Oliphant Margaret

Sir Tom

Margaret Oliphant
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Mrs. Oliphant
Sir Tom

CHAPTER I.
HOW SIR TOM BECAME A GREAT PERSONAGE

Sir Thomas Randolph had lived a somewhat stormy life during the earliest half of his career. He had gone through what the French called a *jeunesse orageuse*; nothing very bad had ever been laid to his charge; but he had been adventurous, unsettled, a roamer about the world even after the period at which youthful extravagances cease. Nobody ever knew when or where he might appear. He set off to the farthest parts of the earth at a day's notice, sometimes on pretext of sport, sometimes on no pretext at all, and re-appeared again as unexpectedly as he had gone away. He had run out his fortune by these and other extravagances, and was at forty in one of the most uncomfortable positions in which a man can find himself, with the external appearance of large estates and an established and important position, but in reality with scarcely any income at all, just enough to satisfy the mortgagees, and leave himself a pittance not much more than the wages of a gamekeeper. If his aunt, Lady Randolph, had not been

so good to him it was uncertain whether he could have existed at all, and when the heiress, whom an eccentric will had consigned to her charge, fell in his way, all her friends concluded as a matter of certainty that Sir Tom would jump at this extraordinary windfall, this gift of a too kind Providence, which sometimes will care for a prodigal in a way which he is quite unworthy of, while leaving the righteous man to struggle on unaided. But for some time it appeared as if society for once was out in its reckoning. Sir Tom did not pounce upon the heiress. He was a person of very independent mind, and there were some who thought he was happier in his untrammelled poverty, doing what he pleased, than he ever had been as a great proprietor. Even when it became apparent to the wise and far-seeing that little Miss Trevor was only waiting till his handkerchief was thrown at her to become the happiest of women, still he did nothing. He exasperated his kind aunt, he made all his friends indignant, and what was more, he exposed the young heiress hourly to many attempts on the part of the inferior class, from which as a matter of fact she herself sprang; and it was not until she was driven nearly desperate by those attempts that Sir Tom suddenly appeared upon the scene, and moved, it was thought, more by a half-fatherly kindness and sympathy for her, than either by love or desire of wealth, took her to himself, and made her his wife, to the great and grateful satisfaction of the girl herself, whose strange upbringing and brief introduction into a higher sphere had spoiled her for that homely country-town existence in which every woman flattered

and every man made love to her.

Whether Lucy Trevor was in love with him was as uncertain as whether he was in love with her. So far as any one knew neither one nor the other had asked themselves this question. She had, as it were, thrown herself into his arms in sudden delight and relief of mind when he appeared and saved her from her suitors; while he had received her tenderly when she did this, out of kindness and pleasure in her genuine, half-childish appreciation of him. There were, of course, people who said that Lucy had been violently in love with Sir Tom, and that he had made up his mind to marry her money from the first moment he saw her; but neither of these things was true. They married with a great deal more pleasure and ease of mind than many people do who are very much in love, for they had mutual faith in each other, and felt a mutual repose and satisfaction in their union. Each supplied something the other wanted. Lucy obtained a secure and settled home, a protector and ever kind and genial guardian, while Sir Tom got not only a good and dutiful and pleasant companion, with a great deal of sense, and good-nature and good looks, – all of which gifts he prized highly, – but at the same time the control of a great fortune, and money enough at once to clear his estates and restore him to his position as a great landowner.

There were very peculiar conditions attached to the great fortune, but to these for the moment he paid very little heed, considering them as fantastic follies not worth thinking about, which were never likely to become difficulties in his way. The

advantage he derived from the marriage was enormous. All at once, at a bound, it restored him to what he had lost, to the possession of his own property, which had been not more than nominally his for so many years, and to the position of a man of weight and importance, whose opinion told with all his neighbours and the county generally, as did those of few others in the district.

Sir Tom, the wanderer, had not been thought very highly of in his younger days. He had been called wild. He had been thought untrustworthy, a fellow here to-day and gone to-morrow, who had no solidity in him. But when the mortgages were all paid off, and the old hall restored, and Sir Thomas Randolph came to settle down at home, with his pretty little wife, and an establishment quite worthy of his name, the county discovered in a day, almost in a moment, that he was very much improved. He had always been clever enough, they said, for anything, and now that he had sown his wild oats and learned how to conduct himself, and attained an age when follies are naturally over, there was no reason why he should not be received with open arms. Such a man had a great many more experiences, the county thought with a certain pride, than other men who had sown no wild oats, and had never gone farther afield than the recognised round of European cities. Sir Tom had been in all the four quarters of the globe; he had travelled in America long before it became fashionable to do so, and even had been in Africa while it was as yet untrod by any white foot but that of

a missionary. And it was whispered that in the days when he was "wild" he had penetrated into regions nearer at hand, but more obscure and mysterious even than Africa. All this made the county think more of him now when he appeared staid yet genial, in the fulness of manhood, with a crisp brown beard and a few gray hairs about his temples mingled with his abundant locks, and that capability of paying his way which is dear to every well-regulated community. But for this last particular the county would not have been so tolerant, nay almost pleased, with the fact that he had been "wild." They saw all his qualities in the halo that surrounded the newly-decorated hall, the liberated farms, the lands upon which no creditor had now any claim. He was the most popular man in the district when Parliament was dissolved, and he was elected for the county almost without opposition, he, at whom all the sober people had shaken their heads only a few years before. The very name of "Sir Tom," which had been given rather contemptuously to denote a somewhat careless fellow, who minded nothing, became all at once the sign of popular amity and kindness. And if it had been necessary to gain votes for him by any canvassing tricks, this name of his would have carried away all objections. "Sir Tom!" it established a sort of affectionate relationship at once between him and his constituency. The people felt that they had known him all his life, and had always called him by his Christian name.

Lady Randolph was much excited and delighted with her husband's success. She canvassed for him in a modest way,

making herself pleasant to the wives of his supporters in a unique manner of her own which was not perhaps quite dignified considering her position, but yet was found very captivating by those good women. She did not condescend to them as other titled ladies do, but she took their advice about her baby, and how he was to be managed, with a pretty humility which made her irresistible. They all felt an individual interest thenceforward in the heir of the Randolphs, as if they had some personal concern in him; and Lady Randolph's gentle accost, and the pretty blush upon her cheeks, and her way of speaking to them all, "as if they were just as good as she was," had a wonderful effect. When she received him in the hotel which was the headquarters of his party, as soon as the result of the election was known, Sir Tom, coming in flushed with applauses and victory, took his wife into his arms and kissed her. "I owe this to you, as well as so much else, Lucy," he said.

"Oh, don't say that! when you know I don't understand much, and never can do anything; but I am so glad, nobody could be more glad," said Lucy. Little Tom had been brought in, too, in his nurse's arms, and crowed and clapped his fat little baby hands for his father; and when his mother took him and stepped out upon the balcony, from which her husband was speaking an impromptu address to his new constituents, with the child in her arms, not suspecting that she would be seen, the cheers and outcries ran into an uproar of applause. "Three cheers for my lady and the baby," the crowd shouted at the top of its many

voices; and Lucy, blushing and smiling and crying with pleasure, instead of shrinking away as everybody feared she would do, stood up in her modest, pretty youthfulness, shy, but full of sense and courage, and held up the child, who stared at them all solemnly with big blue eyes, and, after a moment's consideration, again patted his fat little hands together, an action which put the multitude beside itself with delight. Sir Tom's speech did not make nearly so much impression as the baby's "patti-cake." Every man in the crowd, not to say every woman, and with still more reason every child, clapped his or her hands too, and shouted and laughed and hurrahed.

The incident of the baby's appearance before the public, and the early success he had gained – the earliest on record, the newspapers said – made quite a sensation throughout the county, and made Farafield famous for a week. It was mentioned in a leading article in the first newspaper in the world. It appeared in large headlines in the placards under such titles as "Baby in Politics," "The Nursery and the Hustings," and such like. As for the little hero of the moment, he was handed down to his anxious nurse just as symptoms of a whimper of fear at the alarming tumult outside began to appear about the corners of his mouth. "For heaven's sake take him away; he mustn't cry, or he will spoil all," said the chairman of Sir Tom's committee. And the young mother, disappearing too into the room behind, sat down in a great chair behind their backs, and cried to relieve her feelings. Never had there been such a day. If Sir Tom had not been the

thoroughly good-humoured man he was, it is possible that he might have objected to the interruption thus made in his speech, which was altogether lost in the tumult of delight which followed his son's appearance. But as a matter of fact he was as much delighted as any one, and proud as man could be of his pretty little wife and his splendid boy. He took "the little beggar," as he called him, in his arms, and kissed the mother again, soothing and laughing at her in the tender, kindly, fatherly way which had won Lucy.

"It is you who have got the seat," he said; "I vote that you go and sit in it, Lady Randolph. You are a born legislator, and your son is a favourite of the public, whereas I am only an old fogey."

"Oh, Tom!" Lucy said, lifting her simple eyes to his with a mist of happiness in them. She was accustomed to his nonsense. She never said anything more than "Oh, Tom!" and indeed it was not very long since she had given up the title and ceased to say "Oh, Sir Tom!" which seemed somehow to come more natural. It was what she had said when he came suddenly to see her in the midst of her early embarrassments and troubles; when the cry of relief and delight with which she turned to him, uttering in her surprise that title of familiarity, "Oh, Sir Tom!" had signified first to her middle-aged hero, with the most flattering simplicity and completeness, that he had won the girl's pure and inexperienced heart.

There was no happier evening in their lives than this, when, after all the commotion, threatenings of the ecstatic crowd to

take the horses from their carriage, and other follies, they got off at last together and drove home through roads that wound among the autumn fields, on some of which the golden sheaves were still standing in the sunshine. Sir Tom held Lucy's hand in his own. He had told her a dozen times over that he owed it all to her.

"You have made me rich, and you have made me happy," he said, "though I am old enough to be your father, and you are only a little girl. If there is any good to come out of me, it will all be to your credit, Lucy. They say in story books that a man should be ashamed to own so much to his wife, but I am not the least ashamed."

"Oh, Tom!" she said, "how can you talk so much nonsense," with a laugh, and the tears in her eyes.

"I always did talk nonsense," he said; "that was why you got to like me. But this is excellent sense and quite true. And that little beggar; I am owing you for him, too. There is no end to my indebtedness. When they put the return in the papers it should be Sir Thomas Randolph, etc., returned as representative of his wife, Lucy, a little woman worth as much as any county in England."

"O, Sir Tom," Lucy cried.

"Well, so you are, my dear," he said, composedly. "That is a mere matter of fact, you know, and there can be no question about it at all."

For the truth was that she was so rich as to have been called the greatest heiress in England in her day.

CHAPTER II.
HIS WIFE

Young Lady Randolph had herself been much changed by the progress of these years. Marriage is always the great touchstone of character at least with women; but in her case the change from a troubled and premature independence, full of responsibilities and an extremely difficult and arduous duty, to the protection and calm of early married life, in which everything was done for her, and all her burdens taken from her shoulders, rather arrested than aided in the development of her character. She had lived six months with the Dowager Lady Randolph after her father's death; but those six months had been all she knew of the larger existence of the wealthy and great. All she knew – and even in that short period she had learned less than she might have been expected to learn; for Lucy had not been introduced into society, partly on account of her very youthful age, and partly because she was still in mourning, so that her acquaintance with life on the higher line consisted merely in a knowledge of certain simple luxuries, of larger rooms and prettier furniture, and more careful service than in her natural condition. And by birth she belonged to the class of small townsfolk who are nobody, and whose gentility is more appalling than their homeliness. So that when she came to be Sir Thomas Randolph's wife and a great lady, not merely the ward

of an important personage, but herself occupying that position, the change was so wonderful that it required all Lucy's mental resources to encounter and accustom herself to it.

Sir Tom was the kindest of middle-aged husbands. If he did not adore his young wife with the fervour of passion, he had a sincere affection for her, and the warmest desire to make her happy. She had done a great deal for him, she had changed his position unspeakably, and he was fully determined that no lady in England should have more observance, more honour and luxury, and what was better, more happiness, than the little girl who had made a man of him. There had always been a sweet and serious simplicity about her, an air of good sense and reasonableness, which had attracted everybody whose opinion was worth having to Lucy; but she was neither beautiful nor clever. She had been so brought up that, though she was not badly educated, she had no accomplishments, and not more knowledge than falls to the lot of an ordinary schoolgirl. The farthest extent of her mild experiences was Sloane Street and Cadogan Place: and there were people who thought it impossible that Sir Tom, who had been everywhere, and run through the entire gamut of pleasures and adventures, should find anything interesting in this bread-and-butter girl, whom, of course, it was his duty to marry, and having married to be kind to. But when he found himself set down in an English country house with this little piece of simplicity opposite to him, what would he do, the sympathising spectators said? Even his kind aunt, who felt that she had brought

about the marriage, and who, as a matter of fact, had fully intended it from the first, though she herself liked Lucy, had a little terror in her soul as she asked herself the same question. He would fill the house with company and get over it in that way, was what the most kind and moderate people thought. But Sir Tom laughed at all their prognostications. He said afterwards that he had never known before how pretty it was to know nothing, and to have seen nothing, when these defects were conjoined with intelligence and delightful curiosity and never-failing interest. He declared that he had never truly enjoyed his own adventures and experiences as he did when he told them over to his young wife. You may be sure there were some of them which were not adapted for Lucy's ears: but these Sir Tom left religiously away in the background. He had been a careless liver no doubt, like so many men, but he would rather have cut off his right hand, as the Scripture bids, than have soiled Lucy's white soul with an idea, or an image, that was unworthy of her. She knew him under all sorts of aspects, but not one that was evil. Their solitary evenings together were to her more delightful than any play, and to him nearly as delightful. When the dinner was over and the cold shut out, she would wait his appearance in the inner drawing-room, which she had chosen for her special abode, with some of the homely cares that had been natural to her former condition, drawing his chair to the fire, taking pride in making his coffee for him, and a hundred little attentions. "Now begin," she would say, recalling with a child's eager interest and earnest recollection the

point at which he had left off. This was the greater part of Lucy's education. She travelled with him through very distant regions, and went through all kinds of adventure.

And in the season they went to London, where she made her appearance in society, not perhaps with *éclat*, but with a modest composure which delighted him. She understood then, for the first time, what it was to be rich, and was amused and pleased – amused above all by the position which she occupied with the utmost simplicity. People said it would turn the little creature's head, but it never even disturbed her imagination. She took it with a calm that was extraordinary. Thus her education progressed, and Lucy was so fully occupied with it, with learning her husband and her life and the world, that she had no time to think of the responsibilities which once had weighed so heavily upon her. When now and then they occurred to her and she made some passing reference to them, there were so many other things to do that she forgot again – forgot everything except to be happy and learn and see, as she had now so many ways of doing. She forgot herself altogether, and everything that had been hers, not in excitement, but in the soft absorbing influence of her new life, which drew her away into endless novelties and occupations, such as were, indeed, duties and necessities of her altered sphere.

If this was the case in the first three or four years of her marriage, when she had only Sir Tom to think of, you may suppose what it was when the baby came, to add a hundredfold to the interests of her existence. Everything else in life, it may

be believed, dwindled into nothing in comparison with this boy of boys – this wonderful infant. There had never been one in the world like him it is unnecessary to say: and everything was so novel to her, and she felt the importance of being little Tom's mother so deeply, that her mind was quite carried away from all other thoughts. She grew almost beautiful in the light of this new addition to her happiness. And how happy she was! The child grew and throve. He was a splendid boy. His mother did not sing litanies in his praise in public, for her good sense never forsook her: but his little being seemed to fill up her life like a new stream flowing into it, and she expanded in life, in thought, and in understanding. She began to see a reason for her own position, and to believe in it, and take it seriously. She was a great lady, the first in the neighbourhood, and she felt that, as little Tom's mother, it was natural and befitting that she should be so. She began to be sensible of ambition within herself, as well as something that felt like pride. It was so little like ordinary pride, however, that Lucy was sorry for everybody who had not all the noble surroundings which she began to enjoy. She would have liked that every child should have a nursery like little Tom's, and every mother the same prospects for her infant, and was charitable and tender beyond measure to all the mothers and children within reach on little Tom's account, which was an extravagance which her husband did not grudge, but liked and encouraged, knowing the sentiment from which it sprang. It was with no view to popularity that the pair thus endeavoured to

diffuse happiness about them, being so happy themselves; but it answered the same purpose, and their popularity was great.

When the county conferred the highest honour in its power upon Sir Tom, his immediate neighbours in the villages about took the honour as their own, and rejoiced as, even at a majority or a marriage, they had never rejoiced before, for so kind a landlord, so universal a friend, had never been.

The villages were model villages on the Randolph lands. Sir Tom and his young wife had gone into every detail about the labourers' cottages with as much interest as if they had themselves meant to live in one of them. There were no such trim gardens or bright flower-beds to be seen anywhere, and it was well for the people that the Rector of the parish was judicious, and kept Lady Randolph's charities within bounds. There had been no small amount of poverty and distress among these rustics when the Squire was poor and absent, when they lived in tumbledown old houses, which nobody took any interest in, and where neither decency nor comfort was considered; but now little industries sprang up and prospered, and the whole landscape smiled. A wise landlord with unlimited sway over his neighbourhood and no rivals in the field can do so much to increase the comfort of everybody about him; and such a small matter can make a poor household comfortable. Political economists, no doubt, say it is demoralising: but when it made Lucy happy and the poor women happy, how could Sir Tom step in and arrest the genial bounty? He gave the Rector a hint to see

that she did not go too far, and walked about with his hands in his pockets and looked on. All this amused him greatly; even the little ingratitudes she met with, which went to Lucy's heart, made her husband laugh. It pleased his satirical vein to see how human nature displayed itself, and the black sheep appeared among the white even in a model village. But as for Lucy, though she would sometimes cry over these spots upon the general goodness, it satisfied every wish of her heart to be able to do so much for the cottagers. They did not, perhaps, stand so much in awe of her as they ought to have done, but they brought all their troubles to her with the most perfect and undoubting confidence.

All this time, however, Lucy, following the dictates of her own heart, and using what after all was only a little running over of her great wealth to secure the comfort of the people round, was neglecting what she had once thought the great duty of her life as entirely as if she had been the most selfish of worldly women. Her life had been so entirely changed – swung, as one might say, out of one orbit into another – that the burdens of the former existence seemed to have been taken from her shoulders along with its habits and external circumstances. Her husband thought of these as little as herself; yet even he was somewhat surprised to find that he had no trouble in weaning Lucy from the extravagances of her earlier independence. He had not expected much trouble, but still it had seemed likely enough that she would at least propose things that his stronger sense condemned, and would have to be convinced and persuaded that they were

impracticable; but nothing of the kind occurred, and when he thought of it Sir Tom himself was surprised, as also were various other people who knew what Lucy's obstinacy on the subject before her marriage had been, and especially the Dowager Lady Randolph, who paid her nephew a yearly visit, and never failed to question him on the subject.

"And Lucy?" she would say. "Lucy never makes any allusion? She has dismissed everything from her mind? I really think you must be a magician, Tom. I could not have believed it, after all the trouble she gave us, and all the money she threw away. Those Russells, you know, that she was so ridiculously liberal to, they are as bad as ever. That sort of extravagant giving of money is never successful. But I never thought you would have got it out of her mind."

"Don't flatter me," he said; "it is not I that have got it out of her mind. It is life and all the novelties in it – and small Tom, who is more of a magician than I am – "

"Oh, the baby!" said the dowager, with the indifference of a woman who has never had a child, and cannot conceive why a little sprawling tadpole in long clothes should make such a difference. "Yes, I suppose that's a novelty," she said, "to be mother of a bit of a thing like that naturally turns a girl's head. It is inconceivable the airs they give themselves, as if there was nothing so wonderful in creation. And so far as I can see you are just as bad, though you ought to know better, Tom."

"Oh, just as bad," he said, with his large laugh. "I never had

a share in anything so wonderful. If you only could see the superiority of this bit of a thing to all other things about him – "

"Oh! spare me," cried Lady Randolph the elder, holding up her hands. "Of course I don't undervalue the importance of an heir to the property," she said in a different tone. "I have heard enough about it to be pretty sensible of that."

This the Dowager said with a slight tone of bitterness, which indeed was comprehensible enough: for she had suffered much in her day from the fact that no such production had been possible to her. Had it been so, her nephew who stood by her would not (she could scarcely help reflecting with some grudge against Providence) have been the great man he now was, and no child of his would have mattered to the family. Lady Randolph was a very sensible woman, and had long been reconciled to the state of affairs, and liked her nephew, whom she had been the means of providing for so nobly; and she was glad there was a baby; still, for the sake of her own who had never existed, she resented the self-exaltation of father and mother over this very common and in no way extraordinary phenomenon of a child.

