

Braddon Mary Elizabeth

Mount Royal: A Novel.

Volume 2 of 3



Мэри Элизабет Брэддон

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CHAPTER I

"LET ME AND MY PASSIONATE LOVE GO BY."

That second week of July was not altogether peerless weather. It contained within the brief span of its seven days one of those sudden and withering changes which try humanity more than the hardest winter, with which ever Transatlantic weather-prophet threatened our island. The sultry heat of a tropical Tuesday was followed by the blighting east wind of a chilly Wednesday; and in the teeth of that keen east wind, blowing across the German Ocean, and gathering force among the Pentlands, Angus Hamleigh set forth from the cosy shelter of Hillside, upon a long day's salmon fishing.

His old kinswoman's health had considerably improved since his arrival; but she was not yet so entirely restored to her normal condition as to be willing that he should go back to London. She pleaded with him for a few days more, and in order that the days should not hang heavily on his hands, she urged him to make the most of his Scottish holiday by enjoying a day or two's salmon fishing. The first floods, which did not usually begin till August, had already swollen the river, and the grilse and early autumn salmon were running up; according to Donald, the handy man who helped in the gardens, and who was a first-rate fisherman.

"There's all your ain tackle upstairs in one o' the presses," said the old lady; "ye'll just find it ready to your hand."

The offer was tempting – Angus had found the long summer days pass but slowly in house and garden – albeit there was a library of good old classics. He so longed to be hastening back to Christabel – found the hours so empty and joyless without her. He was an ardent fisherman – loving that leisurely face-to-face contemplation of Nature which goes with rod and line. The huntsman sees the landscape flash past him like a dream of grey wintry beauty – it is no more to him than a picture in a gallery – he has rarely time to feel Nature's tranquil charms. Even when he must needs stand still for a while, he is devoured by impatience to be scampering off again, and to see the world in motion. But the angler has leisure to steep himself in the atmosphere of hill and streamlet – to take Nature's colours into his soul. Every angler ought to blossom into a landscape painter. But this salmon fishing was not altogether a dreamy and contemplative business. Quickness, presence of mind, and energetic action were needed at some stages of the sport. The moment came when Angus found his rod bending under the weight of a magnificent salmon, and when it seemed a toss up between landing his fish and being dragged under water by him.

"Jump in," cried Donald, excitedly, when the angler's line was nearly expended, "it's only up to your neck." So Angus jumped in, and followed the lightning-swift rush of the salmon down stream, and then, turning him after some difficulty, had to follow his prey up stream again, back to the original pool, where he captured him, and broke the top of his eighteen-foot rod.

Angus clad himself thinly, because the almanack told him it was summer – he walked far and fast – overheated himself – waded for hours knee-deep in the river – his fishing-boots of three seasons ago far from watertight – ate nothing all day – and went back to Hillside at dusk, carrying the seeds of pneumonia under his oilskin jacket. Next day he contrived to crawl about the gardens, reading "Burton" in an idle desultory way that suited so desultory a book, longing for a letter from Christabel, and sorely tired of his Scottish seclusion. On the day after he was laid up with a sharp attack of inflammation of the lungs, attended by his aunt's experienced old doctor – a shrewd hard-

headed Scotchman, contemporary with Simpson, Sibson, Fergusson – all the brightest lights in the Caledonian galaxy – and nursed by one of his aunt's old servants.

While he was in this condition there came a letter from Christabel, a long letter which he unfolded with eager trembling hands, looking for joy and comfort in its pages. But, as he read, his pallid cheek flushed with angry feverish carmine, and his short hard breathing grew shorter and harder.

Yet the letter expressed only tenderness. In tenderest words his betrothed reminded him of past wrong-doing and urged upon him the duty of atonement. If this girl whom he had so passionately loved a little while ago was from society's standpoint unworthy to be his wife – it was he who had made her unworthiness – he who alone could redeem her from absolute shame and disgrace. "All the world knows that you wronged her, let all the world know that you are glad to make such poor amends as may be made for that wrong," wrote Christabel. "I forgive you all the sorrow you have brought upon me: it was in a great measure my own fault. I was too eager to link my life with yours. I almost thrust myself upon you. I will revere and honour you all the days of my life, if you will do right in this hard crisis of our fate. Knowing what I know I could never be happy as your wife: my soul would be wrung with jealous fears; I should never feel secure of your love; my life would be one long self-torment. It is with this conviction that I tell you our engagement is ended, Angus, loving you with all my heart. I have not come hurriedly to this resolution. It is not of anybody's prompting. I have prayed to my God for guidance. I have questioned my own heart, and I believe that I have decided wisely and well. And so farewell, dear love. May God and your conscience inspire you to do right.

*"Your ever constant friend,
"Christabel Courtenay."*

Angus Hamleigh's first impulse was anger. Then came a softer feeling, and he saw all the nobleness of the womanly instinct that had prompted this letter: a good woman's profound pity for a fallen sister; an innocent woman's readiness to see only the poetical aspect of a guilty love; an unselfish woman's desire that right should be done, at any cost to herself.

"God bless her!" he murmured, and kissed the letter before he laid it under his pillow.

His next thought was to telegraph immediately to Christabel. He asked his nurse to bring him a telegraph form and a pencil, and with a shaking hand began to write: —

"No! a thousand times no. I owe no allegiance to any one but to you. There can be no question of broken faith with the person of whom you write. I hold you to your promise."

Scarcely had his feeble fingers scrawled the lines than he tore up the paper.

"I will see the doctor first," he thought. "Am I a man to claim the fulfilment of a bright girl's promise of marriage? No, I'll get the doctor's verdict before I send her a word."

When the old family practitioner had finished his soundings and questionings, Angus asked him to stop for a few minutes longer.

"You say I'm better this afternoon, and that you'll get me over this bout," he said, "and I believe you. But I want you to go a little further and tell me what you think of my case from a general point of view."

"Humph," muttered the doctor, "it isn't easy to say what proportion of your scemptoms may be temporary, and what pairment; but ye've a vairy shabby pair of lungs at this praisent writing. What's your family heestory?"

"My father died of consumption at thirty."

"Humph! ainy other relative?"

"My aunt, a girl of nineteen; my father's mother, at seven-and-twenty."

"Dear, dear, that's no vairy lively retrospaict. Is this your fairst attack of heemorrhage?"

"Not by three or four."

The good old doctor shook his head.

"Ye'll need to take extreme care of yourself," he said: "and ye'll no be for spending much of your life in thees country. Ye might do vairy weel in September and October at Rothsay or in the Isle of Arran, but I'd recommaind ye to winter in the South."

"Do you think I shall be a long-lived man?"

"My dear sir, that'll depend on care and circumstances beyond human foresight. I couldn't conscientiously recommaind your life to an Insurance Office."

"Do you think that a man in my condition is justified in marrying?"

"Do ye want a plain answer?"

"The plainest that you can give me."

"Then I tell you frankly that I think the marriage of a man with a marked consumptive tendency, like yours, is a crime – a crying sin, which is inexcusable in the face of modern science and modern enlightenment, and our advanced knowledge of the mainsprings of life and death. What, sir, can it be less than a crime to bring into this world children burdened with an hereditary curse, destined to a heritage of weakness and pain – bright young minds fettered by diseased bodies – born to perish untimely? Mr. Hamleigh, did ye ever read a book called 'Ecce Homo?'"

"Yes, it is a book of books. I know it by heart."

"Then ye'll may be remainber the writer's summing up of practical Chreestianity as a seestem of ethics which in its ultimate perfection will result in the happiness of the human race – even that last enemy, Death, if not subdued, may be made to keep his distance, seemply by a due observance of natural laws – by an unselfish forethought and regard in each member of the human species for the welfare of the multitude. The man who becomes the father of a race of puny children, can be no friend to humanity. He predooms future suffering to the innocent by a reckless indulgence of his own inclination in the present."

"Yes, I believe you are right," said Angus, with a despairing sigh. "It seems a hard thing for a man who loves, and is beloved by, the sweetest among women, to forego even a few brief years of perfect bliss, and go down lonely to the grave – to accept this doctrine of renunciation, and count himself as one dead in life. Yet a year ago I told myself pretty much what you have told me to-day. I was tempted from my resolve by a woman's loving devotion – and now – a crucial point has come – and I must decide whether to marry or not."

"If you love humanity better than you love yourself, ye'll die a bachelor," said the Scotchman, gravely, but with infinite pity in his shrewd old face; "ye've asked me for the truth, and I've geeven it ye. Truth is often hard."

Angus gave his thin hot hand to the doctor in token of friendly feeling, and then silently turned his face to the wall, whereupon the doctor gently patted him upon the shoulder and left him.

Yes, it was hard. In the bright spring time, his health wondrously restored by that quiet restful winter on the shores of the Mediterranean, Angus had almost believed that he had given his enemy the slip – that Death's dominion over him was henceforth to be no more than over the common ruck of humanity, who, knowing not when or how the fatal lot may fall from the urn, drop into a habit of considering themselves immortal, and death a calamity of which one reads in the newspapers with only a kindly interest in other people's mortality. All through the gay London season he had been so utterly happy, so wonderfully well, that the insidious disease, which had declared itself in the past by so many unmistakable symptoms, seemed to have relaxed its grip upon him. He began to have faith in an advanced medical science – the power to cure maladies hitherto considered incurable. That long interval of languid empty days and nights of placid sleep – the heavy sweetness of southern air breathing over fields of orange flowers and violets, February roses and carnations, had brought strength and healing. The foe had been baffled by the new care which his victim had taken of an existence that had suddenly become precious.

This was the hope that had buoyed up Angus Hamleigh's spirits all through the happy springtime and summer which he had spent in the company of his betrothed. He had seen the physician who

less than a year before had pronounced his sentence of doom, and the famous physician, taking the thing in the light-hearted way of a man for whom humanity is a collection of "cases," was jocose and congratulatory, full of wonder at his patient's restoration, and taking credit to himself for having recommended Hyères. And now the enemy had him by the throat. The foe, no longer insidiously hinting at his deadly meaning, held him in the fierce grip of pain and fever. Such an attack as this, following upon one summer day's imprudence, showed but too plainly by how frail a tie he clung to life – how brief and how prone to malady must be the remnant of his days.

Before the post went out he re-read Christabel's letter, smiling mournfully as he read.

"Poor child!" he murmured to himself, "God bless her for her innocence – God bless her for her unselfish desire to do right. If she only knew the truth – but, better that she should be spared the knowledge of evil. What good end would it serve if I were to enter upon painful explanations?"

He had himself propped up with pillows, and wrote, in a hand which he strove to keep from shaking, the following lines: —

"Dearest! I accept your decree: not for the reasons which you allege, which are no reasons; but for other motives which it would pain me too much to explain. I have loved you, I do love you, better than my own joy or comfort, better than my own life: and it is simply and wholly on that account I can resign myself to say, let us in the future be friends – and friends only.

"Your ever affectionate

"Angus Hamleigh."

He was so much better next day as to be able to sit up for an hour or two in the afternoon; and during that time he wrote at length to Mrs. Tregonell, telling her of his illness, and of his conversation with the Scotch doctor, and the decision at which he had arrived on the strength of that medical opinion, and leaving her at liberty to tell Christabel as much, or as little of this, as she thought fit.

"I know you will do what is best for my darling's happiness," he said. "If I did not believe this renunciation a sacred duty, and the only means of saving her from infinite pain in the future, nothing that she or even you could say about my past follies would induce me to renounce her. I would fight that question to the uttermost. But the other fatal fact is not to be faced, except by a blind and cowardly selfishness which I dare not practise."

After this day, the invalid mended slowly, and old Miss MacPherson, his aunt, being soon quite restored, Mr. Hamleigh telegraphed to his valet to bring books and other necessities from his chambers in the Albany, and to meet him in the Isle of Arran, where he meant to vegetate for the next month or two, chartering a yacht of some kind, and living half on land and half on sea.

CHAPTER II

"ALAS FOR ME THEN, MY GOOD DAYS ARE DONE."

Angus Hamleigh's letter came upon Christabel like a torrent of cold water, as if that bright silvery arc which pierces the rock at St. Nectan's Kieve had struck upon her heart with its icy stream, and chilled it into stone. All through that long summer day upon which her letter must arrive at Hillside, she had lived in nervous expectation of a telegram expressing indignation, remonstrance, pleading, anger – a savage denial of her right to renounce her lover – to break her engagement. She had made up her mind in all good faith. She meant to go on to the bitter end, in the teeth of her lover's opposition, to complete her renunciation in favour of that frail creature who had so solemn a claim upon Angus Hamleigh's honour. She meant to fight this good fight – but she expected that the struggle would be hard. Oh, how long and dismal those summer hours seemed, which she spent in her own room, trying to read, trying to comfort herself with saddest strains of classic melody, and always and through all listening for the telegraph boy's knock at the hall door, or for the sudden stopping of a hansom against the kerb, bringing home her lover to remonstrate in person, in defiance of all calculations of time and space.

There was no telegram. She had to wait nearly twenty-four hours for the slow transit of the mails from the high latitude of Inverness. And when she read Angus Hamleigh's letter – those few placid words which so quietly left her free to take her own way – her heart sank with a dull despair that was infinitely worse than the keen agonies of the last few days. The finality of that brief letter – the willingness to surrender her – the cold indifference, as it seemed, to her future fate – was the hardest blow of all. Too surely it confirmed all those humiliating doubts which had tortured her since her discovery of that wretched past. He had never really cared for her. It was she who had forced him into an avowal of affection by her unconscious revelation of love – she who, unmaidenly in her ignorance of life and mankind, had been the wooer rather than the wooed.

"Thank God that my pride and my duty helped me to decide," she said to herself: "what should I have done if I had married him and found out afterwards how weak a hold I had upon his heart – if he had told me one day that he had married me out of pity."

Christabel told Mrs. Tregonell she had written to Mr. Hamleigh – she spoke of him only as Mr. Hamleigh now – and had received his reply, and that all was now over between them.

"I want you to return his presents for me, Auntie," she said. "They are too valuable to be sent to his chambers while he is away – the diamond necklace which he gave me on my birthday – just like that one I saw on the stage – I suppose he thinks all women have exactly the same ideas and fancies – the books too – I will put them all together for you to return."