Sir Tom laughed again with a sense of superiority, which was in itself somewhat ludicrous; but as nobody is clear-sighted in their own concerns, he was quite unconscious of this. His laugh nettled Lady Randolph still more. She said, with a certain disdain in her tone, —

"And so you think you have sailed triumphantly over all that difficulty – thanks to your charms and the baby's, and are going

to hear nothing of it any more?"

Sir Tom felt that he was suddenly pulled up, and was a little resentful in return.

"I hope," he said, "that is, I do more than hope, I feel convinced, that my wife, who has great sense, has outgrown that nonsense, and that she has sufficient confidence in me to leave her business matters in my hands."

Lady Randolph shook her head.

"Outgrown nonsense – at three and twenty?" she said. "Don't you think that's premature? and, my dear boy, take my word for it, a woman when she has the power, likes to keep the control of her own business just as well as a man does. I advise you not to holloa till you are out of the wood."

"I don't expect to have any occasion to holloa; there is no wood for that matter; Lucy, though perhaps you may not think it, is one of the most reasonable of creatures."

"She is everything that is nice and good," said the Dowager, "but how about the will? Lucy may be reasonable, but that is not. And she cannot forget it always."

"Pshaw! The will is a piece of folly," cried Sir Tom. He grew red at the very thought with irritation and opposition. "I believe the old man was mad. Nothing else could excuse such imbecility. Happily there is no question of the will."

"But there must be, some time or other."

"I see no occasion for it," said Sir Tom coldly; and as his aunt was a reasonable woman, she did not push the matter any

farther. But if the truth must be told this sensible old lady contemplated the great happiness of these young people with a sort of interested and alarmed spectatorship (for she wished them nothing but good), watching and wondering when the explosion would come which might in all probability shatter it to ruins. For she felt thoroughly convinced in her own mind that Lucy would not always forget the conditions by which she held her fortune, and that all the reason and good sense in the world would not convince her that it was right to ignore and baulk her father's intentions, as conveyed with great solemnity in his will. And when the question should come to be raised, Lady Randolph felt that it would be no trifling one. Lucy was very simple and sweet, but when her conscience spoke even the influence of Sir Tom would not suffice to silence it. She was a girl who would stand to what she felt to be right if all the world and even her husband were against her – and the Dowager, who wished them no harm, felt a little alarmed as to the issue. Sir Tom was not a man easy to manage, and the reddening of his usually smiling countenance at the mere suggestion of the subject was very ominous. It would be better, far better, for Lucy if she would yield at once and say nothing about it. But that was not what it was natural for her to do. She would stand by her duty to her father, just as, were it assailed, she would stand by her duty to her husband; but she would never be got to understand that the second cancelled the first. The Dowager Lady Randolph watched the young household with something of the interest with which a playgoer watches the

stage. She felt sure that the explosion would come, and that a breath, a touch, might bring it on at any moment; and then what was to be the issue? Would Lucy yield? would Lucy conquer? or would the easy temper with which everybody credited Sir Tom support this trial? The old lady, who knew him so well, believed that there was a certain fiery element below, and she trembled for the peace of the household which was so happy and triumphant, and had no fear whatever for itself. She thought of "the torrent's smoothness ere it dash below," of the calm that precedes a storm, and many other such images, and so frightened did she become at the dangers she had conjured up that she put the will hurriedly out of her thoughts, as Sir Tom had done, and would think no more of it. "Sufficient," she said to herself, "is the evil to the day."

In the meantime, the married pair smiled serenely at any doubts of their perfect union, and Lucy felt a great satisfaction in showing her husband's aunt (who had not thought her good enough for Sir Tom, notwithstanding that she so warmly promoted the match) how satisfied he was with his home, and how exultant in his heir.

In the following chapters the reader will discover what was the cause which made the Dowager shake her head when she got into the carriage to drive to the railway at the termination of her visit. It was all very pretty and very delightful, and thoroughly satisfactory; but still Lady Randolph, the elder, shook her experienced head.

CHAPTER III.
OLD MR. TREVOR'S WILL

Lucy Trevor, when she married Sir Thomas Randolph, was the heiress of so great a fortune that no one ventured to state it in words or figures. She was not old enough, indeed, to have the entire control of it in her hands, but she had unlimited control over a portion of it in a certain sense, not for her own advantage, but for the aggrandisement of others. Her father, who was eccentric and full of notions, had so settled it that a large portion of the money should eventually return, as he phrased it, to the people from whom it had come, and this not in the way of public charities and institutions, as is the common idea in such cases, but by private and individual aid to struggling persons and families. Lucy, who was then all conscience and devotion to the difficult yet exciting duty which her father had left to her to do, had made a beginning of this extraordinary work before her marriage, resisting all the arguments that were brought to bear upon her as to the folly of the will, and the impossibility of carrying it out. It is likely, indeed, that the trustees and guardians would have taken steps at once to have old Trevor's will set aside but for the fact that Lucy had a brother, who in that case would divide the inheritance with her, but who was specially excluded by the will, as being a son of Mr. Trevor's second wife, and entirely unconnected with

the source from which the fortune came. It was Lucy's mother who had brought it into the family, although she was not herself aware of its magnitude, and did not live long enough to have any enjoyment of it. Neither did old Trevor himself have any enjoyment of it, save in the making of the will by which he laid down exactly his regulations for its final disposal. In any case Lucy was to retain the half, which was of itself a great sum; but the condition of her inheritance, and indeed the occupation of her life, according to her father's intention, was that she should select suitable persons to whom to distribute the other half of her fortune. It is needless to say that this commission had seriously occupied the thoughts of the serious girl who, without any sense of personal importance, found herself thus placed in the position of an official bestower of fortune, having it in her power to confer comfort, independence, and even wealth; for she was left almost entirely unrestricted as to her disposition of the money, and might at her pleasure confer a very large sum upon a favourite. Everybody who had ever heard of old Trevor's will considered it the very maddest upon record, and there were many who congratulated themselves that Lucy's husband, if she was so lucky as to marry a man of sense, would certainly put a stop to it – or even that Lucy herself, when she came to years of serious judgment, would see the folly; for there was no stipulation as to the time at which the distributions should be made, these, as well as the selection of the objects of her bounty, being left to herself. She had been very full of this strange duty before

her marriage, and had selected several persons who, as it turned out, did but little credit to her choice, almost forcing her will upon the reluctant trustees, who had no power to hinder her from carrying it out, and whose efforts at reasoning with her had been totally unsuccessful. In these early proceedings Sir Tom, who was intensely amused by the oddity of the business altogether, and who had then formed no idea of appropriating her and her money to himself, gave her a delighted support.

He had never in his life encountered anything which amused him so much, and his only regret was that he had not known the absurd but high-minded old English Quixote who, wiser in his generation than that noble knight, left it to his heir to redress the wrongs of the world, while he himself had the pleasure of the anticipation only, not perhaps unmixed with a malicious sense of all the confusions and exhibitions of the weakness of humanity it would produce. Sir Tom himself had humour enough to appreciate the philosophy of the old humorist, and the droll spectator position which he had evidently chosen for himself, as though he could somehow see and enjoy all the struggles of self-interest raised by his will, with one of those curious self-delusions which so often seem to actuate the dying. Sir Tom, however, had thought it little more than a folly even at the moment when it had amused him the most. He had thought that in time Lucy would come to see how ridiculous it was, and would tacitly, without saying anything, give it up, so sensible a girl being sure in the long run to see how entirely unsuited to modern times

and habits such a disposition was. And had she done so, there was nobody who was likely to awaken her to a sense of her duty. Her trustees, who considered old Trevor mad, and Lucy a fool to humour him, would certainly make no objection; and little Jock, the little brother to whom Lucy was everything in the world, was still less likely to interfere. When it came about that Lucy herself, and her fortune, and all her right, were in Sir Tom's own hands, he was naturally more and more sure that this foolish will (after giving him a great deal of amusement, and perhaps producing a supernatural chuckle, if such an expression of feeling is possible in the spiritual region where old Trevor might be supposed to be) would be henceforward like a testament in black letter, voided by good sense and better knowledge and time, the most certain agency of all. And his conviction had been more than carried out in the first years of his married life. Lucy forgot what was required of her. She thought no more of her father's will. It glided away into the unseen along with so many other things, extravagances, or if not extravagances, still phantasies of youth. She found enough in her new life – in her husband, her baby, and the humble community which looked up to her and claimed everything from her – to occupy both her mind and her hands. Life seemed to be so full that there was no time for more.

It had been no doing of Sir Tom's that little Jock, the brother who had been Lucy's child, her Mentor, her counsellor and guide, had been separated from her for so long. Jock had been sent to school with his own entire concurrence and control. He was

a little philosopher with a mind beyond his years, and he had seemed to understand fully, without any childish objection, the reason why he should be separated from her, and even why it was necessary to give up the hope of visiting his sister. The first year it was because she was absent on her prolonged wedding tour: the next because Jock was himself away on a long and delightful expedition with a tutor, who had taken a special fancy to him. Afterwards the baby was expected, and all exciting visits and visitors were given up. They had met in the interval. Lucy had visited Jock at his school, and he had been with them in London on several occasions. But there had been little possibility of anything like their old intercourse. Perhaps they could never again be to each other what they had been when these two young creatures, strangely separated from all about them, had been alone in the world, having entire and perfect confidence in each other. They both looked back upon these bygone times with a sort of regretful consciousness of the difference; but Lucy was very happy in her new life, and Jock was a perfectly natural boy, given to no sentimentalities, not jealous, and enjoying his existence too completely to sigh for the time when he was a quaint old-fashioned child, and knew no life apart from his sister.

Their intercourse then had been so pretty, so tender and touching; the child being at once his sister's charge and her superior in his old-fashioned reflectiveness, her pupil and her teacher, the little judge of whose opinions she stood in awe, while at the same time quite subject and submissive to her – that it was

a pity it should ever come to an end; but it is a pity, too, when children grow up, when they grow out of all the softness and keen impressions of youth into the harder stuff of man and woman. To their parents it is a change which has often little to recommend it – but it is inevitable, as we all know; and so it was a pity that Lucy and Jock were no longer all in all to each other; but the change was in their case, too, inevitable, and accepted by both. When, however, the time came that Jock was to arrive really on his first long visit at the Hall, Lucy prepared for this event with a little excitement, with a lighting up of her eyes and countenance, and a pleasant warmth of anticipation in which even little Tom was for the moment set aside. She asked her husband a dozen times in the previous day if he thought the boy would be altered. "I know he must be taller and all that," Lucy said. "I do not mean the outside of him. But do you think he will be changed?"

"It is to be hoped so," said Sir Tom, serenely. "He is sixteen. I trust he is not what he was at ten. That would be a sad business, indeed – "

"Oh, Tom, you know that's not what I mean! – of course he has grown older; but he always was very old for his age. He has become a real boy now. Perhaps in some things he will seem younger too."

"I always said you were very reasonable," said her husband, admiringly. "That is just what I wanted you to be prepared for – not a wise little old man as he was when he had the charge of your soul, Lucy."

She smiled at him, shaking her head. "What ridiculous things you say. But Jock was always the wise one. He knew much better than I did. He did take care of me whatever you may think, though he was such a child."

"Perhaps it was as well that he did not continue to take care of you. On the whole, though I have no such lofty views, I am a better guide."

Lucy looked at him once more without replying for a moment. Was her mind ever crossed by the idea that there were perhaps certain particulars in which little Jock was the best guide? If so the blasphemy was involuntary. She shook it off with a little movement of her head, and met his glance with her usual serene confidence. "You ought to be," she said, "Tom; but you liked him always. Didn't you like him? I always thought so; and you will like him now?"

"I hope so," said Sir Tom.

Then a slight gleam of anxiety came into Lucy's eyes. This seemed the only shape in which evil could come to her, and with one of those forewarnings of Nature always prone to alarm, which come when we are most happy, she looked wistfully at her husband, saying nothing, but with an anxious question and prayer combined in her look. He smiled at her, laying his hand upon her head, which was one of his caressing ways, for Lucy, not an imposing person in any particular, was short, and Sir Tom was tall.

"Does that frighten you, Lucy? I shall like him for your sake,

if not for his own, never fear."

"That is kind," she said, "but I want you to like him for his own sake. Indeed, I should like you if you would, Tom," she added almost timidly, "to like him for your own. Perhaps you think that is presuming, as if he, a little boy, could be anything to you; but I almost think that is the only real way – if you know what I mean."

"Now this is humbling," said Sir Tom, "that one's wife should consider one too dull to know what she means. You are quite right, and a complete philosopher, Lucy. I will like the boy for my own sake. I always did like him, as you say. He was the quaintest little beggar, an old man and a child in one. But it would have been bad for him had you kept on cultivating him in that sort of hot-house atmosphere. It was well for Jock, whatever it might be for you, that I arrived in time."

Lucy pondered for a little without answering; and then she said, "Why should it be considered so necessary for a boy to be sent away from home?"

"Why!" cried Sir Tom, in astonishment; and then he added, laughingly, "It shows your ignorance, Lucy, to ask such a question. He must be sent to school, and there is an end of it. There are some things that are like axioms in Euclid, though you don't know very much about that – they are made to be acted upon, not to be discussed. A boy must go to school."

"But why?" said Lucy undaunted. "That is no answer." She was untrammelled by any respect for Euclid, and would have freely questioned the infallibility of an axiom, with a courage

such as only ignorance possesses. She was thinking not only of Jock, but had an eye to distant contingencies, when there might be question of a still more precious boy. "God," she said, reverentially, "must have meant surely that the father and mother should have something to do in bringing them up."

"In the holidays, my dear," said Sir Tom; "that is what we are made for. Have you never found that out?"

Lucy never felt perfectly sure whether he was in jest or earnest. She looked at him again to see what he meant – which was not very easy, for Sir Tom meant two things directly opposed to each other. He meant what he said, and yet said what he knew was nonsense, and laughed at himself inwardly with a keen recognition of this fact. Notwithstanding, he was as much determined to act upon it as if it had been the most certain truth, and in a way pinned his faith to it as such.

"I suppose you are laughing," said Lucy, "and I wish you would not, because it is so important. I am sure we are not meant only for the holidays, and you don't really think so, Tom; and to take a child away from his natural teachers, and those that love him best in the world, to throw him among strangers! Oh, I cannot think that is the best way, whatever Euclid may make you think."

At this Sir Tom laughed, as he generally did, though never disrespectfully, at Lucy's decisions. He said, "That is a very just expression, my dear, though Euclid never made us think so much as he ought to have done. You are thinking of that little beggar. Wait till he is out of long clothes."

"Which shows all you know about it. He was shortcoated at the proper time, I hope," said Lucy, with some indignation, "do you call these long clothes?"

These were garments which showed when he sprawled, as he always did, a great deal of little Tom's person, and as his mother was at that time holding him by them, while he "felt his feet," upon the carpet, the spectacle of two little dimpled knees without any covering at all triumphantly proved her right. Sir Tom threw himself upon the carpet to kiss those sturdy, yet wavering little limbs, which were not quite under the guidance of Tommy's will as yet, and taking the child from his mother, propped it up against his own person. "For the present, I allow that fathers and mothers are the best," he said.

Lucy stood and gazed at them in that ecstasy of love and pleasure with which a young mother beholds her husband's adoration for their child. Though she feels it to be the highest pride and crown of their joint existence, yet there is always in her mind a sense of admiration and gratitude for his devotion. She looked down upon them at her feet, with eyes running over with happiness. It is to be feared that at such a moment Lucy forgot even Jock, the little brother who had been as a child to her in her earlier days; and yet there was no want of love for Jock in her warm and constant heart.

CHAPTER IV.
YOUNG MR. TREVOR

John Trevor, otherwise Jock, arrived at the Hall in a state of considerable though suppressed excitement. It was not in his nature to show the feelings which were most profound and strongest in his nature, even if the religion of an English public school boy had not forbidden demonstration. But he had very strong feelings underneath his calm exterior, and the approach to Lucy's home gave him many thoughts. The sense of separation which had once affected him with a deep though unspoken sentiment had passed away long ago into a faint grudge, a feeling of something lost – but between ten and sixteen one does not brood upon a grievance, especially when one is surrounded by everything that can make one happy; and there was a certain innate philosophy in the mind of Jock which enabled him to see the justice and necessity of the separation. He it was who in very early day, had ordained his own going to school with a realisation of the need of it which is not usually given to his age – and he had understood without any explanation and without any complaint that Lucy must live her own life, and that their constant brother and sister fellowship became impossible when she married. The curious little solemn boy, who had made so many shrewd guesses at the ways of life while he was still only

a child, accepted this without a word, working it out in his own silent soul; but nevertheless it had affected him deeply. And when the time came at last for a real meeting, not a week's visit in town where she was fully occupied, and he did not well know what to do with himself – or a hurried rapid meeting at school, where Jock's pride in introducing his tutor to his sister was a somewhat imperfect set-off to the loss of personal advantage to himself in thus seeing Lucy always in the company of other people – his being was greatly moved with diverse thoughts. Lucy was all he had in the world to represent the homes, the fathers and mothers and sisters and brothers of his companions. The old time when they had been all in all to each other had a more delicate beauty than the ordinary glow of childhood. He thought there was nobody like her, with that mingled adoration and affectionate contempt which make up a boy's love for the women belonging to him. She was not clever: but he regarded the simplicity of her mind with pride. This seemed to give her her crowning charm. "Any fellow can be clever," Jock said to himself. It was part of Lucy's superiority that she was not so. He arrived at the railway station at Farafield with much excitement in his mind, though his looks were quiet enough. The place, though it was the first he had ever known, did not attract a thought from the other and more important meeting. It was a wet day in August, and the coachman who had been sent for him gave him a note to say that Lucy would have come to meet him but for the rain. He was rather glad of the rain, this being the case. He did not want to meet her

on a railway platform – he even regretted the long stretches of the stubble fields as he whirled past, and wished that the way had been longer, though he was so anxious to see her. And when he jumped down at the great door of the hall and found himself in the embrace of his sister, the youth was thrilling with excitement, hope, and pleasure. Lucy had changed much less than he had. Jock, who had been the smallest of pale-faced boys, was now long and weedy, with limbs and fingers of portentous length. His hair was light and limp; his large eyes, well set in his head, had a vague and often dreamy look. It was impossible to call him a handsome boy. There was an entire want of colour about him, as there had been about Lucy in her first youth, and his gray morning clothes, like the little gray dress she had worn as a young girl were not very becoming to him. They had been so long apart that he met her very shyly, with an awkwardness that almost looked like reluctance, and for the first hour scarcely knew what to say to her, so full was he of the wonder and pleasure of being by her, and the impossibility of expressing this. She asked him about his journey, and he made the usual replies, scarcely knowing what he said, but looking at her with a suppressed beatitude which made Jock dull in the very intensity of his feeling. The rain came steadily down outside, shutting them in as with veils of falling water. Sir Tom, in order to leave them entirely free to have their first meeting over, had taken himself off for the day. Lucy took her young brother into the inner drawing-room, the centre of her own life. She made him sit down in a luxurious chair, and stood

over him gazing at the boy, who was abashed and did not know what to say. "You are different, Jock. It is not that you are taller and bigger altogether, but you are different. I suppose so am I."

"Not much," he said, looking shyly at her. "You couldn't change."

"How so?" she asked with a laugh. "I am such a great deal older I ought to look wiser. Let me see what it is. Your eyes have grown darker, I think, and your face is longer, Jock; and what is that? a little down, actually, upon your upper lip. Jock, not a moustache!"

Jock blushed with pleasure and embarrassment, and put up his hand fondly to feel those few soft hairs. "There isn't very much of it," he said.

"Oh, there is enough to swear by; and you like school as well as ever? and MTutor, how is he? Are you as fond of him as you used to be, Jock?"

"You don't say you're fond of him," said Jock, "but he's just as jolly as ever, if that is what you mean."

"That is what I mean, I suppose. You must tell me when I say anything wrong," said Lucy. She took his head between her hands and gave him a kiss upon his forehead. "I am so glad to see you here at last," she said.