"He has given you a small library," said Mrs. Tregonell. "I will take the things in the carriage, and see that they are properly delivered. Don't be afraid, darling. You shall have no trouble about them. My own dear girl – how brave and good you are – how wise too. Yes, Belle, I am convinced that you have chosen wisely," said the widow, with the glow of honest conviction, for the woof of self-interest is so cunningly interwoven with the warp of righteous feeling that very few of us can tell where the threads cross.

She drew her niece to her heart, and kissed her, and cried with her a little; and then said cheerfully, "And now tell me, darling, what you would like to do? We have ever so many engagements for this week and the next fortnight – but you know they have been made only for your sake, and if you don't care about them –"

"Care about them! Oh, Auntie, do you think I could go into society with this dull aching pain at my heart? I feel as if I should never care to see my fellow-creatures again – except you and Jessie."

"And Leonard," said the mother. "Poor Leonard, who would go through fire and water for you."

Christabel winced, feeling fretfully that she did not want any one to go through fire and water; a kind of acrobatic performance continually being volunteered by people who would hesitate at the loan of five pounds.

"Where shall we go, dear? Would you not like to go abroad for the autumn – Switzerland, or Italy, for instance?" suggested Mrs. Tregonell, with an idea that three months on the Continent was a specific in such cases.

"No," said Christabel, shudderingly, remembering how Angus and his frail first love had been happy together in Italy – oh, those books, those books, with their passionate record of past joys, those burning lines from Byron and Heine, which expressed such a world of feeling in ten syllables – "No, I would ever so much rather go back to Mount Royal."

"My poor child, the place is so associated with Mr. Hamleigh. You would be thinking of him every hour of the day."

"I shall do that anywhere."

"Change of scene would be so much better for you – travelling – variety."

"Auntie, you are not strong enough to travel with comfort to yourself. I am not going to drag you about for a fanciful alleviation of my sorrow. The landscape may change but not the mind – I should think of – the past – just as much on Mont Blanc as on Willapark. No, dearest, let us go home; let me go back to the old, old life, as it was before I saw Mr. Hamleigh. Oh, what a child I was in those dear days, how happy, how happy."

She burst into tears, melted by the memory of those placid days, the first tears she had shed since she received her lover's answer.

"And you will be happy again, dear. Don't you remember that passage I read to you in 'The Caxtons' a few days ago, in which the wise tender-hearted father tells his son how small a space one great sorrow takes in a life, and how triumphantly the life soars on beyond it?"

"Yes, I remember; but I didn't believe him then, and I believe him still less now," answered Christabel, doggedly.

Major Bree called that afternoon, and found Mrs. Tregonell alone in the drawing-room.

"Where is Belle?" he asked.

"She has gone for a long country ride – I insisted upon it."

"You were quite right. She was looking as white as a ghost yesterday when I just caught a glimpse of her in the next room. She ran away like a guilty thing when she saw me. Well, has this cloud blown over? Is Hamleigh back?"

"No; Christabel's engagement is broken off. It has been a great blow, a severe trial; but now it is over I am glad: she never could have been happy with him."

"How do you know that?" asked the Major, sharply.

"I judge him by his antecedents. What could be expected from a man who had led that kind of life – a man who so grossly deceived her?"

"Deceived her? Did she ask him if he had ever been in love with an actress? Did she or you ever interrogate him as to his past life? Why you did not even question me, or I should have been obliged to tell you all I knew of his relations with Miss Mayne."

"You ought to have told me of your own accord. You should not have waited to be questioned," said Mrs. Tregonell, indignantly.

"Why should I stir dirty water? Do you suppose that every man who makes a good husband and lives happily with his wife has been spotless up to the hour of his marriage? There is a *Sturm und Drang* period in every man's life, depend upon it. Far better that the tempest should rage before marriage than after."

"I can't accept your philosophy, nor could Christabel. She took the business into her own hands, bravely, nobly. She has cancelled her engagement, and left Mr. Hamleigh free to make some kind of reparation to this actress person."

"Reparation! – to Stella Mayne? Why don't you know that she is the mistress of Colonel Luscomb, who has ruined his social and professional prospects for her sake. Do you mean to say that old harpy who gave you your information about Angus did not give you the epilogue to the play?"

"Not a word," said Mrs. Tregonell, considerably dashed by this intelligence. "But I don't see that this fact alters the case – much. Christabel could never have been happy or at peace with a man who had once been devoted to a creature of that class."

"Would you be surprised to hear that creatures of that class are flesh and blood; and that they love us and leave us, and cleave to us and forsake us, just like the women in society?" asked the Major, surveying her with mild scorn.

She was a good woman, no doubt, and acted honestly according to her lights; yet he was angry with her, believing that she had spoiled two lives by her incapacity to take a wide and liberal view of the human comedy.

CHAPTER III

"GRIEF A FIXED STAR, AND JOY A VANE THAT VEERS."

They went back to the Cornish moors, and the good old manor-house on the hill above the sea; went back to the old life, just the same, in all outward seeming, as it had been before that fatal visit which had brought love and sorrow to Christabel. How lovely the hills looked in the soft summer light; how unspeakably fair the sea in all its glory of sapphire and emerald, and those deep garnet-coloured patches which show where the red sea-weed lurks below, with its pinnacles of rock and colonies of wild living creatures, gull and cormorant, basking in the sun. Little Boscastle, too, gay with the coming and going of many tourists, the merry music of the guard's horn, as the omnibus came jolting down the hill from Bodmin, or the coach wound up the hill to Bude; busy with the bustle of tremendous experiments with rockets and life-saving apparatus in the soft July darkness; noisy with the lowing of cattle and plaintive tremolo of sheep in the market-place, and all the rude pleasures of a rural fair; alive with all manner of sound and movement, and having a general air of making money too fast for the capability of investment. The whole place was gorged with visitors – not the inn only, but every available bedchamber at post-office, shop, and cottage was filled with humanity; and the half-dozen or so available pony-carriages were making the journey to Tintagel and back three times a day; while the patient investigators who tramped to St. Nectan's Kieve, without the faintest idea of who St. Nectan was, or what a kieve was, or what manner of local curiosity they were going to see, were legion; all coming back ravenous to the same cosy inn to elbow one another in friendly contiguity at the homely *table d'hôte*, in the yellow light of many candles.

Christabel avoided the village as much as possible during this gay season. She would have avoided it just as much had it been the dull season: the people she shrank from meeting were not the strange tourists, but the old gaffers and goodies who had known her all their lives – the "uncles" and "aunts" – (in Cornwall uncle and aunt are a kind of patriarchal title given to honoured age) – and who might consider themselves privileged to ask why her wedding was deferred, and when it was to be.

She went with Jessie on long lonely expeditions by sea and land. She had half a dozen old sailors who were her slaves, always ready to take her out in good weather, deeming it their highest privilege to obey so fair a captain, and one who always paid them handsomely for their labour. They went often to Trebarwith Sands, and sat there in some sheltered nook, working and reading at peace, resigned to a life that had lost all its brightness and colour.