And then there was a pause. Her first little overflow of questions had come to an end, and she did not exactly know what to say, while Jock sat silent, staring at her with an earnest gaze. It was all so strange, the scene and surroundings, and Lucy

in the midst, who was a great lady, instead of being merely his sister – all these confused the boy's faculties. He wanted time to realise it all. But Lucy, for her part, felt the faintest little touch of disappointment. It seemed to her as if they ought to have had so much to say to each other, such a rush of questions and answers, and full-hearted confidence. Jock's heart would be at his lips, she thought, ready to rush forth – and her own also, with all the many things of which she had said to herself: "I must tell that to Jock." But as a matter of fact, many of these things had been told by letter, and the rest would have been quite out of place in the moment of reunion, in which indeed it seemed inappropriate to introduce any subject other than their pleasure in seeing each other again, and those personal inquiries which we all so long to make face to face when we are separated from those near to us, yet which are so little capable of filling all the needs of the situation when that moment comes. Jock was indeed showing his happiness much more by his expressive silence and shy eager gaze at her than if he had plunged into immediate talk; but Lucy felt a little disappointed, and as if the meeting had not come up to her hopes. She said, after a pause which was almost awkward, "You would like to see baby, Jock? How strange that you should not know baby! I wonder what you will think of him." She rose and rang the bell while she was speaking in a pleasant stir of fresh expectation. No doubt it would stir Jock to the depths of his heart, and bring out all his latent feeling, when he saw Lucy's boy. Little Tom was brought in state to see "his uncle," a title

of dignity which the nurse felt indignantly disappointed to have bestowed upon the lanky, colourless boy who got up with great embarrassment and came forward reluctantly to see the creature quite unknown and unrealised, of whom Lucy spoke with so much exultation. Jock was not jealous, but he thought it rather odd that "a little thing like that" should excite so much attention. It seemed to him that it was a thing all legs and arms, sprawling in every direction, and when it seized Lucy by the hair, pulling it about her face with the most riotous freedom, Jock felt deeply disposed to box its ears. But Lucy was delighted. "Oh, naughty baby!" she said, with a voice of such admiration and ecstasy as the finest poetry, Jock reflected, would never have awoke in her; and when the thing "loved" her, at its nurse's bidding, clasping its fat arms round her neck, and applying a wide-open wet mouth to her cheek, the tears were in her eyes for very pleasure. "Baby, darling, that is your uncle; won't you go to your uncle? Take him, Jock. If he is a little shy at first he will soon get used to you," Lucy cried. To see Jock holding back on one side, and the baby on the other, which strenuously refused to go to its uncle, was as good as a play.

"I'm afraid I should let it fall," said Jock, "I don't know anything about babies."

"Then sit down, dear, and I will put him upon your lap," said the young mother. There never was a more complete picture of wretchedness than poor Jock, as he placed himself unwillingly on the sofa with his knees put firmly together and his feet slanting

outwards to support them. "I sha'n't know what to do with it," he said. It is to be feared that he resented its existence altogether. It was to him a quite unnecessary addition. Was he never to see Lucy any more without that thing clinging to her? Little Tom, for his part, was equally decided in his sentiments. He put his little fists, which were by no means without force, against his uncle's face, and pushed him away, with squalls that would have exasperated Job; and then, instead of consoling Jock, Lucy took the little demon to her arms and soothed him. "Did they want it to make friends against its will," Lucy was so ridiculous as to say, like one of the women in *Punch*, petting and smoothing down that odious little creature. Both she and the nurse seemed to think that it was the baby who wanted consoling for the appearance of Jock, and not Jock who had been insulted; for one does not like even a baby to consider one as repulsive and disagreeable. The incident was scarcely at an end when Sir Tom came in, fresh, smiling, and damp from the farm, where he had been inspecting the cattle and enjoying himself. Mature age and settled life and a sense of property had converted Sir Tom to the pleasure of farming. He shook Jock heartily by the hand, and clapped him on the back, and bade him welcome with great kindness. Then he took "the little beggar" on his shoulder and carried him, shrieking with delight, about the room. It seemed a very strange thing to Jock to see how entirely these two full-grown people gave themselves up to the deification of this child. It was not bringing themselves to his level, it was looking up to him as their superior. If he had

been a king his careless favours could not have been more keenly contended for. Jock, who was fond of poetry and philosophy and many other fine things, looked on at this new mystery with wondering and indignant contempt. After dinner there was the baby again. It was allowed to stay out of bed longer than usual in honour of its uncle, and dinner was hurried over, Jock thought, in order that it might be produced, decked out in a sash almost as broad as its person. When it appeared rational conversation was at an end, Sir Tom, whom Jock had always respected highly, stopped the inquiries he was making, with all the knowledge and pleasure, of an old schoolboy, into school life, comparing his own experiences with those of the present generation – to play bo-peep behind Lucy's shoulder with the baby. Bo-peep! a Member of Parliament, a fellow who had been at the University, who had travelled, who had seen America and gone through the Desert! There was consternation in the astonishment with which Jock looked on at this unlooked-for, almost incredible, exhibition. It was ridiculous in Lucy, but in Sir Tom!

"I suppose we were all like that one time?" he said, trying to be philosophical, as little Tom at last, half smothered with kisses, was carried away.

"Like *that* – do you mean like baby? You were a little darling, dear, and I was always very, very fond of you," said Lucy, giving him the kindest look of her soft eyes. "But you were not a beauty, like my boy."

Sir Tom had laughed, with something of the same sentiment

very evident in his mirth, when Lucy spoke. He put out his hand and patted his young brother-in-law on the shoulder. "It is absurd," he said, "to put that little beggar in the foreground when we have somebody here who is in Sixth form at sixteen, and is captain of his house, and has got a school prize already. If Lucy does not appreciate all that, I do, Jock, and the best I can wish for Tommy is that he should have done as much at your age."

"Oh, I was not thinking of that," said Jock with a violent blush.

"Of course he was not," said Lucy calmly, "for he always had the kindest heart though he was so clever. If you think I don't appreciate it as you say, Tom, it is only because I knew it all the time. Do you think I am surprised that Jock has beaten everybody? He was like that when he was six, before he had any education. And he will be just as proud of baby as we are when he knows him. He is a little strange at first," said Lucy, beaming upon her brother; "but as soon as he is used to you, he will go to you just as he does to me."

To this Jock could not reply by betraying the shiver that went over him at the thought, but it gave great occupation to his mind to make out how a little thing like that could attain, as it had done, such empire over the minds of two sensible people. He consulted MTutor on the subject by letter, who was his great referee on difficult subjects, and he could not help betraying his wonder to the household as he grew more familiar and the days went on. "He can't do anything for you," Jock said. "He can't talk; he doesn't know anything about – well, about books: I know that's

more my line than yours, Lucy – but about anything. Oh! you needn't flare up. When he dabs his mouth at you all wet – "

"Oh! you little wretch, you infidel, you savage," Lucy cried; "his sweet mouth! and a dear big wet kiss that lets you know he means it."

Jock looked at her as he had done often in the old days, with mingled admiration and contempt. It was like Lucy, and yet how odd it was. "I suppose, then," he said, "I was rather worse than *that* when you took me up and were good to me. What for, I wonder? and you were fond of me, too, although you are fonder of *it*– "

"If you talk of It again I will never speak to you more," Lucy said, "as if my beautiful boy was a thing and not a person. He is not It: he is Tom, he is Mr. Randolph: that is what Williams calls him." Williams was the butler who had been all over the world with Sir Tom, and who was respectful of the heir, but a little impatient and surprised, as Jock was, of the fuss that was made about Tommy for his own small sake.

By this time, however, Jock had recovered from his shyness – his difficulty in talking, all the little mist that absence had made – and roamed about after Lucy, hanging upon her, putting his arm through hers, though he was much the taller, wherever she went. He held her back a little now as they walked through the park in a sort of procession, Mrs. Richens, the nurse, going first with the boy. "When I was a little slobbering beast, like – " he stopped himself in time, "like the t'other kind of baby, and

nobody wanted me, you were the only one that took any trouble."

"How do you know?" said Lucy; "you don't remember and I don't remember."

"Ah! but I remember the time in the Terrace, when I lay on the rug, and heard papa making his will over my head. I was listening for you all the time. I was thinking of nothing but your step coming to take me out."

"Nonsense!" said Lucy, "you were deep in your books, and thinking of them only; of that – gentleman with the windmills – or Shakspeare, or some other nonsense. Oh, I don't mean Shakspeare is nonsense. I mean you were thinking of nothing but your books, and nobody would believe you understood all that at your age."

"I did not understand," said Jock with a blush. "I was a little prig. Lucy, how strange it all is, like a picture one has seen somewhere, or a scene in a play or a dream! Sometimes I can remember little bits of it, just as he used to read it out to old Ford. Bits of it are all in and out of *As You Like It*, as if Touchstone had said them, or Jaques. Poor old papa! how particular he was about it all. Are you doing everything he told you, Lucy, in the will?"

He did not in the least mean it as an alarming question, as he stooped over, in his awkward way holding her arm, and looked into her face.

CHAPTER V.
CONSULTATIONS

Lucy was much startled by her brother's demand. It struck, however, not her conscience so much as her recollection, bringing back that past which was still so near, yet which seemed a world away, in which she had made so many anxious efforts to carry out her father's will and considered it the main object of her life. A young wife who is happy, and upon whom life smiles, can scarcely help looking back upon the time when she was a girl with a sense of superiority, an amused and affectionate contempt for herself. "How could I be so silly?" she will say, and laugh, not without a passing blush. This was not exactly Lucy's feeling; but in three years she had, even in her sheltered and happy position, attained a certain acquaintance with life, and she saw difficulties which in those former days had not been apparent to her. When Jock began to recall these reminiscences it seemed to her as if she saw once more the white commonplace walls of her father's sitting-room rising about her, and heard him laying down the law which she had accepted with such calm. She had seen no difficulty then. She had not even been surprised by the burden laid upon her. It had appeared as natural to obey him in matters which concerned large external interests, and the well-being of strangers, as it was to fill him out a cup of tea. But

the interval of time, and the change of position, had made a great difference; and when Jock asked, "Are you doing all he told you?" the question brought a sudden surging of the blood to her head, which made a singing in her ears and a giddiness in her brain. It seemed to place her in front of something which must interrupt all her life and put a stop to the even flow of her existence. She caught her breath. "Doing all he told me!"

Jock, though he did not mean it, though he was no longer her self-appointed guardian and guide, became to Lucy a monitor, recalling her as to another world.

But the effect though startling was not permanent. They began to talk it all over, and by dint of familiarity the impression wore away. The impression, but not the talk. It gave the brother and sister just what they wanted to bring back all the habits of their old affectionate confidential intercourse, a subject upon which they could carry on endless discussions and consultations, which was all their own, like one of those innocent secrets which children delight in, and which, with arms entwined and heads close together, they can carry on endlessly for days together. They ceased the discussion when Sir Tom appeared, not with any fear of him as a disturbing influence, but with a tacit understanding that this subject was for themselves alone. It involved everything; the past with all those scenes of their strange childhood, the homely living, the fantastic possibilities always in the air, the old dear tender relationship between the two young creatures who alone belonged to each other. Lucy almost

forgot her present self as she talked, and they moved about together, the tall boy clinging to her arm as the little urchin had done, altogether dependent, yet always with a curious leadership, suggesting a thousand things that would not have occurred to her.

Lucy had no occasion now for the advice which Jock at eight years old had so freely given her. She had her husband to lead and advise her. But in this one matter Sir Tom was put tacitly out of court, and Jock had his old place. "It does not matter at all that you have not done anything lately," Jock said; "there is plenty of time – and now that I am to spend all my holidays here, it will be far easier. It was better not to do things so hastily as you began."

"But, Jock," said Lucy, "We must not deceive ourselves; it will be very hard. People who are very nice do not like to take the money; and those who are willing to take it – "

"Does the will say the people are to be nice?" asked Jock. "Then what does that matter? The will is all against reason, Lucy. It is wrong, you know. Fellows who know political economy would think we are all mad; for it just goes against it, straight."

"That is strange, Jock; for papa was very economical. He never could bear waste: he used to say – "

"Yes, yes; but political economy means something different. It is a science. It means that you should sell everything as dear as you can, and buy it as cheap as you can – and never give anything away – "

"That is dreadful, Jock," said Lucy. "It is all very well to be a science, but nobody like ourselves could be expected to act upon

it – private people, you know."

"There is something in that," Jock allowed; "there are always exceptions. I only want to show you that the will being all against rule, it *must* be hard to carry it out. Don't you do anything by yourself, Lucy. When you come across any case that is promising, just you wait till I come, and we'll talk it all over. I don't quite understand about nice people not taking it. Fellows I know are always pleased with presents – or a tip, nobody refuses a tip. And that is just the same sort of thing, you know."

"Not just the same," said Lucy, "for a tip – that means a sovereign, doesn't it?"

"It sometimes means – paper," said Jock, with some solemnity. "Last time you came to see me at school Sir Tom gave me a fiver – "

"A what?"

"Oh, a five-pound note," said Jock, with momentary impatience; "the other's shorter to say and less fuss. MTutor thought he had better not; but I didn't mind. I don't see why anybody should mind. There's a fellow I know – his father is a curate, and there are no end of them, and they've no money. Fellow himself is on the foundation, so he doesn't cost much. Why they shouldn't take a big tip from you, who have too much, I'm sure I can't tell; and I don't believe they would mind," Jock added, after a pause.

This, which would have inspired Lucy in the days of her dauntless maidenhood to calculate at once how much it would

take to make this family happy, gave her a little shudder now.

"I don't feel as if I could do it," she said. "I wish papa had found an easier way. People don't like you afterwards when you do *that* for them. They are angry – they think, why should I have all that to give away, a little thing like me?"

"The easiest way would be an exam.," said Jock. "Everybody now goes in for exams.; and if they passed, they would think they had won the money all right."

"Perhaps there is something in that, Jock; but then it is not for young men. It is for ladies, perhaps, or old people, or – "

"You might let them choose their own subjects," said the boy. "A lady might do a good paper about – servants, or sewing, or that sort of thing; or housekeeping – that would be all right. MTutor might look over the papers – "

"Does he know about housekeeping?"

"He knows about most things," cried Jock, "I should like to see the thing he didn't know. He is the best scholar we have got; and he's what you call an all-round man besides," the boy said with pride.

"What is an all-round man?" Lucy asked, diffidently. "He is tall and slight, so it cannot mean his appearance."

"Oh, what a muff you are, Lucy; you're awfully nice, but you are a muff. It means a man who knows a little of everything. MTutor is more than that, he knows a great deal of everything; indeed, as I was saying," Jock added defiantly, "I should just like to see the thing he didn't know."

"And yet he is so nice," said Lucy, with a gentle air of astonishment.

MTutor was a subject which was endless with Jock, so that the original topic here glided out of sight as the exalted gifts of that model of all the virtues became the theme. This conversation, however, was but one of many. It was their meeting ground, the matter upon which they found each other as of old, two beings separated from the world, which wondered at and did not understand them. What a curious office it was for them, two favourites of fortune as they seemed, to disperse and give away the foundation of their own importance! for Jock owed everything to Lucy, and Lucy, when she had accomplished this object of her existence, and carried out her father's will, would no doubt still be a wealthy woman, but not in any respect the great personage she was now. This was a view of the matter which never crossed the minds of these two. Their strange training had made Lucy less conscious of the immense personal advantage which her money was to her than any other could have done. She knew, indeed, that there was a great difference between her early home in Farafield and the house in London where she had lived with Lady Randolph, and still more, the Hall which was her home – but she had been not less but more courted and worshipped in her lowly estate than in her high one, and her father's curious philosophy had affected her mind and coloured her perceptions. She had learned, indeed, to know that there are difficulties in attempting to enact the part of Providence, and taking upon

herself the task of providing for her fellow-creatures; but these difficulties had nothing to do with the fact that she would herself suffer by such a dispersion. Perhaps her imagination was not lively enough to realise this part of the situation. Jock and she ignored it altogether. As for Jock, the delight of giving away was strong in him, and the position was so strange that it fascinated his boyish imagination. To act such a part as that of Haroun-al-Raschid in real life, and change the whole life of whatsoever poor cobbler or fruit-seller attracted him, was a vision of fairyland such as Jock had not yet outgrown. But the chief thing that he impressed on his sister was the necessity of doing nothing by herself. "Just wait till we can talk it over," he said, "two are always better than one: and a fellow learns a lot at school. You wouldn't think it, perhaps, but there's all sorts there, and you learn a lot when you have your eyes well open. We can talk it all over and settle if it's good enough; but don't go and be rash, Lucy, and do anything by yourself."

"I sha'n't, dear; I should be too frightened," Lucy said.

This was on one of his last days, when they were walking together through the shrubbery. It was September by this time, and he might have been shooting partridges with Sir Tom, but Jock was not so much an out-door boy as he ought to have been, and he preferred walking with his sister, his arm thrust through hers, his head stooping over her. It was perhaps the last opportunity they would have of discussing their family secrets, a matter (they thought) which really concerned nobody else, which

no one else would care to be troubled with. Perhaps in Lucy's mind there was a sense of unreality in the whole matter; but Jock was entirely in earnest, and quite convinced that in such an important business he was his sister's natural adviser, and might be of a great deal of use. It was towards evening when they went out, and a red autumnal sunset was accomplishing itself in the west, throwing a gleam as of the brilliant tints which were yet to come, on the still green and luxuriant foliage. The light was low, and came into Lucy's eyes, who shaded them with her hand. And the paths had a touch of autumnal damp, and a certain mistiness, mellow and golden by reason of the sunshine, was rising among the trees.

"We will not be hasty," said Jock; "we will take everything into consideration: and I don't think you will find so much difficulty, Lucy, when you have me."

"I hope not, dear," Lucy said; and she began to talk to him about his flannels and other precautions he was to take; for Jock was supposed not to be very strong. He had grown fast, and he was rather weedy and long, without strength to support it. "We have been so happy together," she said. "We always were happy together, Jock. Remember, dear, no wet feet, and as little football as you can help, for my sake."

"Oh, yes," he said, with a wave of his hand; "all right, Lucy. There is no fear about that. The first thing to think of is poor old father's will, and what you are going to do about it. I mean to think out all that about the examinations, and I suppose I may

speak to MTutor – "

"It is too private, don't you think, Jock? Nobody knows about it. It is better to keep it between you and me."

"I can put it as a supposed case," said Jock, "and ask what he would advise; for you see, Lucy, you and even I are not very experienced, and MTutor, he knows such a lot. It would always be a good thing to have his advice, you know; he – "

There was no telling how long Jock might have gone on on this subject. But just at this moment a quick step came round the corner of a clump of wood, and a hand was laid on the shoulder of each. "What are you plotting about?" asked the voice of Sir Tom in their ears. It was a curious sign of her mental condition which Lucy remembered with shame afterwards, without being very well able to account for it, that she suddenly dropped Jock's arm and turned round upon her husband with a quick blush and access of breathing, as if somehow – she could not tell how – she had been found out. It had never occurred to her before, through all those long drawn out consultations, that she was concealing anything from Sir Tom. She dropped Jock's arm as if it hurt her, and turned to her husband in the twinkling of an eye.

"Jock," she said quickly, "and I – were talking about MTutor, Tom."

"Ah! once landed on that subject, and there is no telling when we may come to an end," Sir Tom said, with a laugh, "but never mind, I like you all the better for it, my boy."

Jock gave an astonished look at Lucy, a half-defiant one at

her husband.

"That was only by the way," he said, lifting up his shoulders with a little air of offence. He did not condescend to any further explanation, but walked along by their side with a lofty abstraction, looking at them now and then from the corner of his eye. Lucy had taken Sir Tom's arm, and was hanging upon her tall husband, looking up in his face. The little blush of surprise – or was it of guilt? – with which she had received him was still upon her cheek. She was far more animated than usual, almost a little agitated. She asked about the shooting, about the bag, and how many brace was to Sir Tom's own gun, with that conciliating interest which is one of the signs of a conscious fault; while Sir Tom, on his side bending down to his little wife, received all her flatteries with so complacent a smile, and such a beatific belief in her perfect sincerity and devotion, that Jock, looking on from his superiority of passionless youth, regarded them both with a wondering disdain. Why did she "make up" in that way to her husband, dropping her brother as if she had been plotting harm? Jock was amazed, he could not understand it. Perhaps it was only because he thus fell in a moment from being the chief object of interest to the position of nobody at all.

CHAPTER VI.
A SHADOW OF COMING EVENTS

Lucy's mind had sustained a certain shock when her husband appeared. During her short married life there had not been a cloud, or a shadow of a cloud, between them. But then there had been no question between them, nothing to cause any question, no difference of opinion. Sir Tom had taken all her business naturally into his hands. Whatever she wished she had got – nay, before she expressed a wish it had been satisfied. He had talked to her about everything, and she had listened with docile attention, but without concealing the fact that she neither understood nor wished to understand; and he had not only never chided her, but had accepted her indifference with a smile of pleasure as the most natural thing in the world. He had encouraged her in all her liberal charities, shaking his head and declaring with a radiant face that she would ruin herself, and that not even her fortune would stand it. But the one matter which had given Lucy so much trouble before her marriage, and which Jock had now brought back to her mind, was one that had never been mentioned between them. He had known all about it, and her eccentric proceedings and conflict with her guardians, backing her up, indeed, with much laughter, and showing every symptom of amiable amusement; but he had never given any opinion on

the subject, nor made the slightest allusion since to this grand condition of her father's will. In the sunny years that were past Lucy had taken no notice of this omission. She had not thought much on the subject herself. She had withdrawn from it tacitly, as one is apt to do from a matter which has been productive of pain and disappointment, and had been content to ignore that portion of her responsibilities. Even when Jock forcibly revived the subject it continued without any practical importance, and its existence was a question between themselves to afford material for endless conversation which had been pleasant and harmless. But when Sir Tom's hand was laid on her shoulder, and his cheerful voice sounded in her ear, a sudden shock was given to Lucy's being. It flashed upon her in a moment that this question which she had been discussing with Jock had never been mentioned between her and her husband, and with a sudden instinctive perception she became aware that Sir Tom would look upon it with very different eyes from theirs. She felt that she had been disloyal to him in having a secret subject of consultation even with her brother. If he heard he would be displeased, he would be taken by surprise, perhaps wounded, perhaps made angry. In any wise it would introduce a new element into their life. Lucy saw, with a sudden sensation of fright and pain, an unknown crowd of possibilities which might pour down upon her, were it to be communicated to Sir Tom that his wife and her brother were debating as to a course of action on her part, unknown to him. All this occurred in a moment, and it was not

any lucid and real perception of difficulties, but only a sudden alarmed compunctious consciousness that filled her mind. She fled, as it were, from the circumstances which made these horrors possible, hurrying back into her former attitude with a penitential urgency. Jock, indeed, was very dear to her, but he was no more than second, nay he was but third, in Lady Randolph's heart. Her husband's supremacy he could not touch, and though he had been almost her child in the old days, yet he was not, nor ever would be, her child in the same ineffable sense as little Tom was, who was her very own, the centre of her life. So she ran away (so to speak) from Jock with a real panic, and clung to her husband, conciliating, nay almost wheedling him, if we may use the word, with a curious feminine instinct, to make up to him for the momentary wrong she had done, and which he was not aware of. Sir Tom himself was a little surprised by the warmth of the reception she gave him. Her interest in his shooting was usually very mild, for she had never been able to get over a little horror she had, due, perhaps, to her bourgeois training, of the slaughter of the birds. He glanced at the pair with an unusual perception that there was something here more than met the eye. "You have been egging her up to some rebellion," he said; "Jock, you villain; you have been hatching treason behind my back!" He said this with one of those cordial laughs which nobody could refrain from joining – full of good humour and fun, and a pleased consciousness that to teach Lucy to rebel would be beyond any one's power. At any other moment she would have taken the

accusation with the tranquil smile which was Lucy's usual reply to her husband's pleasantries; but this time her laugh was a little strained, and the warmth of her denial, "No, no! there has been no treason," gave the slightest jar of surprise to Sir Tom. It sounded like a false note in the air; he did not understand what it could mean.

Jock went away the next day. He went with a basket of game for MTutor and many nice things for himself, and all the attention and care which might have been his had he been the heir instead of only the young brother and dependent. Lucy herself drove in with him to Farafield to see him off, and Sir Tom, who had business in the little town and meant to drive back with his wife, appeared on the railway platform just in time to say good-bye. "Now, Lucy, you will not forget," were Jock's last words as he looked out of the window when the train was already in motion. Lucy nodded and smiled, and waved her hand, but she did not make any other reply. Sir Tom said nothing until they were driving along the stubble fields in the afternoon sunshine. Lucy lay back in her corner with that mingled sense of regret and relief with which, when we are very happy at home, we see a guest go away – a gentle sorrow to part, a soft pleasure in being once more restored to the more intimate circle. She had not shaken off that impression of guiltiness, but now it was over, and nothing further could be said on the subject for a long time to come.

"What is it, Lucy, that you are not to forget?"

She roused herself up, and a warm flush of colour came to her

face. "Oh, nothing, Tom, a little thing we were consulting about. It was Jock that brought it to my mind."

"I think it must be more than just a little thing. Mayn't I hear what this secret is?"

"Oh, it is nothing, Tom," Lady Randolph repeated; and then she sat up erect and said, "I must not deceive you. It is not merely a small matter. Still it is just between Jock and me. It was about – papa's will, Tom."

"Ah! that is a large matter. I don't quite see how that can be between you and Jock, Lucy. Jock has very little to do with it. I don't want to find fault, my dear, but I think as an adviser you will find me better than Jock."

"I know you are far better, Tom. You know more than both of us put together."

"That would not be very difficult," he said, with a smile.

Perhaps this calm acceptance of the fact nettled Lucy. At least she said, with a little touch of spirit, "And yet I know something about our kind of people better than you will ever do, Tom."

"Lucy, this is a wonderful new tone. Perhaps you may know better, but I am doubtful if you understand the relation of things as well. What is it, my dear? – that is to say, if you like to tell me, for I am not going to force your confidence."

"Tom – oh dear Tom! It is not that. It is rather that it was something to talk to Jock about. He remembers everything. When papa was making that will – " here Lucy stopped and sighed. It had not been doing her a good service to make her

recollect that will, which had enough in it to make her life wretched, though that as yet nobody knew. "He recollects it all," she said. "He used to hear it read out. He remembers everything."

"I suppose, then," said Sir Tom, with a peculiar smile, "there is something in particular which he thought you were likely to forget?"

Here Lucy sighed again. "I am afraid I had forgotten it. No, not forgotten, but – I never knew very well what to do. Perhaps you don't remember either. It is about giving the money away."

Sir Tom was a far more considerable person in every way than the little girl who was his wife, and who was not clever nor of any great account apart from her wealth; and she was devoted to him, so that he could have very little fear how any conflict should end when he was on one side, if all the world were on the other. But perhaps he had been spoiled by Lucy's entire agreement and consent to whatever he pleased to wish, so that his tone was a little sharp, not so good-humoured as usual, but with almost a sneer in it when he replied quickly, not leaving her a moment to get her breath, "I see; Jock having inspiration from the fountain head, was to be your guide in that."

She looked at him alarmed and penitent, but reproachful. "I would have done nothing, I could have done nothing, oh Tom! without you."

"It is very obliging of you Lucy to say so; nevertheless, Jock thought himself entitled to remind you of what you had forgotten, and to offer himself as your adviser. Perhaps MTutor was to

come in, too," he said, with a laugh.

Sir Tom was not immaculate in point of temper any more than other men, but Lucy had never suffered from it before. She was frightened, but she did not give way. The colour went out of her cheeks, but there was more in her than mere insipid submission. She looked at her husband with a certain courage, though she was so pale, and felt so profoundly the displeasure which she had never encountered before.

"I don't think you should speak like that, Tom. I have done nothing wrong. I have only been talking to my brother of – of – a thing that nobody cares about but him and me in all the world."

"And that is – "

"Doing what papa wished," Lucy said in a low voice. A little moisture stole into her eyes. Whether it came because of her father, or because her husband spoke sharply to her, it perhaps would have been difficult to say.

This made Sir Tom ashamed of his ill-humour. It was cruel to be unkind to a creature so gentle, who was not used to be found fault with; and yet he felt that for Lucy to set up an independence of any kind was a thing to be crushed in the bud. A man may have the most liberal principles about women, and yet feel a natural indignation when his own wife shows signs of desiring to act for herself; and besides, it was not to be endured that a boy and girl conspiracy should be hatched under his very nose to take the disposal of an important sum of money out of his hands. Such an idea was not only ridiculous in itself, but apt to make him

ridiculous, a man who ought to be strong enough to keep the young ones in order. "My dear," he said, "I have no wish to speak in any way that vexes you; but I see no reason you can have – at least I hope there has been nothing in my conduct to give you any reason – to withdraw your confidence from me and give it to Jock."

Lucy did not make him any reply. She looked at him pathetically through the water in her eyes. If she had spoken she would have cried, and this in an open carriage, with a village close at hand, and people coming and going upon the road, was not to be thought of. By the time she had mastered herself Sir Tom had cooled down, and he was ashamed of having made Lucy's lips to quiver and taken away her voice.

"That was a very nasty thing to say," he said, "wasn't it, Lucy? I ought to be ashamed of myself. Still, my little woman must remember that I am too fond of her to let her have secrets with anybody but me."

And with this he took the hand that was nearest to him into both of his and held it close, and throwing a temptation in her way which she could not resist, led her to talk of the baby and forget everything else except that precious little morsel of humanity. He was far cleverer than Lucy; he could make her do whatever he pleased. No fear of any opposition, any setting up of her own will against his. When they got home he gave her a kiss, and then the momentary trouble was all over. So he thought at least. Lucy was so little and gentle and fair, that she appeared to her husband

even younger than she was; and she was a great deal younger than himself. He thought her a sort of child-wife, whom a little scolding or a kiss would altogether sway. The kiss had been quite enough hitherto. Perhaps, since Jock had come upon the scene, a few words of admonition might prove now and then necessary, but it would be cruel to be hard upon her, or do more than let her see what his pleasure was.

But Lucy was not what Sir Tom thought. She could not endure that there should be any shadow between her husband and herself, but her mind was not satisfied with this way of settling an important question. She took his kiss and his apology gratefully, but if anything had been wanted to impress more deeply upon her mind the sense of a duty before her, of which her husband did not approve, and in doing which she could not have his help, it would have been this little episode altogether. Even little Tom did not efface the impression from her mind. At dinner she met her husband with her usual smile, and even assented when he remarked upon the pleasantness of finding themselves again alone together. There had been other guests besides Jock, so that the remark did not offend her; but yet Lucy was not quite like herself. She felt it vaguely, and he felt it vaguely, and neither was entirely aware what it was.

In the morning, at breakfast, Sir Tom received a foreign letter, which made him start a little. He started and cried, "Hollo!" then, opening it, and finding two or three closely-scribbled sheets, gave way to a laugh. "Here's literature!" he said. Lucy, who had no

jealousy of his correspondents, read her own calm little letters, and poured out the tea, with no particular notice of her husband's interjections. It did not even move her curiosity that the letter was in a feminine hand, and gave forth a faint perfume. She reminded him that his tea was getting cold, but otherwise took no notice. One of her own letters was from the Dowager Lady Randolph, full of advice about the baby. "Mrs. Russell tells me that Katie's children are the most lovely babies that ever were seen; but she is very fantastic about them; will not let them wear shoes to spoil their feet, and other vagaries of that kind. I hope, my dear Lucy, that you are not fanciful about little Tom," Lady Randolph wrote. Lucy read this very composedly, and smiled at the suggestion. Fanciful! Oh, no, she was not fanciful about him – she was not even silly, Lucy thought. She was capable of allowing that other babies might be lovely, though why the feet of Katie's children should be of so much importance she allowed to herself she could not see. She was roused from these tranquil thoughts by a little commotion on the other side of the table, where Sir Tom had just thrown down his letter. He was laughing and talking to himself. "Why shouldn't she come if she likes it?" he was saying. "Lucy, look here, since you have set up a confidant, I shall have one too," and with that Sir Tom went off into an immoderate fit of laughing. The letter scattered upon the table all opened out, two large foreign sheets, looked endless. Nobody had ever written so much to Lucy in all her life. She could see it was largely underlined and full of notes of admiration

and interrogation, altogether an out-of-the-way epistle. Was it possible that Sir Tom was a little excited as well as amused? He put his roll upon a hot plate, and began to cut it with his knife and fork in an absence of mind, which was not usual with him, and at intervals of a minute or two would burst out with his long "Ha, ha," again. "That will serve you out, Lucy," he said, with a shout, "if I set up a confidant too."

CHAPTER VII.
A WARNING

"I wonder if I shall like her," Lucy said to herself.

She had been hearing from her husband about the Contessa di Forno-Populo, who had promised to pay them a visit at Christmas. He had laughed a great deal while he described this lady. "What she will do here in a country-house in the depth of winter, I cannot tell," he said, "but if she wants to come why shouldn't she? She and I are old friends. One time and another we have seen a great deal of each other. She will not understand me in the character of a Benedick, but that will be all the greater fun," he said with a laugh. Lucy looked at him with a little surprise. She could not quite make him out.

"If she is a friend she will not mind the country and the winter," said Lucy; "it will be you she will want to see – "

"That is all very well, my dear," said Sir Tom, "but she wants something more than me. She wants a little amusement. We must have a party to meet her, Lucy. We have never yet had the house full for Christmas. Don't you think it will be better to furnish the Contessa with other objects instead of letting her loose upon your husband. You don't know what it is you are treating so lightly."

"I – treat any one lightly that you care for, Tom! Oh, no; I was only thinking. I thought she would come to see you, not a number

of strange people – "

"And you would not mind, Lucy?"

"Mind?" Lucy lifted her innocent eyes upon him with the greatest surprise. "To be sure it is most nice of all when there is nobody with us," she said – as if that had been what he meant. Enlightenment on this subject had not entered her mind. She did not understand him; nor did he understand her. He gave her a sort of friendly hug as he passed, still with that laugh in which there was no doubt a great perception of something comic, yet – an enlightened observer might have thought – a little uneasiness, a tremor which was almost agitation too. Lucy too had a perception of something a little out of the way which she did not understand, but she offered to herself no explanation of it. She said to herself, when he was gone, "I wonder if I shall like her?" and she did not make herself any reply. She had been in society, and held her little place with a simple composure which was natural to her, whoever might come in her way. If she was indeed a little frightened of the great ladies, that was only at the first moment before she became used to them; and afterwards all had gone well – but there was something in the suggestion of a foreign great lady, who perhaps might not speak English, and who would be used to very different "ways," which alarmed her a little; and then it occurred to her with some disappointment that this would be the time of Jock's holidays, and that it would disappoint him sadly to find her in the midst of a crowd of visitors. She said to herself, however, quickly, that it was not to be expected that

everything should always go exactly as one wished it, and that no doubt the Countess of – what was it she was the Countess of? – would be very nice, and everything go well; and so Lady Randolph went away to her baby and her household business, and put it aside for the moment. She found other things far more important to occupy her, however, before Christmas came.

For that winter was very severe and cold, and there was a great deal of sickness in the neighbourhood. Measles and colds and feverish attacks were prevalent in the village, and there were heartrending "cases," in which young Lady Randolph at the Hall took so close an interest that her whole life was disturbed by them. One of the babies, who was little Tom's age, died. When it became evident that there was danger in this case it is impossible to describe the sensations with which Lucy's brain was filled. She could not keep away from the house in which the child was. She sent to Farafield for the best doctor there, and everything that money could procure was got for the suffering infant, whose belongings looked on with wonder and even dismay, with a secret question like that of him who was a thief and kept the bag – to what purpose was this waste? for they were all persuaded that the baby was going to die.

"And the best thing for him, my lady," the grandmother said. "He'll be better done by where he's agoing than he ever could have been here."

"Oh, don't say so," said Lucy. The young mother, who was as young as herself, cried; yet if Lucy had been absent would have

been consoled by that terrible philosophy of poverty that it was "for the best." But Lady Randolph, in such a tumult of all her being as she had never known before, with unspeakable yearning over the dying baby, and a panic beyond all reckoning for her own, would not listen to any such easy consolation. She shut her ears to it with a gleam of anger such as had never been seen in her gentle face before, and would have sat up all night with the poor little thing in her lap if death had not ended its little plaints and suffering. Sir Tom, in this moment of trial, came out in all his true goodness and kindness. He went with her himself to the cottage, and when the vigil was over appeared again to take her home. It was a wintry night, frosty and clear, the stars all twinkling with that mysterious life and motion which makes them appear to so many wistful eyes like persons rather than worlds, and as if there was knowledge and sympathy in those far-shining lights of heaven. Sir Thomas was alarmed by Lucy's colourless face, and the dumb passion of misery and awe that was about her. He was very tender-hearted himself at sight of the dead baby which was the same age as his lovely boy. He clasped the trembling hand with which his wife held his arm, and tried to comfort her. "Look at the stars, my darling," he said, "the angels must have carried the poor little soul that way." He was not ashamed to let fall a tear for the little dead child. But Lucy could neither weep nor think of the angels. She hurried him on through the long avenue, clinging to his arm but not leaning upon it, hastening home. Now and then a sob escaped her, but no tears. She flew upstairs to her own

boy's nursery, and fell down on her knees by the side of his little crib. He was lying in rosy sleep, his little dimpled arms thrown up over his head, a model of baby beauty. But even that sight did not restore her. She buried her wan face in her hands and so gasped for breath that Sir Tom, who had followed her, took her in his arms and carrying her to her own room laid her down on the sofa by the fire and did all that man could to soothe her.

"Lucy, Lucy! we must thank God that all is well with our own," he said, half terrified by the gasping and the paleness; and then she burst forth:

"Oh, why should it be well with him, and little Willie gone? Why should we be happy and the others miserable? My baby safe and warm in my arms, and poor Ellen's – poor Ellen's – "

This name, and the recollection of the poor young mother, whom she had left in her desolation, made Lucy's tears pour forth like a summer storm. She flung her arms round her husband's neck, and called out to him in an agony of anxiety and excitement:

"Oh, what shall we do to save him? Oh, Tom, pray, pray! Little Willie was well on Saturday – and now – How can we tell what a day may bring forth?" Lucy cried, wildly pushing him away from her, and rising from the sofa.

Then she began to pace about the room as we all do in trouble, clasping her hands in a wild and inarticulate appeal to heaven. Death had never come across her path before save in the case of her father, an old man whose course was run, and his end a thing

necessary and to be looked for. She could not get out of her eyes the vision of that little solemn figure, so motionless, so marble white. The thought would not leave her. To see the calm Lucy pacing up and down in this passion of terror and agony made Sir Tom almost as miserable as herself. He tried to take her into his arms, to draw her back to the sofa.

"My darling, you are over-excited. It has been too much for you," he said.

"Oh, what does it matter about me?" cried Lucy; "think – oh, God! oh, God I – if we should have *that* to bear."

"My dear love – my Lucy, you that have always been so reasonable – the child is quite well; come and see him again and satisfy yourself."

"Little Willie was quite well on Saturday," she cried again. "Oh, I cannot bear it, I cannot bear it! and why should it be poor Ellen and not me?"

When a person of composed mind and quiet disposition is thus carried beyond all the bounds of reason and self-restraint, it is natural that everybody round her should be doubly alarmed. Lucy's maid hung about the door, and the nurse, wrapped in a shawl, stole out of little Tom's room. They thought their mistress had the hysterics, and almost forced their way into the room to help her. It did Sir Tom good to send these busybodies away. But he was more anxious himself than words could say. He drew her arms within his, and walked up and down with her. "You know, my darling, what the Bible says, 'that one shall be taken

and another left; and that the wind bloweth where it listeth,'" he said, with a pardonable mingling of texts. "We must just take care of him, dear, and hope the best."

Here Lucy stopped, and looked him in the face with an air of solemnity that startled him.

"I have been thinking," she said; "God has tried us with happiness first. That is how He always does – and if we abuse *that* then there comes – the other. We have been so happy. Oh, so happy!" Her face, which had been stilled by this profounder wave of feeling, began to quiver again. "I did not think any one could be so happy," she said.

"Well, my darling! and you have been very thankful and good – "

"Oh, no, no, no," she cried. "I have forgotten my trust. I have let the poor suffer, and put aside what was laid upon me – and now, now – " Lucy caught her husband's arm with both her hands, and drew him close to her. "Tom, God has sent his angel to warn us," she said, in a broken voice.

"Lucy, Lucy, this is not like you. Do you think that poor little woman has lost her baby for our sake? Are we of so much more importance than she is, in the sight of God, do you think? Come, come, that is not like you."

Lucy gazed at him for a moment with a sudden opening of her eyes, which were contracted with misery. She was subdued by the words, though she only partially comprehended them.

"Don't you think," he said, "that to deprive another woman of

her child in order to warn you, would be unjust, Lucy? Come and sit down and warm your poor little hands, and take back your reason, and do not accuse God of wrong, for that is not possible. Poor Ellen I don't doubt is composed and submissive, while you, who have so little cause – "

She gave him a wild look. "With her it is over, it is over!" she cried, "but with us – "

Lucy had never been fanciful, but love quickens the imagination and gives it tenfold power; and no poet could have felt with such a breathless and agonised realisation the difference between the accomplished and the possible, the past which nothing can alter, and the pain and sickening terror with which we anticipate what may come. Ellen had entered into the calm of the one. She herself stood facing wildly the unspeakable terror of the other. "Oh, Tom, I could not bear it, I could not bear it!" she cried.

It was almost morning before he had succeeded in soothing her, in making her lie down and compose herself. But by that time nature had begun to take the task in hand, wrapping her in the calm of exhaustion. Sir Tom had the kindest heart, though he had not been without reproach in his life. He sat by her till she had fallen into a deep and quiet sleep, and then he stole into the nursery and cast a glance at little Tom by the dim light of the night lamp. His heart leaped to see the child with its fair locks all tumbled upon the pillow, a dimpled hand laid under a dimpled cheek, ease and comfort and well-being in every lovely curve;

and then there came a momentary spasm across his face, and he murmured "Poor little beggar!" under his breath. He was not panic-stricken like Lucy. He was a man made robust by much experience of the world, and a child more or less was not a thing to affect him as it would a young mother; but the pathos of the contrast touched him with a keen momentary pang. He stole away again quite subdued, and went to bed thankfully, saying an uncustomary prayer in the emotion that possessed him: Good God, to think of it; if that poor little beggar had been little Tom!