"Do you know, Jessie, that I feel like an old maid of fifty?" said Belle on one of those rare occasions when she spoke of her own feelings. "It seems to me as if it were ages since I made up my mind to live and die unmarried, and to make life, somehow or other, self-sufficing – as if Randie and I were both getting old and grey together. For he is ever so much greyer, the dear thing," she said, laying her hand lovingly on the honest black head and grey muzzle. "What a pity that dogs should grow old so soon, when we are so dependent on their love. Why are they not like elephants, in whose lives a decade hardly counts?"

"Oh, Belle, Belle, as if a beautiful woman of twenty could be dependent on a sheep-dog's affection – when she has all her life before her and all the world to choose from."

"Perhaps you think I could change my lover as some people change their dogs," said Belle, bitterly, "be deeply attached to a colley this year and next year be just as devoted to a spaniel. My affections are not so easily transferable."

Mrs. Tregonell had told her niece nothing of Angus Hamleigh's final letter to herself. He had given her freedom to communicate as much or as little of that letter as she liked to Christabel – and she had taken the utmost license, and had been altogether silent about it. What good could it do for

Christabel to hear of his illness. The knowledge might inspire her to some wild quixotic act: she might insist upon devoting herself to him – to be his wife in order that she might be his nurse – and surely this would be to ruin her life without helping him to prolong his. The blow had fallen – the sharpest pain of this sudden sorrow had been suffered. Time and youth, and Leonard's faithful love would bring swift healing. "How I loved and grieved for his father," thought Mrs. Tregonell. "Yet I survived his loss, and had a peaceful happy life with the best and kindest of men."

A peaceful happy life, yes – the English matron's calm content in a handsome house and a well-organized household – a good stable – velvet gowns – family diamonds – the world's respect. But that first passionate love of youth – the love that is eager for self-sacrifice, that would welcome beggary – the love which sees a lover independent of all surrounding circumstances, worshipping and deifying the man himself – that sacred flame had been for ever extinguished in Diana Champernowne's heart before she met burly broad-shouldered Squire Tregonell at the county ball.

She wrote to Leonard telling him what had happened, and that he might now count on the fulfilment of that hope which they both had cherished years ago. She asked him to come home at once, but to be careful that he approached Christabel only in a friendly and cousinly character, until there had been ample time for these new wounds to heal.

"She bears her trouble beautifully, and is all goodness and devotion to me – for I have been weak and ailing ever since I came from London – but I know the trial is very hard for her. The house would be more cheerful if you were at home. You might ask one or two of your Oxford friends. No one goes into the billiard-room now. Mount Royal is as quiet as a prison. If you do not come soon, dear boy, I think we shall die of melancholy."

Mr. Tregonell did not put himself out of the way to comply with his loving mother's request. By the time the widow's letter reached him he had made his plans for the winter, and was not disposed to set them aside in order to oblige a lady who was only a necessary detail in his life. A man must needs have a mother; and, as mothers go, Mrs. Tregonell had been harmless and inoffensive; but she was not the kind of person for whom Leonard would throw over elaborate sporting arrangements, hired guides, horses, carts, and all the paraphernalia needful for Red River explorations. As for Christabel, Mr. Tregonell had not forgiven her for having set another man in the place which he, her cousin and boyish lover in a rough tyrannical way, had long made up his mind to occupy. The fact that she had broken with the man was a redeeming feature in the case; but he was not going into raptures about it; nor was he disposed to return to Mount Royal while she was still moping and regretting the discarded lover.

"Let her get over the doldrums, and then she and I may be friends again," said Leonard to his boon companion, Jack Vandeleur, not a friend of his University days, but an acquaintance picked up on board a Cunard steamer – son of a half-pay naval captain, a man who had begun life in a line regiment, fought in Afghanistan, sold out, and lived by his wits and upon his friends for the last five years. He had made himself so useful to Mr. Tregonell by his superior experience as a traveller, his pluck and knowledge of all kinds of sport, that he had been able to live at free quarters with that gentleman from an early stage of their acquaintance.

Thus it was that Christabel was allowed to end the year in quietness and peace. Every one was tender and gentle with her, knowing how keenly she must have suffered. There was much disappointment among her country friends at the sorry ending of her engagement; more especially among those who had been in London during the season, and had seen the lovely Cornish *débutante* in her brief day of gladness. No one hinted a question to Christabel herself. The subject of marrying and giving in marriage was judiciously avoided in her presence. But Mrs. Tregonell had been questioned, and had explained briefly that certain painful revelations concerning Mr. Hamleigh's antecedents had constrained Christabel to give him up. Every one said it was a pity. Poor Miss Courtenay looked ill and unhappy. Surely it would have been wiser to waive all question of antecedents, and to trust to that sweet girl's influence for keeping Mr. Hamleigh straight in the future. "Antecedents, indeed,"

exclaimed a strong-minded matron, with five marriageable daughters. "It is all very well for a young woman like Miss Courtenay – an only child, with fifteen hundred a year in her own right – to make a fuss about a young man's antecedents. But what would become of my five girls if I were to look at things so closely." Christabel looked at the first column of the *Times* supplement daily to see if there were the advertisement of Angus Hamleigh's marriage with Stella Mayne. She was quite prepared to read such an announcement. Surely, now that she had set him free, he would make this act of atonement, he, in all whose sentiments she had perceived so nice a sense of honour. But no such advertisement appeared. It was possible, however, that the marriage had taken place without any public notification. Mr. Hamleigh might not care to call the world to witness his reparation. She prayed for him daily and nightly, praying that he might be led to do that which was best for his soul's welfare – for his peace here and hereafter – praying that his days, whether few or many, should be made happy.

There were times when that delicate reticence which made Angus Hamleigh's name a forbidden sound upon the lips of her friends, was a source of keenest pain to Christabel. It would have been painful to her to hear that name lightly spoken, no doubt; but this dull dead silence was worse. One day it flashed upon her that if he were to die nobody would tell her of his death. Kindred and friends would conspire to keep her uninformed. After this she read the list of deaths in the *Times* as eagerly as she read the marriages, but with an agony of fear lest that name, as if written in fire, should leap out upon the page.

At last this painful sense of uncertainty as to the fate of one who, a few months ago, had been a part of her life, became unendurable. Pride withheld her from questioning her aunt or Jessie. She shrank from seeming small and mean in the sight of her own sex. She had made her sacrifice of her own accord, and there was a poverty of character in not being able to maintain the same Spartan courage to the end. But from Major Bree, the friend and playfellow of her childhood, the indulgent companion of her youth, she could better bear to accept pity – so, one mild afternoon in the beginning of October, when the Major dropped in at his usual hour for tea and gossip, she took him to see the chrysanthemums, in a house on the further side of the lawn; and here, having assured herself there was no gardener within hearing, she took courage to question him.

"Uncle Oliver," she began, falteringly, trifling with the fringed petals of a snowy blossom, "I want to ask you something."

"My dear, I think you must know that there is nothing in the world I would not do for you."

"I am sure of that: but this is not very difficult. It is only to answer one or two questions. Every one here is very good to me – but they make one mistake: they think because I have broken for ever – with – Mr. Hamleigh, that it can do me no good to know anything about him – that I can go on living and being happy, while I am as ignorant of his fate as if we were inhabitants of different planets. But they forget that after having been all the world to me he cannot all at once become nothing. I have still some faint interest in his fate. It hurts me like an actual pain not to know whether he is alive or dead," she said, with a sudden sob.