Lucy woke to the sound of her boy's little babbling of happiness in the morning, and found him blooming on her bed, brought there by his father, that she might see him and how well he was, even before she was awake. It was thus not till the first minute of delight was over that her recollections came back to her and she remembered the anguish of the previous night; and then with a softened pang, as was natural, and warm flood of thankfulness, which carried away harsher thoughts. But her mind was in a highly susceptible and tender state, open to every impression. And when she knelt down to make her morning supplications, Lucy made a dedication of herself and solemn vow. She said, like the little princess when she first knew that she was to be made queen, "I will be good." She put forth this promise trembling, not with any sense that she was making a bargain with God, as more rigid minds might suppose, but with all the remorseful loving consciousness of a child which feels that it has not made the return it ought for the good things showered

upon it, and confronts for the first time the awful possibility that these tender privileges might be taken away. There was a trembling all over her, body and soul. She was shaken by the ordeal through which she had come – the ordeal which was not hers but another's: and with the artlessness of the child was mingled that supreme human instinct which struggles to disarm Fate by immediate prostration and submission. She laid herself down at the feet of the Sovereign greatness which could mar all her happiness in a moment, with a feeling that was not much more than half Christian. Lucy tried to remind herself that He to whom she knelt was love as well as power. But nature, which still "trembles like a guilty thing surprised" in that great Presence, made her heart beat once more with passion and sickening terror. God knew, if no one else did, that she had abandoned her father's trust and neglected her duty. "Sell all thou hast and give to the poor." Lucy rose from her knees with anxious haste, feeling as if she must do this, come what might and whoever should oppose; or at least since it was not needful for her to sell all she had, that she must hurry forth, and forestall any further discipline by beginning at once to fulfil the duty she had neglected. She could not yet divest herself of the thought that the baby who was dead was a little warning messenger to recall her to a sense of the punishments that might be hanging over her. A messenger to her of mercy, for what, oh! what would she have done if the blow had fallen upon little Tom?

CHAPTER VIII.
THE SHADOW OF DEATH

After this it may perhaps be surprising to hear that Lucy did nothing to carry out that great trust with which she had been charged. She had felt, and did feel at intervals, for a long time afterwards, as if God Himself had warned her what might come upon her if she neglected her duty. But if you will reflect how very difficult that duty was, and how far she was from any opportunity of being able to discharge it! In early days, when she was fresh from her father's teaching, and deeply impressed with the instant necessity of carrying it out, Providence itself had sent the Russell family, poor and helpless people, who had not the faculty of getting on by themselves, into her way, and Lucy had promptly, or at least as promptly as indignant guardians would permit, provided for them in the modest way which was all her ideas reached to at the time. But around the Hall there was nobody to whom the same summary process could be applied. The people about were either working people, whom it is always easy to help, or well-off people, who had no wants which Lucy could supply. And this continued to be so even after her fright and determination to return to the work that had been allotted to her. No doubt, could she have come down to the hearts and lives of the neighbours who visited Lady Randolph on the externally

equal footing which society pretends to allot to all gentlefolks, she would have found several of them who would have been glad to free her from her money; but then she could not see into their hearts. She did not know what a difficult thing it was for Mr. Routledge of Newby to pay the debts of his son when he had left college, or how hardly hit was young Archer of Fordham in the matter of the last joint-stock bank that stopped payment. If they had not all been so determined to hold up their heads with the best, and keep up appearances, Lucy might have managed somehow to transfer to them a little of the money which she wanted to get rid of, and of which they stood so much in need. But this was not to be thought of; and when she cast her eyes around her it was with a certain despair that Lucy saw no outlet whatever for those bounties which it had seemed to her heaven itself was concerned about, and had warned her not to neglect. Many an anxious thought occupied her mind on this subject. She thought of calling her cousin Philip Rainy, who was established and thriving at Farafield, and whose fortune had been founded upon her liberality, to her counsels. But if Sir Tom had disliked the confidences between her and her brother, what would he think of Philip Rainy as her adviser? Then Lucy in her perplexity turned again to the thought of Jock. Jock had a great deal more sense in him than anybody knew. He had been the wisest child, respected by everybody; and now he was almost a man, and had learned, as he said, a great deal at school. She thought wistfully of the poor curate of whom Jock had told her. Very likely that

poor clergyman would do very well for what Lucy wanted. Surely there could be no better use for money than to endow such a man, with a whole family growing up, all the better for it, and a son on the foundation! And then she remembered that Jock had entreated her to do nothing till he came. Thus the time went on, and her passionate resolution, her sense that heaven itself was calling upon her, menacing her with judgment even, seemed to come to nothing – not out of forgetfulness or sloth, or want of will – but because she saw no way open before her, and could not tell what to do. And after that miserable night when Ellen Bailey's baby died, and death seemed to enter in, as novel and terrible as if he had never been known before, for the first time into Lucy's Paradise, she had never said anything to Sir Tom. Day after day she had meant to do it, to throw herself upon his guidance, to appeal to him to help her; but day after day she had put it off, shrinking from the possible contest of which some instinct warned her. She knew, without knowing how, that in this he would not stand by her. Impossible to have been kinder in that crisis, more tender, more indulgent, even more understanding than her husband was; but she felt instinctively the limits of his sympathy. He would not go that length. When she got to that point he would change. But she could not have him change; she could not anticipate the idea of a cloud upon his face, or any shadow between them. And then Lucy made up her mind that she would wait for Jock, and that he and she together, when there were two to talk it over, would make out a way.

All was going on well again, the grass above little Willie's grave was green, his mother consoled and smiling as before, and at the Hall the idea of the Christmas party had been resumed, and the invitations, indeed, were sent off, when one morning the visitor whom Lucy had anticipated with such dread came out of the village, where infantile diseases always lingered, and entered the carefully-kept nursery. Little Tom awoke crying and fretful, hot with fever, his poor little eyes heavy with acrid tears. His mother had not been among the huts where poor men lie for nought, and she saw at a glance what it was. Well! not anything so very dreadful – measles, which almost all children have. There was no reason in the world why she should be alarmed. She acknowledged as much, with a tremor that went to her heart. There were no bad symptoms. The baby was no more ill than it was necessary he should be. "He was having them beautiful," the nurse said, and Lucy scarcely allowed even her husband to see the deep, harrowing dread that was in her. By and by, however, this dread was justified; she had been very anxious about all the little patients in the village that they should not catch cold, which in the careless ignorance of their attendants, and in the limited accommodation of the cottages, was so usual, so likely, almost inevitable. A door would be left open, a sudden blast of cold would come upon the little sufferer; how could any one help it? Lucy had given the poor women no peace on this subject. She had "worrited them out o' their lives." And now, wonder above all finding out, it was in little Tom's luxurious nursery,

where everything was arranged for his safety, where one careful nurse succeeded another by night and by day, and Lady Randolph herself was never absent for an hour, where the ventilation was anxiously watched and regulated, and no incautious intruder ever entered – it was there that the evil came. When the child had shaken off his little complaint and all was going well, he took cold, and in a few hours more his little lungs were labouring heavily, and the fever of inflammation consuming his strength. Little Tom, the heir, the only child! A cloud fell over the house; from Sir Tom himself to the lowest servant, all became partakers, unawares, of Lucy's dumb terror. It was because the little life was so important, because so much hung upon it, that everybody jumped to the conclusion that the worst issue might be looked for. Humanity has an instinctive, heathenish feeling that God will take advantage of all the special circumstances that aggravate a blow.

Lucy, for her part, received the stroke into her very soul. She was outwardly more calm than when her heart had first been roused to terror by the death of the little child in the village. That which she had dreaded was come, and all her powers were collected to support her. The moment had arrived – the time of trial – and she would not fail. Her hand was steady and her head clear, as is the case with finer natures when confronted with deadly danger. This simple girl suddenly became like one of the women of tragedy, fighting, still and strong, with a desperation beyond all symbols – the fight with death. But Sir Tom took it

differently. A woman can nurse her child, can do something for him; but a man is helpless. At first he got rid of his anxieties by putting a cheerful face upon the matter, and denying the possibility of danger. "The measles! every child had the measles. If no fuss was made the little chap," he declared, "would soon be all right. It was always a mistake to exaggerate." But when there could no longer be any doubt on the subject, a curious struggle took place in Sir Tom's mind. That baby – die? That crowing, babbling creature pass away into the solemnity of death! It had not seemed possible, and when he tried to get it into his mind his brain whirled. Wonder for the moment seemed to silence even the possibility of grief. He had himself gone through labours and adventures that would have killed a dozen men, and had never been conscious even of alarm about himself; and the idea of a life quenched in its beginning by so accidental a matter as a draught in a nursery seemed to him something incomprehensible. When he had heard of a child's death he had been used to say that the mother would feel it, no doubt, poor thing; but it was a small event, that scarcely counted in human history to Sir Tom. When, however, his own boy was threatened, after the first incredulity, Sir Tom felt a pang of anger and wretchedness which he could not understand. It was not that the family misfortune of the loss of the heir overwhelmed him, for it was very improbable that poor little Tom would be his only child; it was a more intimate and personal sensation. A sort of terrified rage came over him which he dared not express; for if indeed his child was to be taken from him,

who was it but God that would do this? and he did not venture to turn his rage to that quarter. And then a confusion of miserable feelings rose within him. One night he did not go to bed. It was impossible in the midst of the anxiety that filled the house, he said to himself. He spent the weary hours in going softly up and down stairs, now listening at the door of the nursery and waiting for his wife, who came out now and then to bring him a bulletin, now dozing drearily in his library downstairs. When the first gleams of the dawn stole in at the window he went out upon the terrace in the misty chill morning, all damp and miserable, with the trees standing about like ghosts. There was a dripping thaw after a frost, and the air was raw and the prospect dismal; but even that was less wretched than the glimmer of the shaded lights, the muffled whispering and stealthy footsteps indoors. He took a few turns up and down the terrace, trying to reason himself out of this misery. How was it, after all, that the little figure of this infant should overshadow earth and heaven to a man, a reasonable being, whose mind and life were full of interests far more important? Love, yes! but love must have some foundation. The feeling which clung so strongly to a child with no power of returning it, and no personal qualities to excite it, must be mere instinct not much above that of the animals. He would not say this before Lucy, but there could be no doubt it was the truth. He shook himself up mentally, and recalled himself to what he attempted to represent as the true aspect of affairs. He was a man who had obtained most things that this world can give. He

had sounded life to its depths (as he thought), and tasted both the bitter and the sweet; and after having indulged in all these varied experiences it had been given to him, as it is not given to many men, to come back from all wanderings and secure the satisfactions of mature life, wealth, and social importance, and the power of acting in the largest imperial concerns. Round about him everything was his; the noble woods that swept away into the mist on every side; the fields and farms which began to appear in the misty paleness of the morning through the openings in the trees. And if he had not by his side such a companion as he had once dreamed of, the beautiful, high-minded ideal woman of romance, yet he had got one of the best of gentle souls to tread the path of life along with him, and sympathise even when she did not understand. For a man who had not perhaps deserved very much, how unusual was this happiness. And was it possible that all these things should be obscured, cast into the shade, by so small a matter as the sickness of a child? What had the baby ever done to make itself of so much importance? Nothing. It did not even understand the love it excited, and was incapable of making any response. Its very life was little more than a mechanical life. The woman who fed it was far more to it than its father, and there was nothing excellent or noble in the world to which it would not prefer a glittering tinsel or a hideous doll. If the little thing had grown up, indeed, if it had developed human tastes and sympathies, and become a companion, an intelligence, a creature with affections and thoughts, – but that the whole house should

thus be overwhelmed with miserable anxiety and pain because of a being in the embryo state of existence, who could neither respond nor understand, what a strange thing it was! No doubt this instinct had been implanted in order to preserve the germ and keep the race going; but that it should thus develop into an absorbing passion and overshadow everything else in life was a proof how the natural gets exaggerated, and, if we do not take care, changes its character altogether, mastering us instead of being kept in its fit place, and in check, as it ought to be by sense and reason. From time to time, as Sir Tom made these reflections, there would flit across his mind, as across a mirror, something which was not thought, which was like a picture momentarily presented before him. One of the most persistent of these, which flashed out and in upon his senses like a view in a magic lantern, was of that moment in the midst of the flurry of the election when little Tom, held up in his mother's arms, had clapped his baby hands for his father. This for a second would confound all his thoughts, and give his heart a pang as if some one had seized and pressed it with an iron grasp; but the next moment he would pick up the thread of his reflections again, and go on with them. That, too, was merely mechanical, like all the little chap's existence up to this point. Poor little chap! here Sir Tom stopped in his course of thought, impeded by a weight at his heart which he could not shake off; nor could he see the blurred and vague landscape round him – something more blinding even than the fog had got into his eyes.

Then Sir Tom started and his heart sprang up to his throat beating loudly. It was not anything of much importance, it was only the opening of the window by which he himself had come out upon the terrace. He turned round quickly, too anxious even to ask a question. If it had been a king's messenger bringing him news that affected the whole kingdom, he would have turned away with an impatient "Pshaw!" or struck the intruder out of his way. But it was his wife, wrapped in a dressing-gown, pale with watching, her hair pushed back upon her forehead, her eyes unnaturally bright. "How is he?" cried Sir Tom, as if the question was one of life or death.

Lucy told him, catching at his arm to support herself, that she thought there was a little improvement. "I have been thinking so for the last hour, not daring to think it, and yet I felt sure; and now nurse says so too. His breathing is easier. I have been on thorns to come and tell you, but I would not till I was quite sure."

"Thank God! God be praised!" said Sir Tom. He did not pretend to be a religious man on ordinary occasions, but at the present moment he had no time to think, and spoke from the bottom of his heart. He supported his little wife tenderly on one arm, and put back the disordered hair on her forehead. "Now you will go and take a little rest, my darling," he said.

"Not yet, not till the doctor comes. But you want it as much as I."

"No; I had a long sleep on the sofa. We are all making fools of ourselves, Lucy. The poor little chap will be all right. We are

queer creatures. To think that you and I should make ourselves so miserable over a little thing like that, that knows nothing about it, that has no feelings, that does not care a button for you and me."

"Tom, what are you talking of? Not of my boy, surely – not my boy!"

"Hush, my sweet. Well," said Sir Tom, with a tremulous laugh, "what is it but a little polypus after all? that can do nothing but eat and sleep, and crow perhaps – and clap its little fat hands," he said, with the tears somehow getting into his voice, and mingling with the laughter. "I allow that I am confusing my metaphors."

At this moment the window opening upon the terrace jarred again, and another figure in a dressing-gown, dark and ghost-like, appeared beckoning to Lucy, "My lady! my lady!"

Lucy let go her husband's arm, thrust him away from her with passion, gave him one wild look of reproach, and flew noiselessly like a spirit after the nurse to her child. Sir Tom, with his laugh still wavering about his mouth, half hysterically, though he was no weakling, tottered along the terrace to the open window, and stood there leaning against it, scarcely breathing, the light gone out of his eyes, his whole soul suspended, and every part of his strong body, waiting for what another moment might bring to pass.

CHAPTER IX.
A CHRISTMAS VISIT

Little Tom did not die, but he became "delicate," – and fathers and mothers know what that means. The entire household was possessed by one pervading terror lest he should catch cold, and Lucy's life became absorbed in this constant watchfulness. Naturally the Christmas guests were put off, and it was understood in respect to the Contessa di Forno-Populo, that she was to come at Easter. Sir Tom himself thought this a better arrangement. The Parliamentary recess was not a long one, and the Contessa would naturally prefer, after a short visit to her old friend, to go to town, where she would find so many people she knew.

"And even in the country the weather is more tolerable in April," said Sir Tom.

"Oh, yes, yes. The doctor says if we keep clear of the east winds that he may begin to go out again and get up his strength," said Lucy.

"My love, I am thinking of your visitors, and you are thinking of your baby," Sir Tom said.

"Oh, Tom, what do you suppose I could be thinking of?" his wife cried.

Sir Tom himself was very solicitous about the baby, but to

hear of nothing else worried him. He was glad when old Lady Randolph, who was an invariable visitor, arrived.

"How is the baby?" was her first question when he met her at the train.

"The baby would be a great deal better if there was less fuss made about him," he said. "You must give Lucy a hint on that subject, aunt."

Lady Randolph was a good woman, and it was her conviction that she had made this match. But it is so pleasant to feel that you have been right, that she was half pleased, though very sorry, to think that Sir Tom (as she had always known) was getting a little tired of sweet simplicity. She met Lucy with an affectionate determination to be very plain with her, and warn her of the dangers in her path. Jock had arrived the day before. He rose up in all the lanky length of sixteen from the side of the fire in the little drawing-room when the Dowager came in. It was just the room into which one likes to come after a cold journey at Christmas; the fire shining brightly in the midst of the reflectors of burnished steel and brass, shining like gold and silver, of the most luxurious fireplace that skill could contrive (the day of tiled stoves was not as yet), and sending a delicious glow on the soft mossy carpets into which the foot sank; a table with tea, reflecting the firelight in all the polished surfaces of the china and silver, stood near; and chairs invitingly drawn towards the fire. The only drawback was that there was no one to welcome the visitor. On ordinary occasions Lucy was at the door, if not at the

station, to receive the kind lady whom she loved. Lady Randolph was somewhat surprised at the difference, and when she saw the lengthy boy raising himself up from the fireside, turned round to her nephew and asked, "Do I know this young gentleman? There is not light enough to see him," with a voice in which Jock, shy and awkward, felt all the old objection to his presence as a burden upon Lucy, which in his precocious toleration he had accepted as reasonable, but did not like much the better for that. And then she sat down somewhat sullenly at the fire. The next minute Lucy came hastily in with many apologies: "I did not hear the carriage, aunt. I was in the nursery – "

"And how is the child?" Lady Randolph said.

"Oh, he is a great deal better – don't you think he is much better, Tom? Only a little delicate, and that, we hope, will pass away."

"Then, Lucy, my dear, though I don't want to blame you, I think you should have heard the carriage," said Aunt Randolph. "The tea-table does not look cheerful when the mistress of the house is away."

"Oh, but little Tom – " Lucy said, and then stopped herself, with a vague sense that there was not so much sympathy around her as usual. Her husband had gone out again, and Jock stood dumb, an awkward shadow against the mantelpiece.

"My dear, I only speak for your good," the elder lady said. "Big Tom wants a little attention too. I thought you were going to have quite a merry Christmas and a great many people here."

"But, Aunt Randolph, baby – "

"Oh, my dear, you must think of something else besides baby. Take my word for it, baby would be a great deal stronger if you left him a little to himself. You have your husband, you know, to think of, and what harm would it have done baby if there had been a little cheerful company for his father? But you will think I have come to scold, and I don't in the least mean that. Give me a cup of tea, Lucy. Tom tells me that this tall person is Jock."

"You would not have known him?" said Lucy, much subdued in tone.

She occupied herself with the tea, arranging the cups and saucers with hands that trembled a little at the unexpected and unaccustomed sensation of a repulse.

"Well, I cannot even see him. But he has certainly grown out of knowledge – I never thought he would have been so tall; he was quite a little pinched creature as a child. I daresay you took too much care of him, my dear. I remember I used to think so; and then when he was tossed into the world or sent to school – it comes to much the same thing, I suppose – he flourished and grew."

"I wonder," said Lucy, somewhat wistfully, "if that is really so? Certainly it is since he has been at school that he has grown so much." Jock all this time fidgeted about from one leg to another with unutterable darkness upon his brow, could any one have seen it. There are few things so irritating, especially at his age, as to be thus discussed over one's own head.

"My dear Lucy," said Lady Randolph, "don't you remember some one says – who was it, I wonder? it sounds like one of those dreadfully clever French sayings that are always so much to the point – about the advantages of a little wholesome neglect?"

"Can neglect ever be wholesome? Oh, I don't think so – I can't think so – at least with children."

"It is precisely children that are meant," said the elder Lady Randolph. But as she talked, sitting in the warm light of the fire, with her cup in her hand, feeling extremely comfortable, discoursing at her ease, and putting sharp arrows as if they had been pins into the heart of Lucy, Sir Tom's large footsteps became audible coming through the great drawing-room, which was dark. The very sound of him was cheerful as he came in, and he brought the scent of fresh night air, cold but delightful, with him. He passed by Lucy's chair and said, "How is the little 'un?" laying a kind hand upon her head.

"Oh, better. I am sure he is better. Aunt Randolph thinks – "

"I am giving Lucy a lecture," said Lady Randolph, "and telling her she must not shut herself up with that child. He'll get on all the better if he is not coddled too much."

Sir Tom made no reply, but came to the fire, and drew a chair into the cheerful glow. "You are all in the dark," he said, "but the fire is pleasant this cold night. Well, now that you are thawed, what news have you brought us out of the world? We are two hermits, Lucy and I. We forget what kind of language you speak. We have a little sort of talk of our own which answers common

needs about babies and so forth, but we should like to hear what you are discoursing about, just for a change."