"My poor pet!" murmured the Major, taking her hand in both his own. "Have you heard nothing about him since you left London?"

"Not one word. People make believe that there was never any such person in this world."

"They think it wiser to do so, in the hope you will forget him."

"They might as well hope that I shall become a blackamoor," said Christabel, scornfully. "You have more knowledge of the human heart, Uncle Oliver – and you must know that I shall always – remember him. Tell me the truth about him just this once, and I will not mention his name again for a long, long time. He is not dead, is he?"

"Dead! – no, Belle. What put such a notion into your head?"

"Silence always seems like death; and every one has kept silence about him."

"He was ill while he was in Scotland – a touch of the old complaint. I heard of him at Plymouth the other day, from a yachting man who met him in the Isle of Arran, after his illness – he was all right then, I believe."

"Ill – and I never knew of it – dangerously ill, perhaps."

"I don't suppose it was anything very bad. He had been yachting when my Plymouth acquaintance met him."

"He has not married – that person," faltered Christabel.

"What person?"

"Miss Mayne."

"Good heavens, no, my dear – nor ever will."

"But he ought – it is his duty."

"My dear child, that is a question which I can hardly discuss with you. But I may tell you, at least, that there is an all-sufficient reason why Angus Hamleigh would never make such an idiot of himself."

"Do you mean that she could never be worthy of him – that she is irredeemably wicked?" asked Christabel.

"She is not good enough to be any honest man's wife."

"And yet she did not seem wicked: she spoke of him with such intense feeling."

"She seemed – she spoke!" repeated the Major aghast. "Do you mean to tell me that you have seen – that you have conversed with her?"

"Yes: when my aunt told me the story which she heard from Lady Cumberbridge I could not bring myself to believe it until it was confirmed by Miss Mayne's own lips. I made up my mind that I would go and see her – and I went. Was that wrong?"

"Very wrong. You ought not to have gone near her. If you wanted to know more than common rumour could tell you, you should have sent me – your friend. It was a most unwise act."

"I thought I was doing my duty. I think so still," said Christabel, looking at him with frank steadfast eyes. "We are both women. If we stand far apart it is because Providence has given me many blessings which were withheld from her. It is Mr. Hamleigh's duty to repair the wrong he has done. If he does not he must be answerable to his Maker for the eternal ruin of a soul."

"I tell you again, my dear, that you do not understand the circumstances, and cannot fairly judge the case. You would have done better to take an old soldier's advice before you let the venomous gossip of that malevolent harridan spoil two lives."

"I did not allow myself to be governed by Lady Cumberbridge's gossip, Uncle Oliver. I took nothing for granted. It was not till I had heard the truth from Miss Mayne's lips that I took any decisive step. Mr. Hamleigh accepted my resolve so readily that I can but think it was a welcome release."

"My dear, you went to a queer shop for truth. If you had only known your way about town a little better you would have thought twice before you sacrificed your own happiness in the hope of making Miss Mayne a respectable member of society. But what's done cannot be undone. There's no use in crying over spilt milk. I daresay you and Mr. Hamleigh will meet again and make up your quarrel before we are a year older. In the meantime don't fret, Belle – and don't be afraid that he will ever marry any one but you. I'll be answerable for his constancy."

The anniversary of Christabel's betrothal came round, St. Luke's Day – a grey October day – with a drizzling West-country rain. She went to church alone, for her aunt was far from well, and Miss Bridgeman stayed at home to keep the invalid company – to read to her and cheer her through the long dull morning. Perhaps they both felt that Christabel would rather be alone on this day. She put on her waterproof coat, took her dog with her, and started upon that wild lonely walk to the church in the hollow of the hills. Randie was a beast of perfect manners, and would lie quietly in the porch all through the service, waiting for his mistress.

She knelt alone just where they two had knelt together. There was the humble altar before which they were to have been married; the rustic shrine of which they had so often spoken as the fittest place for a loving union – fuller of tender meaning than splendid St. George's, with its fine oaken panelling, painted windows, and Hogarthian architecture. Never at that altar, nor at any other, were they two to kneel. A little year had held all – her hopes and fears – her triumphant love – joy beyond expression – and sadness too deep for tears. She went over the record as she knelt in the familiar pew – her lips moving automatically, repeating the responses – her eyes fixed and tearless.

Then when the service was over she went slowly wandering in and out among the graves, looking at the grey slate tablets, with the names of those whom she had known in life – all at rest now – old people who had suffered long and patiently before they died – a fair young girl who had died of consumption, and whose sufferings had been sharper than those of age – a sailor who had gone out to a ship with a rope one desperate night, and had given his life to save others – all at rest now.

There was no grave being dug to-day. She remembered how, as she and Angus lingered at the gate, the dull sound of the earth thrown from the gravedigger's spade had mixed with the joyous song of the robin perched on the gate. To-day there was neither gravedigger nor robin – only the soft drip, drip of the rain on dock and thistle, fern and briony. She had the churchyard all to herself, the dog following her about meekly – crawling over grassy mounds, winding in and out among the long wet grass.

"When I die, if you have the ordering of my funeral, be sure I am buried in Minster Churchyard."

That is what Angus had said to her one summer morning, when they were sitting on the Maidenhead coach – and even West-End London, and a London Park, looked lovely in the clear June light. Little chance now that she would be called upon to choose his resting-place – that her hands would fold his in their last meek attitude of submission to the universal conqueror.

"Perhaps he will spend his life in Italy, where no one will know his wife's history," thought Christabel, always believing, in spite of Major Bree's protest, that her old lover would sooner or later make the one possible atonement for an old sin. Nobody except the Major had told her how little the lady deserved that such atonement should be made. It was Mrs. Tregonell's theory that a well-brought up young woman should be left in darkest ignorance of the darker problems of life.

Christabel walked across the hill, and down by narrow winding ways into the valley, where the river, swollen and turbid after the late rains, tumbled noisily over rock and root and bent the long reeds upon its margin. She crossed the narrow footbridge, and went slowly through the level fields between two long lines of hills – a gorge through which, in bleak weather, the winds blew fiercely. There was another hill to ascend before she reached the field that led to Pentargon Bay – half a mile or so of high road between steep banks and tall unkempt hedges. How short and easy to climb that hill had seemed to her in Angus Hamleigh's company! Now she walked wearily and slowly under the softly falling rain, wondering where he was, and whether he remembered this day.

She could recall every word that he had spoken, and the memory was full of pain; for in the light of her new knowledge it seemed to her that all he had said about his early doom had been an argument intended to demonstrate to her why he dared not and must not ask her to be his wife – an apology and an explanation as it were – and this apology, this explanation had been made necessary by her own foolishness – by that fatal forgetfulness of self-respect which had allowed her love to reveal itself. And yet, surely that look of rapture which had shone in his eyes as he clasped her to his heart, as he accepted the dedication of her young life, those tender tones, and all the love that had come afterwards could not have been entirely falsehood.

"I cannot believe that he was a hypocrite," she said, standing where they two had sat side by side in the sunlight of that lovely day, gazing at the grey sea, smooth as a lake under the low grey sky. "I think he must have loved me – unwillingly, perhaps – but it was true love while it lasted. He gave his first and best love to that other – but he loved me too. If I had dared to believe him – to

trust in my power to keep him. But no; that would have been to confirm him in wrong-doing. It was his duty to marry the girl he wronged."

The thought that her sacrifice had been made to principle rather than to feeling sustained her in this hour as nothing else could have done. If she could only know where he was, and how he fared, and what he meant to do with his future life, she could be happier, she thought.

Luncheon was over when Christabel went back to Mount Royal; but as Mrs. Tregonell was too ill to take anything beyond a cup of beef-tea in her own room this fact was of no consequence. The mistress of Mount Royal had been declining visibly since her return to Cornwall; Mr. Treherne, the family doctor, told Christabel there was no cause for alarm, but he hinted also that her aunt was not likely to be a long-lived woman.

"I'm afraid she worries herself," he said; "she is too anxious about that scapegrace son of hers."

"Leonard is very cruel," answered Christabel; "he lets weeks and even months go by without writing, and that makes his poor mother miserable. She is perpetually worrying herself about imaginary evils – storm and shipwreck, runaway horses, explosions on steamboats."

"If she would but remember a vulgar adage, that 'Nought is never in danger,'" muttered the doctor, with whom Leonard had been no favourite.

"And then she has frightful dreams about him," said Christabel.

"My dear Miss Courtenay, I know all about it," answered Mr. Treherne; "your dear aunt is just in that comfortable position of life in which a woman must worry herself about something or other. 'Man was born to trouble,' don't you know, my dear? The people who haven't real cares are constrained to invent sham ones. Look at King Solomon – did you ever read any book that breathes such intense melancholy in every line as that little work of his called Ecclesiastes. Solomon was living in the lap of luxury when he wrote that little book, and very likely hadn't a trouble in this world. However, imaginary cares can kill as well as the hardest realities, so you must try to keep up your aunt's spirits, and at the same time be sure that she doesn't over-exert herself. She has a weak heart – what we call a tired heart."

"Does that mean heart-disease?" faltered Christabel, with a despairing look.

"Well, my dear, it doesn't mean a healthy heart. It is not organic disease – nothing wrong with the valves – no fear of excruciating pains – but it's a rather risky condition of life, and needs care."

"I will be careful," murmured the girl, with white lips, as the awful shadow of a grief, hardly thought of till this moment, fell darkly across her joyless horizon.

Her aunt, her adopted mother – mother in all sweetest care and love and thoughtful culture – might too soon be taken from her. Then indeed, and then only, could she know what it was to be alone. Keenly, bitterly, she thought how little during the last dismal months she had valued that love – almost as old as her life – and how the loss of a newer love had made the world desolate for her, life without meaning or purpose. She remembered how little more than a year ago – before the coming of Angus Hamleigh – her aunt and she had been all the world to each other, that tender mother-love all sufficing to fill her life with interest and delight.

In the face of this new fear that sacred love resumed its old place in her mind. Not for an hour, not for a moment of the days to come, should her care or her affection slacken. Not for a moment should the image of him whom she had loved and renounced come between her and her duty to her aunt.

CHAPTER IV

"LOVE WILL HAVE HIS DAY."

From this time Christabel brightened and grew more like her old self. Mrs. Tregonell told herself that the sharp sorrow was gradually wearing itself out. No girl with such happy surroundings as Christabel's could go on being unhappy for ever. Her own spirits improved with Christabel's increasing brightness, and the old house began to lose its dismal air. Until now the widow's conscience had been ill at ease – she had been perpetually arguing with herself that she had done right – trying to stifle doubts that continually renewed themselves. But now she told herself that the time of sorrow was past, and that her wisdom would be justified by its fruits. She had no suspicion that her niece was striving of set purpose to be cheerful – that these smiles and this bright girlish talk were the result of painful effort, duty triumphing over sorrow.

Mount Royal that winter seemed one of the brightest, most hospitable houses in the neighbourhood. There were no parties; Mrs. Tregonell's delicate health was a reason against that. But there was generally some one staying in the house – some nice girl, whose vivacious talk and whose new music helped to beguile the mother from sad thoughts about her absent son – from wearying doubts as to the fulfilment of her plans for the future. There were people coming and going; old friends driving twenty miles to luncheon, and sometimes persuaded to stay to dinner; nearer neighbours walking three miles or so to afternoon tea. The cheery rector of Trevalga and his family, friends of twenty years' standing, were frequent guests. Mrs. Tregonell was not allowed to excite herself, but she was never allowed to be dull. Christabel and Jessie watched her with unwavering attention – anticipating every wish, preventing every fatigue. A weak and tired heart might hold out for a long time under such tender treatment.

But early in March there came an unexpected trial, in the shape of a sudden and great joy. Leonard, who had never learnt the rudiments of forethought and consideration for others, drove up to the house one afternoon in a hired chaise from Launceston, just as twilight was creeping over the hills, and dashed unannounced into the room where his mother and the two girls were sitting at tea.

"Who is this?" gasped Mrs. Tregonell, starting up from her low easy chair, as the tall broad-shouldered man, bearded, bronzed, clad in a thick grey coat and big white muffler, stood before her; and then with a shriek she cried, "My son! My son!" and fell upon his breast.

When he placed her in her chair a minute later she was almost fainting, and it was some moments before she recovered speech. Christabel and Jessie thought the shock would have killed her.

"Oh, Leonard! how could you?" murmured Christabel, reproachfully.

"How could I do what?"

"Come home without one word of notice, knowing your mother's delicate health."

"I thought it would be a pleasant surprise for her. Besides I hadn't made up my mind to come straight home till two o'clock to-day. I had half a mind to take a week in town first, before I came to this God-forsaken hole. You stare at me as if I had no right to be here at all, Belle."

"Leonard, my boy, my boy," faltered the mother, with pale lips, looking up adoringly at the bearded face, so weather-beaten, so hardened and altered from the fresh lines of youth. "If you knew how I have longed for this hour. I have had such fears. You have been in such perilous places – among savages – in all kinds of danger. Often and often I have dreamt that I saw you dead."

"Upon my soul, this is a lively welcome," said Leonard.

"My dearest, I don't want to be dismal," said Mrs. Tregonell, with a faint hysterical laugh. Her heart was beating tumultuously, the hands that clasped her son's were cold and damp. "My soul is full of joy. How changed you are, dear! You look as if you had gone through great hardships."

"Life in the Rockies isn't all child's play, mother, but we've had a jolly time of it, on the whole. America is a magnificent country. I feel deuced sorry to come home – except for the pleasure of seeing you and Belle. Let's have a look at you, Belle, and see if you are as much changed as I am. Step into the light, young lady."

He drew her into the full broad light of a heaped-up wood and coal fire. There was very little daylight in the room. The tapestry curtains fell low over the heavily mullioned Tudor windows, and inside the tapestry there was a screen of soft muslin.

"I have not been shooting moose and skunk, or living in a tent," said Christabel, with a forced laugh. She wanted to be amiable to her cousin – wished even to like him, but it went against the grain. She wondered if he had always been as hateful as this. "You can't expect to find much difference in me after three years' vegetation in Cornwall."