"There is no such thing as a world just now," said Lady Randolph, "there are nothing but country-houses. Society is all broken up into little bits, as you know as well as I do. One gleans a little here and a little there, and one carries it about like a basket of eggs."

"Jock has a world, and it is quite entire," said Sir Tom, with his cordial laugh. "No breaking up into little bits there. If you want a society that knows its own opinions, and will stick to them through thick and thin, I can tell you where to find it; and to see how it holds together and sits square whatever happens – "

Here there came a sort of falsetto growl from Jock's corner, where he was blushing in the firelight. "It's because you were once a fellow yourself, and know all about it."

"So it is, Jock; you are right, as usual," said Sir Tom; "I was once a fellow myself, and now I'm an old fellow, and growing duller. Turn out your basket of eggs, Aunt Randolph, and let us know what is going on. Where did you come from last – the Mulberrys? Come; there must have been some pretty pickings of gossip there."

"You shall have it all in good time. I am not going to run myself dry the first hour. I want to know about yourselves, and when you are going to give up this honeymooning. I expected to have met all sorts of people here."

"Yes," said Sir Tom, and then he burst forth in a laugh, "La

Forno-Populo and a few others; but as little Tom is not quite up to visitors, we have put them off till Easter."

"La Forno-Populo!" said Lady Randolph, in a voice of dismay.

"Why not?" said Sir Tom. "She wrote and offered herself. I thought she might find it a doubtful pleasure, but if she likes it – However, you may make yourself easy, nobody is coming," he added, with a certain jar of impatience in his tone.

"Well, Tom, I must say I am very glad of that," Lady Randolph said gravely – and then there was a pause. "I doubt whether Lucy would have liked her," she added, after a moment. Then with another interval, "I think, Lucy, my love, after that nice cup of tea, and my first sight of you, that I will go to my own room. I like a little rest before dinner – you know my lazy way."

"And it's getting ridiculously dark in this room," Sir Tom said, kicking a footstool out of the way. This little impatient movement was like one of those expletives that seem to relieve a man's mind, and both the ladies understood it as such, and knew that he was angry. Lucy, as she rose from her tea-table to attend upon her visitor, herself in a confused and painful mood, and vexed with what had been said to her, thought her husband was irritated by his aunt, and felt much sympathy with him, and anxiety to conduct Lady Randolph to her room before it should go any farther. But the elder lady understood it very differently. She went away, followed by Lucy through the great drawing-room, where a solitary lamp had been placed on a table to show the way. It had been the Dowager's own house in her day, and she did not

require any guidance to her room. Nor did she detain Lucy after the conventional visit to see that all was comfortable.

"That I haven't the least doubt of," Lady Randolph said, "and I am at home, you know, and will ask for anything I want; but I must have my nap before dinner; and do you go and talk to your husband."

Lucy could not resist one glance into the nursery, where little Tom, a little languid but so much better, was sitting on his nurse's knee before the fire, amused by those little fables about his fingers and toes which are the earliest of all dramatic performances. The sight of him thus content, and the sound of his laugh, was sweet to her in her anxiety. She ran downstairs again without disturbing him, closing so carefully the double doors that shut him out from all draughts, not without a wondering doubt as she did so, whether it was true, perhaps, that she was "coddling" him, and if there was such a thing as wholesome neglect. She went quickly through the dim drawing-room to the warm ruddy flush of firelight that shone between the curtains from the smaller room, thinking nothing less than to find her husband, who was fond of an hour's repose in that kindly light before dinner. She had got to her old place in front of the fire before she perceived that Sir Tom's tall shadow was no longer there. Lucy uttered a little exclamation of disappointment, and then she perceived remorsefully another shadow, not like Sir Tom's, the long weedy boyish figure of her brother against the warm light.

"But you are here, Jock," she said, advancing to him. Jock

took hold of her arm, as he was so fond of doing.

"I shall never have you, now *she* has come," Jock said.

"Why not, dear? You were never fond of Lady Randolph – you don't know how good and kind she is. It is only when you like people that you know how nice they are," Lucy said, all unconscious that a deeper voice than hers had announced that truth.

"Then I shall never know, for I don't like her," said Jock uncompromising. "You'll have to sit and gossip with her when you're not in the nursery, and I shall have no time to tell you, for the holidays last only a month."

"But you can tell me everything in a month, you silly boy; and if we can't have our walks, Jock (for it's cold), there is one place where she will never come," said Lucy, upon which Jock turned away with an exclamation of impatience.

His sister put her hand on his shoulder and looked reproachfully in his face.

"You too! You used to like it. You used to come and toss him up and make him laugh – "

"Oh, don't, Lucy! can't you see? So I would again, if he were like that. How you can bear it!" said the boy, bursting away from her. And then Jock returned very much ashamed and horror-stricken, and took the hand that dropped by her side, and clumsily patted and kissed it, and held it between his own, looking penitently, wistfully, in her face all the while: but not knowing what to say.

Lucy stood looking down into the glowing fire, with her head drooping and an air of utter dejection in her little gentle figure. "Do you think he looks so bad as that?" she said, in a broken voice.

"Oh, no, no; that is not what I mean," the boy cried. "It's – the little chap is not so jolly; he's – a little cross; or else he's forgotten me. I suppose it's that. He wouldn't look at me when I ran up. He's so little one oughtn't to mind, but it made me – your baby, Lucy! and the little beggar cried and wouldn't look at me."

"Is that all?" said Lucy. She only half believed him, but she pretended to be deceived. She gave a little trembling laugh, and laid her head for a moment upon Jock's boyish breast, where his heart was beating high with a passion of sorrow and tender love. "Sometimes," she said, leaning against him, "sometimes I think I shall die. I can't live to see anything happen to him: and sometimes – But he is ever so much better; don't you think he looks almost himself?" she said, raising her head hurriedly, and interrogating the scarcely visible face with her eyes.

"Looks! I don't see much difference in his looks, if he wouldn't be so cross," said Jock, lying boldly, but with a tremor, for he was not used to it. And then he said hurriedly, "But there's that clergyman, the father of the fellow on the foundation. I've found out all about him. I must tell you, Lucy. He is the very man. There is no call to think about it or put off any longer. What a thing it would be if he could have it by Christmas! I have got all the particulars – they look as if they were just made for us,"

Jock cried.

CHAPTER X.
LUCY'S ADVISERS

Lady Randolph found her visit dull. It is true that there had been no guests to speak of on previous Christmases since Sir Tom's marriage; but the house had been more cheerful, and Lucy had been ready to drive, or walk, or call, or go out to the festivities around. But now she was absorbed by the nursing, and never liked to be an hour out of call. The Dowager put up with it as long as she was able. She did not say anything more on the subject for some days. It was not, indeed, until she had been a week at the Hall that, being disturbed by the appeals of Lucy as to whether she did not think baby was looking better than when she came, she burst forth at last. They were sitting by themselves in the hour after dinner when ladies have the drawing-room all to themselves. It is supposed by young persons in novels to be a very dreary interval, but to the great majority of women it is a pleasant moment. The two ladies sat before the pleasant fire; Lucy with some fleecy white wool in her lap with which she was knitting something for her child, Lady Randolph with a screen interposed between her and the fire, doing nothing, an operation which she always performed gracefully and comfortably. It could not be said that the gentlemen were lingering over their wine. Jock had retired to the library, where he was working through

all the long-collected literary stores of the Randolph family, with an instinctive sense that his presence in the drawing-room was not desired. Sir Tom had business to do, or else he was tired of the domestic calm. The ladies had been sitting for some time in silence when Lady Randolph suddenly broke forth —

"You know what I said to you the first evening, Lucy? I have not said a word on the subject since – of course I didn't come down here to enjoy your hospitality and then to find fault."

"Oh, Aunt Randolph! don't speak of hospitality; it is your own house."

"My dear, it is very pretty of you to say so. I hope I am not the sort of person to take advantage of it. But I feel a sort of responsibility, seeing it was I that brought you together first. Lucy, I must tell you. You are not doing what you ought by Tom. Here he is, a middle-aged man, you know, and one of the first in the county. People look to him for a great many things: he is the member: he is a great landowner: he is (thanks to you) very well off. And here is Christmas, and not a visitor in the house but myself. Oh, there's Jock! a schoolboy home for his holidays – that does not count; not a single dinner that I can hear of – "

"Yes, aunt, on the 6th," said Lucy, with humility.

"On the 6th, and it is now the 27th! and no fuss at all made about Christmas. My dear, you needn't tell me it's a bore. I know it is a bore – everywhere wherever one goes; still, everybody does it. It is just a part of one's responsibilities. You don't go to balls in Lent, and you stand on your heads, so to speak, at Christmas.

The country expects it of you; and it is always a mistake to take one's own way in such matters. You should have had, in the first place," said Lady Randolph, counting on her fingers, "your house full; in the second, a ball, to which everybody should have been asked. On these occasions no one that could possibly be imagined to be gentlefolk should be left out. I would even stretch a point – doctors and lawyers, and so forth, go without saying, and those big brewers, you know, I always took in; and some people go as far as the 'vet.,' as they call him. He was a very objectionable person in my day, and that was where I drew the line; then three or four dinners at the least."

"But, Aunt Randolph, how could we when baby is so poorly – "

"What has baby to do with it, Lucy? You don't have the child down to receive your guests. With the door of his nursery shut to keep out the noise (if you think it necessary: I shouldn't think it would matter) what harm would it do him? He would never be a bit the wiser, poor little dear. Yes, I dare say your heart would be with him many a time when you were elsewhere; but you must not think of yourself."

"I did not mean to do so, aunt. I thought little Tom was my first duty."

"Now, I should have thought, my dear," said the Dowager, smiling blandly, "that it would have been big Tom who answered to that description."

"But, Tom – " Lucy paused, not knowing in what shape to put

so obvious a truth, "he is like me," she said. "He is far, far more anxious than he lets you see. It is his – duty too."

"A great many other things are his duty as well; besides, there is so much, especially in a social point of view, which the man never sees till his wife points it out. That's one of the uses of a woman. She must keep up her husband's popularity, don't you see? You must never let it be said: 'Oh, Sir Tom! he is all very well in Parliament, but he does nothing for the county.'"

"I never thought of that," said Lucy, with dismay.

"But you must learn to think of it, my love. Never mind, this is the first Christmas since the election. But one dinner, and nothing else done, not so much as a magic lantern in the village! I do assure you, my dearest girl, you are very much to blame."

"I am very sorry," said Lucy, with a startled look, "but, dear aunt, little Tom – "

"My dear Lucy! I am sure you don't wish everybody to get sick of that poor child's very name."

Lucy sprang up from her chair at this outrage; she could not bear any more. A flush of almost fury came upon her face. She went up to the mantelpiece, which was a very fine one of carved wood, and leant her head upon it. She did not trust herself to reply.

"Now, I know what you are thinking," said Lady Randolph blandly. "You are saying to yourself, that horrid old woman, who never had a child, how can she know? – and I don't suppose I do," said the clever Dowager pathetically. "All that sweetness has

been denied to me. I have never had a little creature that was all mine. But when I was your age, Lucy, and far older than you, I would have given anything – almost my life – to have had a child."

Lucy melted in a moment, threw herself down upon the hearth-rug upon her knees, and took Lady Randolph's hands in her own and kissed them.

"Oh, dear aunt, dear aunt!" she cried, "to think I should have gone on so about little Tom and never remembered that you – But we are all your children," she said, in the innocence and fervour of her heart.

"Yes, my love." Lady Randolph freed one of her hands and put it up with her handkerchief to her cheek. As a matter of fact she did not regret it now, but felt that a woman when she is growing old is really much more able to look after her own comforts when she has no children; and yet, when she remembered how she had been bullied on the subject, and all the reproaches that had been addressed to her as if it were her fault, perhaps there was something like a tear. "That is why I venture to say many things to you that I would not otherwise. Tom, indeed, is too old to have been my son; but I have felt, Lucy, as if I had a daughter in you." Then shaking off this little bit of sentiment with a laugh, the Dowager raised Lucy and kissed her and put her into a chair by her own side.

"Since we are about it," she said, "there is one other thing I should like to talk to you about. Of course your husband knows a

great deal more of the world than you do, Lucy; but it is perhaps better that he should not decide altogether who is to be asked. Men have such strange notions. If people are amusing it is all they think of. Well, now, there is that Contessa di Forno-Populo. I would not have her, Lucy, if I were you."

"But it was she who was the special person," said Lucy, in amaze. "The others were to come to meet her. She is an old friend."

"Oh, I know all about the old friendship," said Lady Randolph. "I think Tom should be ashamed of himself. He knows that in other houses where the mistress knows more about the world. Yes, yes, she is an old friend. All the more reason, my dear, why you should have as little to say to her as possible; they are never to be reckoned upon. Didn't you hear what he called her. *La* Forno-Populo? Englishmen never talk of a lady like that if they have any great respect for her; but it can't be denied that this lady has a great deal of charm. And I would just keep her at arm's length, Lucy, if I were you."

"Dear Aunt Randolph, why should I do that?" said Lucy, gravely. "If she is Tom's friend, she must always be welcome here. I do not know her, therefore I can only welcome her for my husband's sake; but that is reason enough. You must not ask me to do anything that is against Tom."

"Against Tom! I think you are a little goose, Lucy, though you are so sensible. Is it not all for his sake that I am talking? I want you to see more of the world, not to shut yourself up here in the

nursery entirely on his account. If you don't understand that, then words have no meaning."

"I do understand it, aunt," said Lucy meekly. "Don't be angry; but why should I be disagreeable to Tom's friend? The only thing I am afraid of is, should she not speak English. My French is so bad – "

"Oh, your French will do very well; and you will take your own way, my dear," said the elder lady, getting up. "You all do, you young people. The opinion of others never does any good; and as Tom does not seem to be coming, I think I shall take my way to bed. Good-night, Lucy. Remember what I said, at all events, about the magic lantern. And if you are wise you will have as little to do as possible with La Forno-Populo as you can – and there you have my two pieces of advice."

Lucy was disturbed a little by her elder's counsel, both in respect to the foreign lady, whom, however, she simply supposed Lady Randolph did not like – and in regard to her own nursery tastes and avoidance of society; – could that be why Tom sat so much longer in the dining-room and did not come in to talk to his aunt? She began to think with a little ache in her heart, and to remember that in her great preoccupation with the child he had been left to spend many evenings alone, and that he no longer complained of this. She stood up in front of the fire and pressed her hot forehead to the mantel-shelf. How was a woman to know what to do? Was not he that was most helpless and had most need of her the one to devote her time to? There was not a

thought in her that was disloyal to Sir Tom. But what if he were to form the habit of doing without her society? This was an idea that filled her with a vague dread. Some one came in through the great drawing-room as she stood thinking, and she turned round eagerly, supposing that it was her husband; but it was only Jock, who had been on the watch to hear Lady Randolph go upstairs.

"I never see you at all now, Lucy," cried Jock. "I never have a chance but in the holidays, and now they're half over, and we have not had one good talk. And what about poor Mr. Churchill, Lucy? I thought he was the very man for you. He has got about a dozen children and no money. Somebody else pays for Churchill, that's the fellow I told you of that's on the foundation. I shouldn't have found out all that, and gone and asked questions and got myself thought an inquisitive beggar, if it hadn't been for your sake."

"Oh, Jock, I'm sure I am much obliged to you," said Lucy, dolefully; "and I am so sorry for the poor gentleman. It must be dreadful to have so many children and not to be able to give them everything they require."

At this speech, which was uttered with something between impatience and despair, and which made no promise of any help or succour, her brother regarded her with a mixture of anger and disappointment.

"Is that all about it, Lucy?" he said.

"Oh, no, Jock! I am sure you are right, dear. I know I ought to bestir myself and do something, but only – How much do you

think it would take to make them comfortable? Oh, Jock, I wish that papa had put it all into somebody's hands, to be done like business – somebody that had nothing else to think of!"

"What have you to think of, Lucy?" said the boy, seriously, in the superiority of his youth. "I suppose, you know, you are just too well off. You can't understand what it is to be like that. You get angry at people for not being happy, you don't want to be disturbed." He paused remorsefully, and cast a glance at her, melting in spite of himself, for Lucy did not look too well off. Her soft brow was contracted a little; there was a faint quiver upon her lip. "If you really want to know," Jock said, "people can live and get along when they have about five hundred a year. That is, as far as I can make out. If you gave them that, they would think it awful luck."

"I wish I could give them all of it, and be done with it!"

"I don't see much good that would do. It would be two rich people in place of one, and the two would not be so grand as you. That would not have done for father at all. He liked you to be a great heiress, and everybody to wonder at you, and then to give your money away like a queen. I like it too," said Jock, throwing up his head; "it satisfies the imagination: it is a kind of a fairy tale."

Lucy shook her head.

"He never thought how hard it would be upon me. A woman is never so well off as a man. Oh, if it had been you, Jock, and I only just your sister."

"Talking does not bring us any nearer a settlement," said Jock, with some impatience. "When will you do it, Lucy? Have you got to speak to old Rushton, or write to old Chervil, or what? or can't you just draw them a cheque? I suppose about ten thousand or so would be enough. And it is as easy to do it at one time as another. Why not to-morrow, Lucy? and then you would have it off your mind."

This proposal took away Lucy's breath. She thought with a gasp of Sir Tom and the look with which he would regard her – the laugh, the amused incredulity. He would not be unkind, and her right to do it was quite well established and certain. But she shrank within herself when she thought how he would look at her, and her heart jumped into her throat as she realised that perhaps he might not laugh only. How could she stand before him and carry her own war in opposition to his? Her whole being trembled even with the idea of conflict. "Oh, Jock, it is not just so easily managed as that," she said faltering; "there are several things to think of. I will have to let the trustees know, and it must all be calculated."

"There is not much need for calculation," said Jock, "that is just about it. Five per cent is what you get for money. You had better send the cheque for it, Lucy, and then let the old duffers know of it afterwards. One would think you were afraid!"

"Oh, no," said Lucy, with a slight shiver, "I am not afraid." And then she added, with growing hesitation, "I must – speak to – Oh! Is it you, Tom?" She made a sudden start from Jock's

side, who was standing close by her, argumentative and eager, and whose bewildered spectatorship of her guilty surprise and embarrassment she was conscious of through all.

"Yes, it is I," said Sir Tom, putting his hand upon her shoulders; "you must have been up to some mischief, Jock and you, or you would not look so frightened. What is the secret?" he said, with his genial laugh. But when he looked from Jock, astonished but resentful and lowering, to Lucy, all trembling and pale with guilt, even Sir Tom, who was not suspicious, was startled. His little Lucy! What had she been plotting that made her look so scared at his appearance? Or was it something that had been told to her, some secret accusation against himself? This startled Sir Tom also a little, and it was with a sudden gravity, not unmingled with resentment, that he added, "Come! I mean to know what it is."

CHAPTER XI.
AN INNOCENT CONSPIRACY

"It was only something that Jock was saying," said Lucy, "but, Tom, I will tell you another time. I wish you had come in before Lady Randolph went upstairs. I think she was a little disappointed to have only me."

"Did she share Jock's secret?" Sir Tom said with a keen look of inquiry. It is perhaps one advantage in the dim light which fashion delights in, that it is less easy to scrutinise the secrets of a face.

"We are all a little put wrong when you do not come in," said Lucy. The cunning which weakness finds refuge in when it has to defend itself came to her aid. "Jock is shy when you are not here. He thinks he bores Lady Randolph; and so we ladies are left to our own devices."

"Jock must not be so sensitive," Sir Tom said; but he was not satisfied. It occurred to him suddenly (for schoolboys are terrible gossips) that the boy might have heard something which he had been repeating to Lucy. Nothing could have been more unlikely, had he thought of it, than that Jock should carry tales on such a subject. But we do not stop to argue out matters when our own self-regard is in question. He looked at the two with a doubtful and suspicious eye.

"He will get over it as he grows older," said Lucy; but she gave her brother a look which to Sir Tom seemed one of warning, and he was irritated by it; he looked from one to another and he laughed; but not with the genial laugh which was his best known utterance.

"You are prodigiously on your guard," he said. "I suppose you have your reasons for it. Have you been confiding the Masons' secret or something of that awful character to her, Jock?"

"Why shouldn't I tell him?" cried Jock with great impatience. "What is the use of making all those signs? It's nothing of the sort. It's only I've heard of somebody that is poor – somebody she ought to know of – the sort of thing that is meant in father's will."

"Oh!" said Sir Tom. It was the simplest of exclamations, but it meant much. He was partially relieved that it was not gossip, but yet more gravely annoyed than if it had been.

Lucy made haste to interpose.

"I will tell you afterwards," she said. "If I made signs, as Jock said, it was only that I might tell it you, Tom, myself, when there was more time."

"I am at no loss for time," said Sir Tom, placing himself in the vacant chair. The others were both standing, as became this accidental moment before bed-time. And Lucy had been on thorns to get away, even before her husband appeared. She had wanted to escape from the discussion even with Jock. She had wanted to steal into the nursery, and see that her boy was asleep, to feel his little forehead with her soft hand, and make

sure there was no fever. To be betrayed into a prolonged and agitating discussion now was very provoking, very undesirable; and Lucy had grown rather cowardly and anxious to push away from her, as far as she could, everything that did not belong to the moment.

"Tom," she said, a little tremulously, "I wish you would put it off till to-morrow. I am – rather sleepy; it is nearly eleven o'clock, and I always run in to see how little Tom is going on. Besides," she added, with a little anxiety which was quite fictitious, "it is keeping Fletcher up – "

"I am not afraid of Fletcher, Lucy."

"Oh! but I am," she said. "I will tell you about it to-morrow. There is nothing in the least settled, only Jock thought – "

"Settled!" Sir Tom said, with a curious look. "No, I hope not."

"Oh! nothing at all settled," said Lucy. She stood restlessly, now on one foot now on the other, eager for flight. She did not even observe the implied authority in this remark, at which Jock pricked up his ears with incipient offence. "And Jock ought to be in bed – oh, yes, Jock, you ought. I am sure you are not allowed to sit up so late at school. Come now, there's a good boy – and I will just run and see how baby is."

She put her hand on her brother's arm to take him away with her, but Jock hung back, and Sir Tom interposed, "Now that I have just settled myself for a chat, you had better leave Jock with me at least, Lucy. Run away to your baby, that is all right. Jock and I will entertain each other. I respect his youth, you see, and

don't try to seduce him into a cigar – you should be thankful to me for that."

"If I was not in sixth form," said Jock sharply, nettled by this indignity, "I should smoke; but it is bad form when you are high up in school. In the holidays I don't mind," he added, with careless grandeur, upon which Sir Tom, mollified, laughed as Lucy felt like himself.

"Off duty, eh?" he said, "that's a very fine sentiment, Jock. You may be sure it's bad form to do anything you have promised not to do. You will say that sounds like a copy-book. Come now, Lucy, are not you going, little woman? Do you want to have your share in the moralities?"

For this sudden change had somehow quenched Lucy's desire both to inspect the baby and get to bed. But what could she do? She looked very earnestly at Jock as she bade him good-night, but neither could she shake his respect for her husband by giving him any warning, nor offend her husband by any appearance of secret intelligence with Jock. Poor little Lucy went away after this through the stately rooms and up the grand staircase with a great tremor in her heart. There could not be a life more guarded and happy than hers had been – full of wealth, full of love, not a crumpled rose-leaf to disturb her comfort. But as she stole along the dim corridor to the nursery her heart was beating full of all the terrors that make other hearts to ache. She was afraid for the child's life, which was the worst of all, and looked with a suppressed yet terrible panic into the dark future which

contained she knew not what for him. And she was afraid of her husband, the kindest man in the world, not knowing how he might take the discovery he had just made, fearing to disclose her mind to him, finding herself guilty in the mere idea of hiding anything from him. And she was afraid of Jock, that he would irritate Sir Tom, or be irritated by him, or that some wretched breach or quarrel might arise between these two. Jock was not an ordinary boy; there was no telling how he might take any reproof that might be addressed to him – perhaps with the utmost reasonableness, perhaps with a rapid defiance. Lady Randolph thus, though no harm had befallen her, had come into the usual heritage of humanity, and was as anxious and troubled as most of us are; though she was so happy and well off. She was on thorns to know what was passing in the room she had just left.

This was all that passed. Jock, standing up against the mantelpiece, looked down somewhat lowering upon Sir Tom in the easy chair. He expected to be questioned, and had made up his mind, though with great indignation at the idea that any one should find fault with Lucy, to take the whole blame upon himself. That Lucy should not be free to carry out her duty as seemed to her best was to Jock intolerable. He had put his boyish faith in her all his life. Even since the time, a very early one, when Jock had felt himself much cleverer than Lucy; even when he had been obliged to make up his mind that Lucy was not clever at all – he had still believed in her. She had a mission in the world which separated her from other women. Nobody else had ever

had the same thing to do. Many people had dispensed charities and founded hospitals, but Lucy's office in the world was of a different description – and Jock had faith in her power to do it. To see her wavering was trouble to him, and the discovery he had just made of something beneath the surface, a latent opposition in her husband which she plainly shrank from encountering, gave the boy a shock from which it was not easy to recover. He had always liked Sir Tom; but if – One thing, however, was apparent, if there was any blame, anything to find fault with, it was he, Jock, and not Lucy, that must bear that blame.

"So, Jock, Lucy thinks you should be in bed. When do they put out your lights at school? In my time we were up to all manner of tricks. I remember a certain dark lantern that was my joy; but that was in old Keate's time, you know, who never trusted the fellows. You are under a better rule now."

This took away Jock's breath, who had been prepared for a sterner interrogation. He answered with a sudden blush, but with the rallying of all his forces: "I light them again sometimes. It's hard on a fellow, don't you think, sir, when he's not sleepy and has a lot to do?"

"I never had much experience of that," said Sir Tom. "We were always sleepy, and never did anything in my time. It was for larking, I'm afraid, that we wanted light. And so it is seen on me, Jock. You will be a fellow of your college, whereas I – "

"I don't think so," said Jock generously. "That construe you gave me, don't you remember, last half? MTutor says it is capital.

He says he couldn't have done it so well. Of course, that is his modest way," the boy added, "for everybody knows there isn't such another scholar! but that's what he says."

Sir Tom laughed, and a slight suffusion of colour appeared on his face. He was pleased with this unexpected applause. At five-and-forty, after knocking about the world for years, and "never opening a book," as people say, to have given a good "construe" is a feather in one's cap. "To be second to your tutor is all a man has to hope for," he said, with that mellow laugh which it was so pleasant to hear. "I hope I know my place, Jock. We had no such godlike beings in my time. Old Puck, as we used to call him, was my tutor. He had a red nose, which was the chief feature in his character. He looked upon us all as his natural enemies, and we paid him back with interest. Did I ever tell of that time when we were going to Ascot in a cab, four of us, and he caught sight of the turn-out?"

"I don't think so," said Jock, with a little hesitation. He remembered every detail of this story, which indeed Sir Tom had told him perhaps more than once; for in respect to such legends the best of us repeat ourselves. Many were the thoughts in the boy's mind as he stood against the mantelpiece and looked down upon the man before him, going over with much relish the tale of boyish mischief, the delight of the urchins and the pedagogue's discomfiture. Sir Tom threw himself back in his chair with a peal of joyous laughter.

"Jove! I think I can see him now with the corners of his

mouth all dropped, and his nose like a beacon," he cried. Jock meanwhile looked down upon him very gravely, though he smiled in courtesy. He was a different manner of boy from anything Sir Tom could ever have been, and he wondered, as young creatures will, over the little world of mystery and knowledge which was shut up within the elder man. What things he had done in his life – what places he had seen! He had lived among savages, and fought his way, and seen death and life. Jock, only on the threshold, gazed at him with a curious mixture of awe and wonder and kind contempt. He would himself rather look down upon a fellow (he thought) who did that sort of practical joke now. MTutor would regard such an individual as a natural curiosity. And yet here was this man who had seen so much, and done so much, who ought to have profited by the long results of time, and grown to such superiority and mental elevation – here was he, turning back with delight to the schoolboy's trick. It filled Jock with a great and compassionate wonder. But he was a very civil boy. He was one who could not bear to hurt a fellow-creature's feelings, even those of an old duffer whose recollections were all of the bygone ages. So he did his best to laugh. And Sir Tom enjoyed his own joke so much that he did not know that it was from the lips only that his young companion's laugh came. He got up and patted Jock on the shoulders with the utmost benevolence when this pastime was done.

"They don't indulge in that sort of fooling nowadays," he said. "So much the better – though I don't know that it did us much

harm. Now come along, let us go to bed, according to my lady's orders. We must all, you know, do what Lucy tells us in this house."

Jock obeyed, feeling somewhat "shut up," as he called it, in a sort of blank of confused discomfiture. Sir Tom had the best of it, by whatever means he attained that end. The boy had intended to offer himself a sacrifice, to brave anything that an angry man could say to him for Lucy's sake, and at the same time to die if necessary for Lucy's right to carry out her father's will, and accomplish her mission uninterrupted and untrammelled. When lo, Sir Tom had taken to telling him schoolboy stories, and sent him to bed with good-humoured kindness, without leaving him the slightest opening either to defend Lucy or take blame upon himself. He was half angry, and humbled in his own esteem, but there was nothing for it but to submit. Sir Tom for his part, did not go to bed. He went and smoked a lonely cigar, and his face lost its genial smile. The light of it, indeed, disappeared altogether under a cloud, as he sat gravely over his fire and puffed the smoke away. He had the air of a man who had a task to do which was not congenial to him. "Poor little soul," he said to himself. He could not bear to vex her. There was nothing in the world that he would have grudged to his wife. Any luxury, any adornment that he could have procured for her he would have jumped at. But it was his fate to be compelled to oppose and subdue her instead. The only thing was to do it quickly and decisively, since done it must be. If she had been a warrior worthy

of his steel, a woman who would have defended herself and held her own, it would have been so much more easy; but it was not without a compunction that Sir Tom thought of the disproportion of their forces, of the soft and compliant creature who had never raised her will against his or done other than accept his suggestions and respond to his guidance. He remembered how Lucy had stuck to her colours before her marriage, and how she had vanquished the unwilling guardians who regarded what they thought the squandering of her money with a consternation and fury that were beyond bounds. He had thought it highly comic at the time, and even now there passed a gleam of humour over his face at the recollection. He could not deny himself a smile when he thought it all over. She had worsted her guardians, and thrown away her money triumphantly, and Sir Tom had regarded the whole as an excellent joke. But the recollection of this did not discourage him now. He had no thought that Lucy would stand out against him. It might vex her, however, dear little woman. No doubt she and Jock had been making up some fine Quixotic plans between them, and probably it would be a shock to her when her husband interfered. He had got to be so fond of his little wife, and his heart was so kind, that he could not bear the idea of vexing Lucy. But still it would have to be done. He rose up at last, and threw away the end of his cigar with a look of vexation and trouble. It was necessary, but it was a nuisance, however. "If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly," he said to himself; then laughed again, as he took

his way upstairs, at the over-significance of the words. He was not going to murder anybody; only when the moment proved favourable, for once and only once, seeing it was inevitable, he had to bring under lawful authority – an easy task – the gentle little feminine creature who was his wife.

CHAPTER XII.
THE FIRST STRUGGLE

Lucy knew nothing of this till the next forenoon after breakfast, and after the many morning occupations which a lady has in her own house. She looked wistfully at both her brother and her husband when they met at table, and it was a great consolation to her, and lightening of her heart, when she perceived that they were quite at ease with each other; but still she was burning with curiosity to know what had passed. Sir Tom had not said a word. He had been just as usual, not even looking a consciousness of the unexplained question between them. She was glad and yet half sorry that all was about to blow over, and to be as if it had not been. After going so far, perhaps it would have been better that it had gone farther and that the matter had been settled. This she said to herself in the security of a respite, believing that it had passed away from Sir Tom's mind. She wanted to know, and yet she was afraid to ask, for her heart revolted against asking questions of Jock which might betray to him the fear of a possible quarrel. After she had superintended little Tom's toilet, and watched him go out for his walk (for the weather was very mild for the time of the year), and seen Mrs. Freshwater, the housekeeper, and settled about the dinner, always with a little quiver of anxiety in her heart, she met Jock by a

happy chance, just as she was about to join Lady Randolph in the drawing-room. She seized his arm with energy, and drew him within the door of the library; but after she had done this with an eagerness not to be disguised, Lucy suddenly remembered all that it was inexpedient for her to betray to Jock. Accordingly she stopped short, as it were, on the threshold, and instead of saying as she had intended, "What did he say to you?" dropped down into the routine question, "Where are you going – were you going out?"

"I shall some time, I suppose. What do you grip a fellow's arm for like that? and then when I thought you had something important to say to me, only asking am I going out?"

"Yes, clear," said Lucy, recovering herself with an effort. "You don't take enough exercise. I wish you would not be always among the books."

"Stuff, Lucy!" said Jock.

"I am sure Tom thinks the same. He was telling me – now didn't he say something to you about it last night?"

"That's all bosh," said the boy. "And if you want to know what he said to me last night, he just said nothing at all, but told me old stories of school that I've heard a hundred times. These old d – fellows," (Jock did not swear; he was going to say duffers, that was all) "always talk like that. One would think they had not had much fun in their life when they are always turning back upon school," Jock added, with fine sarcasm.

"Oh, only stories about school!" said Lucy with extreme relief.

But the next moment she was not quite so sure that she was comfortable about this entire ignoring of a matter which Sir Tom had seemed to think so grave. "What sort of stories?" she said dreamily, pursuing her own thoughts without much attention to the answer.

"Oh, that old stuff about Ascot and about the old master that stopped them. It isn't much. I know it," said Jock, disrespectfully, "as well as I know my a, b, c."

"It is very rude of you to say so, Jock."

"Perhaps it is rude," the boy replied, with candour; but he did not further explain himself, and Lucy, to veil her mingled relief and disquietude, dismissed him with an exhortation to go out.

"You read and read," she cried, glad to throw off a little excitement in this manner, though she really felt very little anxiety on the subject, "till you will be all brains and nothing else. I wish you would use your legs a little too." And then, with a little affectionate push away from her, she left him in undisturbed possession of his books, and the morning, which, fine as it was, was not bright enough to tempt him away from them.

Then Lucy pursued her way to the drawing-room: but she had not gone many steps before she met her husband, who stopped and asked her a question or two. Had the boy gone out? It was so fine it would do him good, poor little beggar; and where was her ladyship going? When he heard she was going to join the Dowager, Sir Tom smilingly took her hand and drew it within his own. "Then come here with me for a minute first," he said. And

strange to say, Lucy had no fear. She allowed him to have his way, thinking it was to show her something, perhaps to ask her advice on some small matter. He took her into a little room he had, full of trophies of his travels, a place more distinctively his own than any other in the house. When he had closed the door a faint little thrill of alarm came over her. She looked up at him wondering, inquiring. Sir Tom took her by her arms and drew her towards him in the full light of the window. "Come and let me look at you, Lucy," he said. "I want to see in your eyes what it is that makes you afraid of me."

She met his eyes with great bravery and self-command, but nothing could save her from the nervous quiver which he felt as he held her, or from the tell-tale ebb and flow of the blood from her face. "I – I am not afraid of you, Tom."

"Then have you ceased to trust me, Lucy? How is it that you discuss the most important matters with Jock, who is only a boy, and leave me out? You do not think that can be agreeable to me."

"Tom," she said; then stopped short, her voice being interrupted by the fluttering of her heart.

"I told you: you are afraid. What have I ever done to make my wife afraid of me?" he said.

"Oh, Tom, it is not that! it is only that I felt – there has never been anything said, and you have always done all, and more than all, that I wished; but I have felt that you were opposed to me in one thing. I may be wrong, perhaps," she added, looking up at him suddenly with a catching of her breath.

Sir Tom did not say she was wrong. He was very kind, but very grave. "In that case," he said, "Lucy, my love, don't you think it would have been better to speak to me about it, and ascertain what were my objections, and why I was opposed to you – rather than turn without a word to another instead of me?"

"Oh!" cried Lucy, "I could not. I was a coward. I could not bear to make sure. To stand against you, how could I do it? But if you will hear me out, Tom, I never, never turned to another. Oh! what strange words to say. It was not another. It was Jock, only Jock; but I did not turn even to him. It was he who brought it forward, and I – Now that we have begun to talk about it, and it cannot be escaped," cried Lucy, with sudden nervous boldness, freeing herself from his hold, "I will own everything to you, Tom. Yes, I was afraid. I would not, I could not do it, for I could feel that you were against it. You never said anything; is it necessary that you should speak for me to understand you? but I knew it all through. And to go against you and do something you did not like was more than I could face. I should have gone on for years, perhaps, and never had courage for it," she cried. She was tingling all over with excitement and desperate daring now.

"My darling," said Sir Tom, "it makes me happier to think that it was not me you were afraid of, but only of putting yourself in opposition to me; but still, Lucy, even that is not right, you know. Don't you think that it would be better that we should talk it over, and that I should show you my objections to this strange scheme you have in your head, and convince you – "

"Oh!" cried Lucy, stepping back a little and putting up her hands as if in self-defence, "that was what I was most frightened for."

"What, to be convinced?" he laughed: but his laugh jarred upon her in her excited state. "Well, that is not at all uncommon; but few people avow it so frankly," he said.

She looked up at him with appealing eyes. "Oh, Tom," she cried, "I fear you will not understand me now. I am not afraid to be convinced. I am afraid of what you will think when you know that I cannot be convinced. Now," she said, with a certain calm of despair, "I have said it all."

To her astonishment her husband replied by a sudden hug and a laugh. "Whether you are accessible to reason or not, you are always my dear little woman," he said. "I like best to have it out. Do you know, Lucy, that it is supposed your sex are all of that mind? You believe what you like, and the reason for your faith does not trouble you. You must not suppose that you are singular in that respect."

To this she listened without any response at all either in words or look, except, perhaps, a little lifting of her eyelids in faint surprise; for Lucy was not concerned about what was common to her sex. Nor did she take such questions at all into consideration. Therefore, this speech sounded to her irrelevant; and so quick was Sir Tom's intelligence that, though he made it as a sort of conventional necessity, he saw that it was irrelevant too. It might have been all very well to address a clever woman who

could have given him back his reply in such words. But to Lucy's straightforward, simple, limited intellect such dialectics were altogether out of place. Her very want of capacity to understand them made them a disrespect to her which she had done nothing to deserve. He coloured in his quick sense of this, and sudden perception that his wife in the limitation of her intellect and fine perfection of her moral nature was such an antagonist as a man might well be alarmed to meet, more alarmed even than she generously was to displease him.

"I beg your pardon, Lucy," he said, "I was talking to you as if you were one of the ordinary people. All this must be treated between you and me on a different footing. I have a great deal more experience than you have, and I ought to know better. You must let me show you how it appears to me. You see I don't pretend not to know what the point was. I have felt for a long time that it was one that must be cleared up between you and me. I never thought of Jock coming in," he said with a laugh. "That is quite a new and unlooked-for feature; but begging his pardon, though he is a clever fellow, we will leave Jock out of the question. He can't be supposed to have much knowledge of the world."

"No," said Lucy, with a little suspicion. She did not quite see what this had to do with it, nor what course her husband was going to adopt, nor indeed at all what was to follow.

"Your father's will was a very absurd one," he said.

At this Lucy was slightly startled, but she said after a moment,

"He did not think what hard things he was leaving me to do."

"He did not think at all, it seems to me," said Sir Tom; "so far as I can see he merely amused himself by arranging the world after his fashion, and trying how much confusion he could make. I don't mean to say anything unkind of him. I should like to have known him: he must have been a character. But he has left us a great deal of botheration. This particular thing, you know, that you are driving yourself crazy about is sheer absurdity, Lucy. Solomon himself could not do it, – and who are you, a little girl without any knowledge of the world, to see into people's hearts, and decide whom it is safe to trust?"

"You are putting more upon me than poor papa did, Tom," said Lucy, a little more cheerfully. "He never said, as we do in charities, that it was to go to deserving people. I was never intended to see into their hearts. So long as they required it and got the money, that was all he wanted."

"Well, then, my dear," said Sir Tom, "if your father in his great sense and judgment wanted nothing but to get rid of the money, I wonder he did not tell you to stand upon Beachy Head or Dover Cliff on a certain day in every year and throw so much of it into the sea – to be sure," he added with a laugh, "that would come to very much the same thing – for you can't annihilate money, you can only make it change hands – and the London roughs would soon have found out your days for this wise purpose and interrupted it somehow. But it would have been just as sensible. Poor little woman! Here I am beginning to argue, and abusing

your poor father, whom, of course, you were fond of, and never so much as offering you a chair! There is something on every one of them, I believe. Here, my love, here is a seat for you," he said, displacing a box of curiosities and clearing a corner for her by the fire. But Lucy resisted quietly.

"Wouldn't it do another time, Tom?" she said with a little anxiety, "for Aunt Randolph is all by herself, and she will wonder what has become of me; and baby will be coming back from his walk." Then she made a little pause, and resumed again, folding her hands, and raising her mild eyes to his face. "I am very sorry to go against you, Tom. I think I would rather lose all the money altogether. But there is just one thing, and oh, do not be angry! I must carry out papa's will if I were to die!"