"But you've not been vegetating all the time," said Leonard, looking her over as coolly as if she had been a horse. "You have had a season in London. I saw your name in some of the gossiping journals, when I was last at Montreal. You wore a pink gown at Sandown. You were one of the prettiest girls at the Royal Fancy Fair. You wore white and tea roses at the Marlborough House garden party. You have been shining in high places, Mistress Belle. I hope it has not spoiled you for a country life."

"I love the country better than ever. I can vouch for that."

"And you have grown ever so much handsomer since I saw you last. I can vouch for that," answered her cousin with his free and easy air. "How d'ye do, Miss Bridgeman?" he said, holding out two fingers to his mother's companion, whose presence he had until this moment ignored.

Jessie remembered Thackeray's advice, and gave the squire one finger in return for his two.

"*You're* not altered," he said, looking at her with a steady stare. "You're the hard-wearing sort, warranted fast colour."

"Give Leonard some tea, Jessie," said Mrs. Tregonell. "I'm sure you would like some tea?" looking lovingly at the tall figure, the hard handsome face.

"I'd rather have a brandy-and-soda," answered Leonard carelessly, "but I don't mind a cup of tea presently, when I've been and had a look round the stables and kennels."

"Oh, Leonard! surely not yet?" said Mrs. Tregonell.

"Not yet! Why I've been in the house ten minutes, and you may suppose I want to know how my hunters have been getting on in the last three years, and whether the colt Nicholls bred is good for anything. I'll just take a hurried look round and be back again slick."

Mrs. Tregonell sighed and submitted. What could she do but submit to a son who had had his own way and followed his own pleasure ever since he could run alone; nay, had roared and protested loudly at every attack upon his liberty when he was still in the invertebrate jelly-fish stage of existence, carried at full-length in his nurse's arms, with his face turned to the ceiling, perpetually contemplating that flat white view of indoor existence which must needs have a depressing influence upon the meditations of infancy. The mothers of spirited youths have to fulfil their mission, which is for the most part submission.

"How well he looks!" she said, fondly, when the squire had hurried out of the room; "and how he has broadened and filled out."

Jessie Bridgeman thought within herself that he was quite broad enough before he went to America, and that this filling-out process had hardly improved him, but she held her peace.

"He looks very strong," said Christabel. "I could fancy Hercules just such a man. I wonder whether he has brought home any lions' hides, and if he will have one made into a shooting jacket. Dear, dearest Auntie," she went on, kneeling by the widow's chair, "I hope you are quite happy now. I hope your cup of bliss is full."

"I am very happy, sweet one; but the cup is not full yet. I hope it may be before I die – full to overflowing, and that I shall be able to say, 'Lord, let me depart in peace,' with a glad and grateful heart."

Leonard came back from the stables in a rather gloomy mood. His hunters did not look as well as he expected, and the new colt was weak and weedy. "Nicholls ought to have known better than to breed such a thing, but I suppose he'd say, like the man in *Tristram Shandy*, that it wasn't his fault," grumbled Mr. Tregonell, as he seated himself in front of the fire, with his feet on the brass fender. He wore clump-soled boots and a rough heather-mixture shooting suit, with knickerbockers and coarse stockings, and his whole aspect was "sporting." Christabel thought of some one else who had sat before the same hearth in the peaceful twilight hour, and wondered if the spiritual differences between these two men were as wide as those of manner and outward seeming. She recalled the exquisite refinement of that other man, the refinement of the man who is a born dandy, who, under the most adverse circumstances, compelled to wear old clothes and to defy fashion, would yet be always elegant and refined of aspect. She remembered that outward grace which seemed the natural indication of a poetical mind – a grace which never degenerated into effeminacy, a refinement which never approached the feeble or the lackadaisical.

Mr. Tregonell stretched his large limbs before the blaze, and made himself comfortable in the spacious plush-covered chair, throwing back his dark head upon a crewel anti-macassar, which was a work of art almost as worthy of notice as a water-colour painting, so exquisitely had the flowers been copied from Nature by the patient needlewoman.

"This is rather more comfortable than the Rockies," he said, as he stirred his tea, with big broad hands, scratched and scarred with hard service. "Mount Royal isn't half a bad place for two or three months in the year. But I suppose you mean to go to London after Easter? Now Belle has tasted blood she'll be all agog for a second plunge. Sandown will be uncommonly jolly this year."

"No, we are not going to town this season."

"Why not? Hard up – spent all the dollars?"

"No, but I don't think Belle would care about it."

"That's bosh. Come, now, Belle, you want to go of course," said Mr. Tregonell, turning to his cousin.

"No, Leonard, that kind of thing is all very well for once in a lifetime. I suppose every woman wants to know what the great world is like – but one season must resemble another, I should think: just like Boscastle Fair, which I used to fancy so lovely when I was a child, till I began to understand that it was exactly the same every year, and that it was just possible for one to outgrow the idea of its delightfulness."

"That isn't true about London though. There is always something new – new clubs, new theatres, new actors, new race-meetings, new horses, new people. I vote for May and June in Bolton Row."

"I don't think your dear mother's health would be equal to London, this year, Leonard," said Christabel, gravely.

She was angry with this beloved and only son for not having seen the change in his mother's appearance – for talking so loudly and so lightly, as if there were nothing to be thought of in life except his own pleasure.

"What, old lady, are you under the weather?" he asked, turning to survey his mother with a critical air.

This was his American manner of inquiring after her health. Mrs. Tregonell, when the meaning of the phrase had been explained to her, confessed herself an invalid, for whom the placid monotony of rural life was much safer than the dissipation of a London season.

"Oh, very well," said Leonard with a shrug; "then you and Belle must stop at home and take care of each other – and I can have six weeks in London *en garçon*. It won't be worth while to open the house in Bolton Row – I'd rather stop at an hotel."

"But you won't leave me directly after your return, Leonard?"

"No, no, of course not. Not till after Easter. Easter's three weeks ahead of us. You'll be tired enough of me by that time."

"Tired of you! After three years' absence?"

"Well, you must have got accustomed to doing without me, don't you know," said Leonard, with charming frankness. "When a man has been three years away he can't hurt his friend's feelings much if he dies abroad. They've learnt how easy it is to get along without him."

"Leonard! how can you say such cruel things?" expostulated his mother, with tears in her eyes. The very mention of death, as among the possibilities of existence, scared her.

"There's nothing cruel in it, ma'am; it's only common sense," answered Leonard. "Three years. Well, it's a jolly long time, isn't it? and I dare say to you, in this sleepy hollow of a place, it seemed precious long. But for fellows who are knocking about the world – as Poker Vandeleur and I were – time spins by pretty fast, I can tell you. I'll hoist in some more sap – another cup of tea, if you please, Miss Bridgeman," added Leonard, handing in his empty cup. "It's uncommonly good stuff. Oh! here's old Randie – come here, Randie."

Randie, clutched unceremoniously by the tail, and drawn over the hearthrug, like any inanimate chattel, remonstrated with a growl and a snap. He had never been over-fond of the master of Mount Royal, and absence had not made his heart grow fonder.

"His temper hasn't improved," muttered Leonard, pushing the dog away with his foot.

"His temper is always lovely when he's kindly treated," said Christabel, making room for the dog in her low armchair, whereupon Randie insinuated himself into that soft silken nest, and looked fondly up at his mistress with his honest brown eyes.

"You should let me give you a Pomeranian instead of that ungainly beast," said Leonard.

"No, thanks. Never any other dog while Randie lives. Randie is a person, and he and I have a hundred ideas in common. I don't want a toy dog – a dog that is only meant for show."

"Pomeranians are clever enough for anybody, and they are worth looking at. I wouldn't waste my affection upon an ugly dog any more than I would on an ugly woman."

"Randie is handsome in my eyes," said Christabel, caressing the sheep-dog's grey muzzle.

"I'm through," said Mr. Tregonell, putting down his cup.

He affected Yankee phrases, and spoke with a Yankee twang. America and the Americans had suited him, "down to the ground," as he called it. Their decisive rapidity, that go-ahead spirit which charged life with a kind of mental electricity – made life ever so much better worth living than in the dull sleepy old world where every one was content with the existing condition of things, and only desired to retain present advantages. Leonard loved sport and adventure, action, variety. He was a tyrant, and yet a democrat. He was quite willing to live on familiar term with grooms and game-keepers – but not on equal terms. He must always be master. As much good fellowship as they pleased – but they must all knuckle under to him. He had been the noisy young autocrat of the stable-yard and the saddle-room when he was still in Eton jackets. He lived on the easiest terms with the guides and assistants of his American travels, but he took care to make them feel that he was their employer and, in his own language, "the biggest boss they were ever likely to have to deal with." He paid them lavishly, and gave himself the airs of a Prince – Prince Henry in the wild Falstaffian days, before the charge of a kingdom taught him to be grave, yet with but too little of Henry's gallant spirit and generous instincts.

Three years' travel, in Australia and America, had not exercised a refining influence upon Leonard Tregonell's character or manners. Blind as the mother's love might be, she had insight enough to perceive this, and she acknowledged the fact to herself sadly. There are travellers and travellers: some in whom a wild free life awakens the very spirit of poetry itself – whom unrestrained intercourse with Nature elevates to Nature's grander level – some whose mental power deepens and widens in the solitude of forest or mountain, whose noblest instincts are awakened by loneliness that seems to bring them nearer God. But Leonard Tregonell was not a traveller of this type. Away from the restraints of civilization – the conventional refinements and smoothings down of a rough character – his nature coarsened and hardened. His love of killing wild and beautiful things grew into a passion. He lived

chiefly to hunt and to slay, and had no touch of pity for those gracious creatures which looked at their slaughterer reproachfully, with dim pathetic eyes – wide with a wild surprise at man's cruelty. Constant intercourse with men coarser and more ignorant than himself dragged him down little by little to a lower grade than he had been born to occupy. In all the time that he had been away he had hardly ever opened a book. Great books had been written. Poets, historians, philosophers, theologians had given the fruits of their meditations and their researches to the world, but never an hour had Mr. Tregonell devoted to the study of human progress, to the onward march of human thought. When he was within reach of newspapers he read them industriously, and learnt from a stray paragraph how some great scientific discovery in science, some brilliant success in art, had been the talk of the hour; but neither art nor science interested him. The only papers which he cared about were the sporting papers.

His travels for the most part had been in wild lonely regions, but even in the short intervals that he had spent in cities he had shunned all intellectual amusements. He had heard neither concerts nor lectures, and had only affected the lowest forms of dramatic art. Most of his nights had been spent in bar-rooms or groceries, playing faro, monte, poker, euchre, and falling in pleasantly with whatever might be the most popular form of gambling in that particular city.

And now he had come back to Mount Royal, having sown his wild oats, and improved himself mentally and physically, as it was supposed by the outside world, by extensive travel; and he was henceforward to reign in his father's place, a popular country gentleman, honourable and honoured, useful in his generation, a friend to rich and poor.

Nobody had any cause for complaint against him during the first few weeks after his return. If his manners were rough and coarse, his language larded with American slang, his conduct was unobjectionable. He was affectionate to his mother, attentive in his free and easy way to Christabel, civil to the old servants, and friendly to old friends. He made considerable alterations in the stables, bought and sold and swapped horses, engaged new underlings, acted in all out-of-door arrangements as if the place were entirely his own, albeit his mother's life-interest in the estate gave her the custody of everything. But his mother was too full of gladness at his return to object to anything that he did. She opened her purse-strings freely, although his tour had been a costly business. Her income had accumulated in the less expensive period of his boyhood, and she could afford to indulge his fancies.

He went about with Major Bree, looking up old acquaintances, riding over every acre of the estate – lands which stretched far away towards Launceston on one side, towards Bodmin on the other. He held forth largely to the Major on the pettiness and narrowness of an English landscape as compared with that vast continent in which the rivers are as seas and the forests rank and gloomy wildernesses reaching to the trackless and unknown. Sometimes Christabel was their companion in these long rides, mounted on the thoroughbred which Mrs. Tregonell gave her on that last too-happy birthday. The long rides in the sweet soft April air brought health and brightness back to her pale cheeks. She was so anxious to look well and happy for her aunt's sake, to cheer the widow's fading life; but, oh! the unutterable sadness of that ever-present thought of the aftertime, that unanswerable question as to what was to become of her own empty days when this dear friend was gone.

Happy as Leonard seemed at Mount Royal in the society of his mother and his cousin, he did not forego his idea of a month or so in London. He went up to town soon after Easter, took rooms at an hotel near the Haymarket, and gave himself up to a round of metropolitan pleasures under the guidance of Captain Vandeleur, who had made the initiation of provincial and inexperienced youth a kind of profession. He had a neat way of finding out exactly how much money a young man had to dispose of, present or contingent, and put him through it in the quickest possible time and at the pleasantest pace; but he knew by experience that Leonard had his own ideas about money, and was as keen as experience itself. He would pay the current rate for his pleasures, and no more; and he had a prudential horror of Jews, post-obits, and all engagements likely to damage his future enjoyment

of his estate. He was fond of play, but he did not go in the way of losing large sums – "ponies" not "monkies" were his favourite animals – and he did not care about playing against his chosen friend.

"I like to have you on my side, Poker," he said amiably, when the captain proposed a devilled bone and a hand at *écarté* after the play. "You're a good deal too clever for a comfortable antagonist. You play *écarté* with your other young friends, Poker, and I'll be your partner at whist."

Captain Vandeleur, who by this time was tolerably familiar with the workings of his friend's mind, never again suggested those quiet encounters of skill which must inevitably have resulted to his advantage, had Leonard been weak enough to accept the challenge. To have pressed the question would have been to avow himself a sharper. He had won money from his friend at blind hookey; but then at blind hookey all men are equal – and Leonard had accepted the decree of fate; but he was not the kind of man to let another man get the better of him in a series of transactions. He was not brilliant, but he was shrewd and keen, and had long ago made up his mind to get fair value for his money. If he allowed Jack Vandeleur to travel at his expense, or dine and drink daily at his hotel, it was not because Leonard was weakly generous, but because Jack's company was worth the money. He would not have paid for a pint of wine for a man who was dull, or a bore. At Mount Royal, of course, he was obliged now and then to entertain bores. It was an incident in his position as a leading man in the county – but here in London he was free to please himself, and to give the cold shoulder to uncongenial acquaintance.

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