Her husband, who had begun to enter smilingly upon this discussion, with a certainty of having the best of it, and who had listened to her smilingly in her simple pleas for deferring the conversation, pleas which he was very willing to yield to, was so utterly taken by surprise at this sudden and most earnest statement, that he could do nothing but stare at her, with a loud alarmed exclamation, "Lucy!" and a look of utter bewilderment in his face. But she stood this without flinching, not nervous as many a woman might have been after delivering such a blow, but quite still, clasping her hands in each other, facing him with a desperate quietness. Lucy was not insensible to the tremendous nature of the utterance she had just made.

"This is surprising, indeed, Lucy," cried Sir Tom. He grew

quite pale in that sensation of being disobeyed, which is one of the most disagreeable that human nature is subject to. He scarcely knew what to reply to a rebellion so complete and determined. To see her attitude, the look of her soft girlish face (for she looked still younger than her actual years), the firm pose of her little figure, was enough to show that it was no rash utterance, such as many a combatant makes, to withdraw from it one hour after. Sir Tom, in his amazement, felt his very words come back to him; he did not know what to say. "Do you mean to tell me," he said, almost stammering in his consternation, "that whatever I may think or advise, and however mad this proceeding may be, you have made up your mind to carry it out whether I will or not?"

"Tom! in every other thing I will do what you tell me. I have always done what you told me. You know a great deal better than I do, and never more will I go against you; but I knew papa before I knew you. He is dead; I cannot go to him to ask him to let me off, to tell him you don't like it, or to say it is more than I can do. If I could I would do that. But he is dead: all that he can have is just that I should be faithful to him. And it is not only that he put it in his will, but I gave him my promise that I would do it. How could I break my promise to one that is dead, that trusted in me? Oh, no, no! It will kill me if you are angry; but even then, even then, I must do what I promised to papa."

The tears had risen to her eyes as she spoke: they filled her eyelids full, till she saw her husband only through two blinding seas: then they fell slowly one after another upon her dress:

her face was raised to him, her features all moving with the earnestness of her plea. The anguish of the struggle against her heart, and desire to please him, was such that Lucy felt what it was to be faithful till death. As for Sir Tom, it was impossible for such a man to remain unmoved by emotion so great. But it had never occurred to him as possible that Lucy could resist his will, or, indeed, stand for a moment against his injunction; he had believed that he had only to say to her, "You must not do it," and that she would have cried, but given way. He felt himself utterly defeated, silenced, put out of consideration. He did nothing but stare and gasp at her in his consternation; and, more still, he was betrayed. Her gentleness had deceived him and made him a fool; his pride was touched, he who was supposed to have no pride. He stood silent for a time, and then he burst out with a sort of roar of astonished and angry dismay.

"Lucy, do you mean to tell me that you will disobey me?" he cried.

CHAPTER XIII.
AN IDLE MORNING

The Dowager Lady Randolph had never found the Hall so dull. There was nothing going on, nothing even to look forward to: one formal dinner-party was the only thing to represent that large and cordial hospitality which she was glad to think had in her own time characterised the period when the Hall was open. She had never pretended to be fond of the county society. In the late Sir Robert's time she had not concealed the fact that the less time she spent in it the better she was pleased. But when she was there, all the county had known it. She was a woman who loved to live a large and liberal life. It was not so much that she liked gaiety, or what is called pleasure, as that she loved to have people about her, to be the dispenser of enjoyment, to live a life in which there was always something going on. This is a temperament which meets much censure from the world, and is stigmatised as a love of excitement, and by many other unlovely names; but that is hard upon the people who are born with it, and who are in many cases benefactors to mankind. Lady Randolph's desire was that there should always be something doing – "a magic lantern at the least," she had said. Indeed, there can be no doubt that in managing that magic lantern she would have given as much satisfaction to everybody, and perhaps managed

to enjoy herself as much, as if it had been the first entertainment in Mayfair. She could not stagnate comfortably, she said; and as so much of an ordinary woman's life must be stagnation more or less gracefully veiled, it may be supposed that Lady Randolph had learned the useful lesson of putting up with what she could get when what she liked was not procurable. And it was seldom that she had been set down to so languid a feast as the present. On former occasions a great deal more had been going on, except the last year, which was that of the baby's birth, on which occasion Lucy was, of course, out of the way of entertainment altogether. Lady Randolph had, indeed, found her visits to the Hall amusing, which was delightful, seeing they were duty visits as well. She had stayed only a day or two at that time – just long enough to kiss the baby and talk for half an hour at a time, on two or three distinct opportunities, to the young mother in very subdued and caressing tones. And she had been glad to get away again when she had performed this duty, but yet did not grudge in the least the sacrifice she had made for her family. The case, however, was quite different now: there was no reason in the world why they should be quiet. The baby was delicate! – could there be a more absurd reason for closing your house to your friends, putting off your Christmas visits, entertaining not at all, ignoring altogether the natural expectations of the county, which did not elect a man to be its member in order that he might shut himself up and superintend his nursery? It was ridiculous, his aunt felt; it went to her nerves, and made her quite uncomfortable, to see all the

resources of the house, with which she was so well acquainted, wasted upon four people. It was preposterous – an excellent cook, the best cook almost she had ever come across, and only four to dine! People have different ideas of what waste is – there are some who consider all large expenditure, especially in the entertainment of guests, to be subject to this censure. But Lady Randolph took a completely different view. The wickedness of having such a cook and only a family party of four persons to dine was that which offended her. It was scandalous, it was wicked. If Lucy meant to live in this way let her return to her bourgeois existence, and the small vulgar life in Farafield. It was ridiculous living the life of a nobody here, and in Sir Tom's case was plainly suicidal. How was he to hold up his face at another election, with the consciousness that he had done nothing at all for his county, not even given them a ball, nor so much as a magic lantern, she repeated, bursting with a reprobation which could scarcely find words?

All this went through her mind with double force when she found herself left alone in Lucy's morning-room, which was a bright room opening out upon the flower garden, getting all the morning sun, and the full advantage of the flowers when there were any. There were none, it is true, at this moment, except a few snow-drops forcing their way through the smooth turf under a tree which stood at the corner of a little bit of lawn. Lady Randolph was not very fond of flowers, except in their proper place, which meant when employed in the decoration of rooms

in the proper artistic way, and after the most approved fashion. Thus she liked sunflowers when they were approved by society, and modest violets and pansies in other developments of popular taste, but did not for her own individual part care much which she had, so long as they looked well in her vases, and "came well" against her draperies and furniture. She had come down on this bright morning with her work, as it is the proper thing for a lady to do, but she had no more idea of being left here calmly and undisturbed to do that work than she had of attempting a flight into the inviting and brilliant, if cold and frosty, skies. She sat down with it between the fire and the sunny window, enjoying both without being quite within the range of either. It was an ideal picture of a lady no longer young or capable of much out-door life, or personal emotion; a pretty room; a sunny, soft winter morning, almost as warm as summer, the sunshine pouring in, a cheerful fire in the background to make up what was lacking in respect of warmth; the softest of easiest chairs, yet not too low or demoralising; a subdued sound breaking in now and then from a distance, which pleasantly betrayed the existence of a household; and in the midst of all, in a velvet gown, which was very pretty to look at, and very comfortable to wear, and with a lace cap on her head that had the same characteristics, a lady of sixty, in perfect health, rich enough for all her requirements, without even the thought of a dentist to trouble her. She had a piece of very pretty work in her hand, the newspapers on the table, books within reach. And yet she was not content! What

a delightful ideal sketch might not be made of such a moment! How she might have been thinking of her past, sweetly, with a sigh, yet with a thankful thought of all the good things that had been hers; of those whom she had loved, and who were gone from earth, as only awaiting her a little farther on, and of those about her, with such a tender commendation of them to God's blessing, and cordial desire for their happiness, as would have reached the height of a prayer. And she might have been feeling a tranquil pleasure in the material things about her: the stillness, the warmth, the dreamy quiet, even the pretty work, and the exemption from care which she had arrived at in the peaceful concluding chapter of existence. This is what we all like to think of as the condition of mind and circumstances in which age is best met. But we are grieved to say that this was not in the least Lady Randolph's pose. Anything more distasteful to her than this quiet could not be. It was her principle and philosophy to live in the present. She drew many experiences from the past, and a vast knowledge of the constitutions and changes of society; but personally it did not amuse her to think of it, and the future she declined to contemplate. It had disagreeable things in it, of that there could be no doubt; and why go out and meet the disagreeable? It was time enough when it arrived. There was probably illness, and certainly dying, in it; things which she was brave enough to face when they came, and no doubt would encounter in quite a collected and courageous way. But why anticipate them? She lived philosophically in the day as it came.

After all whatever you do or think, you cannot do much more. Your one day, your hour, is your world. Acquit yourself fitly in that, and you will be able to encounter whatever occurs.

This was the conviction on which Lady Randolph acted. But her pursuit for the moment was not entertaining; she very quickly tired of her work. Work is, on the whole, tiresome when there is no particular use in it, when it is done solely for the sake of occupation, as ladies' work so often is. It wants a meaning and a necessity to give it interest, and Lady Randolph's had neither. She worked about ten minutes, and then she paused and wondered what could have become of Lucy. Lucy was not a very amusing companion, but she was somebody; and then Sir Tom would come in occasionally to consult her, to give her some little piece of information, and for a few minutes would talk and give his relative a real pleasure. But even Lucy did not come; and soon Lady Randolph became tired of looking out of the window and then walking to the fire, of taking up the newspaper and throwing it down again, of doing a few stitches, then letting the work fall on her lap; and above all, of thinking, as she was forced to do, from sheer want of occupation. She listened, and nobody came. Two or three times she thought she heard steps approaching, but nobody came. She had thought of perhaps going out since the morning was so fine, walking down to the village, which was quite within her powers, and of planning several calls which might be made in the afternoon to take advantage of the fine day. But she became really fretted and annoyed as the morning crept

along. Lucy was losing even her politeness, the Dowager thought. This is what comes of what people call happiness! They get so absorbed in themselves, there is no possibility of paying ordinary attention to other people. At last, after completely tiring herself out, Lady Randolph got up and put down her work altogether, throwing it away with anger. She had not lived so long in its sole company for years, and there is no describing how tired she was of it. She got up and went out into the other rooms in search of something to amuse her. Little Tom had just come in, but she did not go to the nursery. She took care not to expose herself to that. She was willing to allow that she did not understand babies; and then to see such a pale little thing the heir of the Randolphs worried her. He ought to have been a little Hercules; it wounded her that he was so puny and pale. She went through the great drawing-room, and looked at all the additions to the furniture and decorations that Tom and Lucy had made. They had kept a number of the old things; but naturally they had added a good deal of *bric-à-brac*, of old things that here were new. Then Lady Randolph turned into the library. She had gone up to one of the bookcases, and was leisurely contemplating the books, with a keen eye, too, to the additions which had been made, when she heard a sound near her, the unmistakable sound of turning over the leaves of a book. Lady Randolph turned round with a start, and there was Jock, sunk into the depths of a large chair with a tall folio supported on the arms of it. She had not seen him when she came in, and, indeed, many people might have

come and gone without perceiving him, buried in his corner. Lady Randolph was thankful for anybody to talk to, even a boy.

"Is it you?" she said. "I might have known it could be nobody but you. Do you never do anything but read?"

"Sometimes," said Jock, who had done nothing but watch her since she came into the room. She gave him a sort of half smile.

"It is more reasonable now than when you were a child," she said; "for I hear you are doing extremely well at school, and gaining golden opinions. That is quite as it should be. It is the only way you can repay Lucy for all she has done for you."

"I don't think," said Jock, looking at her over his book, "that Lucy wants to be repaid."

"Probably not," said Lady Randolph. Then she made a pause, and looked from him to the book he held, and then to him again. "Perhaps you don't think," she said, "there is anything to be repaid."

They were old antagonists; when he was a child and Lucy had insisted on carrying him with her wherever she went, Lady Randolph had made no objections, but she had not looked upon Jock with a friendly eye. And afterwards, when he had interposed with his precocious wisdom, and worsted her now and then, she had come to have a holy dread of him. But now things had righted themselves, and Jock had attained an age of which nobody could be afraid. The Dowager thought, as people are so apt to think, that Jock was not grateful enough. He was very fond of Lucy, but he took things as a matter of course, seldom or

never remembering that whereas Lucy was rich, he was poor, and all his luxuries and well-being came from her. She was glad to take an opportunity of reminding him of it, all the more as she was of opinion that Sir Tom did not sufficiently impress this upon the boy, to whom she thought he was unnecessarily kind. "I suppose," she resumed, after a pause, "that you come here always in the holidays, and quite consider it as your home?"

Jock still sat and looked at her across his great folio. He made her no reply. He was not so ready in the small interchanges of talk as he had been at eight, and, besides, it was new to him to have the subject introduced in this way. It is not amusing to plant arrows of this sort in any one's flesh if they show no sign of any wound, and accordingly Lady Randolph grew angry as Jock made no reply. "Is it considered good manners," she said, "at school – when a lady speaks to you that you should make no answer?"

"I was thinking," Jock said. "A fellow, whether he is at school, or not, can't answer all that at once."

"I hope you do not mean to be impertinent. In that case I should be obliged to speak to my nephew," said Lady Randolph. She had not intended to quarrel with Jock. It was only the vacancy of the morning, and her desire for movement of some sort, that had brought her to this; and now she grew angry with Lucy as well as with Jock, having gone so much farther than she had intended to go. She turned from him to the books which she had been languidly examining, and began to take them out one after another, impatiently, as if searching for something. Jock sat and

looked at her for some time, with the same sort of deliberate observation with which he used to regard her when he was a child, seeing (as she had always felt) through and through her. But presently another impulse swayed him. He got himself out behind his book, and suddenly appeared by her side, startling her nerves, which were usually so firm.

"If you will tell me what you want," he said, "I'll get it for you. I know where they all are. If it is French you want, they are up there. I like going up the ladder," he added, half to himself.

Perhaps it was this confession of childishness, perhaps the unlooked-for civility, that touched her. She turned round with a subdued half frightened air, feeling that there was no telling how to take this strange creature, and said, half apologetically, "I think I should like a French – novel. They are not – so – long, you know, as the English," and sat down in the chair he rolled towards her. Jock was at the top of the ladder in a moment. She watched him, making a little comment in her own mind about Tom's motive in placing books of this description in such a place – in order to keep them out of Lucy's way, she said to herself. Jock brought her down half a dozen to choose from, and even the eye of Jock, who doubtless knew nothing about them, made Lady Randolph a little more scrupulous than usual in choosing her book. She was one of those women who like the piquancy and freedom of French fiction. She would say to persons of like tastes that the English proprieties were tame beside the other, and she thought herself old enough to be altogether beyond any

risk of harm. Perhaps this was why she divined Sir Tom's motive in placing them at the top of the shelves; divined and approved, for though she read all that came in her way, she would not have liked Lucy to share that privilege. She said to Jock as he brought them to her,

"They are shorter than the English. I can't carry three volumes about, you know; all these are in one; but I should not advise you to take to this sort of reading, Jock."

"I don't want to," said Jock, briefly; then he added more gravely, "I can't construe French like you. I suppose you just open it and go straight on?"

"I do," said Lady Randolph, with a smile.

She was mollified, for her French was excellent, and she liked a little compliment, of whatever kind.

"You should give your mind to it; it is the most useful of all languages," she said.

"And Lucy is not great at it either," said Jock.

"That is true, and it is a pity," said Lady Randolph, quite restored to good-humour. "I would take her in hand myself, but I have so many things to do. Do you know where she is, for I have not seen her all this morning?"

"No more have I," said Jock. "I think they have just gone off somewhere together. Lucy never minds. She ought to pay a little attention when there are people in the house."

"That is just what I have been thinking," Lady Randolph said. "I am at home, of course, here; it does not matter for me, and

you are her brother – but she really ought; I think I must speak seriously to her."

"To whom are you going to speak seriously? I hope not to me, my dear aunt," said Sir Tom, coming in. He did not look quite his usual self. He was a little pale, and he had an air about him as of some disagreeable surprise. He had the post-bag in his hand – for there was a post twice a day – and opened it as he spoke. Lady Randolph, with her quick perception, saw at once that something had happened, and jumped at the idea of a first quarrel. It was generally the butler Williams who opened the letter-bag; but he was out of the way, and Sir Tom had taken the office on himself. He took out the contents with a little impatience, throwing across to her her share of the correspondence. "Hallo," he said. "Here is a letter for Lucy from your tutor, Jock. What have you been doing, my young man?"

"Oh, I know what it's about," Jock said in a tone of satisfaction. Sir Tom turned round and looked at him with the letter in his hand, as if he would have liked to throw it at his head.

CHAPTER XIV.
AN UNWILLING MARTYR

Lucy came into the morning-room shortly after, a little paler than usual, but with none of the agitation about her which Lady Randolph expected from Sir Tom's aspect to see. Lucy was not one to bear any outward traces of emotion. When she wept her eyes recovered rapidly, and after half an hour were no longer red. She had a quiet respect for other people, and a determination not to betray anything which she could not explain, which had the effect of that "proper pride" which is inculcated upon every woman, and yet was something different. Lucy would have died rather than give Lady Randolph ground to suppose that she had quarrelled with her husband, and as she could not explain the matter to her, it was necessary to efface all signs of perturbation as far as that was possible. The elder lady was reading her letters when Lucy came in, but she raised her eyes at once with the keenest watchfulness. Young Lady Randolph was pale – but at no time had she much colour. She came in quite simply, without any explanation or giving of reasons, and sat down in her usual place near the window, from which the sunshine, as it was now afternoon, was beginning to die away. Then Lucy gave a slight start to see a letter placed for her on the little table beside her work. She had few correspondents at any time, and when Jock

and Lady Randolph were both at the Hall received scarcely any letters. She took it up and looked at its outside with a little surprise.

"I forgot to tell you, Lucy," the Dowager said at this point, "that there was a letter for you. Tom placed it there. He said it was from Jock's tutor, and I hope sincerely, my dear, it does not mean that Jock has got into any scrape – "

"A scrape," said Lucy, "why should he have got into a scrape?" in unbounded surprise; for this was a thing that never had happened throughout Jock's career.

"Oh, boys are so often in trouble," Lady Randolph said, while Lucy opened her letter in some trepidation. But the first words of the letter disturbed her more than any story about Jock was likely to do. It brought the crisis nearer, and made immediate action almost indispensable. It ran as follows: —

> "Dear Lady Randolph – In accordance with Jock's request, which he assured me was also yours, I have made all the inquiries you wished about the Churchill family. It was not very difficult to do, as there is but one voice in respect to them. Mr. Churchill himself is represented to me as a model of all that a clergyman ought to be. Whatever we may think of his functions, that he should have all the virtues supposed to be attached to them is desirable in every point of view; and he is a gentleman of good sense and intelligence besides, which is not always implied even in the character of a saint. It seems that the failure of an inheritance, which he had every reason to expect, was the cause of his first

disadvantage in the world; and since then, in consonance with that curious natural law which seems so contrary to justice, yet constantly consonant with fact, this evil has been cumulative, and he has had nothing but disappointments ever since. He has a very small living now, and is never likely to get a better, for he is getting old, and patrons, I am told, scarcely venture to give a cure to a man of his age lest it should be said they were gratifying their personal likings at the expense of the people. This seems contrary to abstract justice in such a case; but it is a doctrine of our time to which we must all bow.

"The young people, so far as I know, are all promising and good. Young Churchill, whom Jock knows, is a boy for whom I have the greatest regard. He is one whom Goethe would have described as a beautiful soul. His sisters are engaged in educational work, and are, I am told, in their way equally high-minded and interesting; but naturally I know little of the female portion of the family.

"It is extremely kind of you and Sir Thomas to repeat your invitation. I hope, perhaps at Easter, if convenient, to be able to take advantage of it. I hear with the greatest pleasure from Jock how much he enjoys his renewed intercourse with his home circle. It will do him good, for his mind is full of the ideal, and it will be of endless advantage to him to be brought back to the more ordinary and practical interests. There are very few boys of whom it can be said that their intellectual aspirations over-balance their material impulses. As usual he has not only done his work this half entirely to my satisfaction, but has more than repaid any

services I can render him by the precious companionship of a fresh and elevated spirit.

"Believe me, dear Lady Randolph,

"Most faithfully yours,

"Maximus D. Derwentwater."

A long-drawn breath, which sounded like a sigh, burst from Lucy's breast as she closed this letter. She had, with humility and shrinking, yet with a certain resolution, disclosed to her husband that when the occasion occurred she must do her duty according to her father's will, whether it pleased him or not. She had steeled herself to do this; but she had prayed that the occasion might be slow to come. Nobody but Jock knew anything about these Churchills, and Jock was going back to school, and he was young and perhaps he might forget! But here was another who would not forget. She read all the recommendations of the family and their excellences with a sort of despair. Money, it was evident, could not be better bestowed than in this way. There seemed no opening by which she could escape; no way of thrusting this act away from her. She felt a panic seize her. How was she to disobey Tom, how to do a thing of so much importance, contrary to his will, against his advice? The whole world around her, the solid walls, and the sky that shone in through the great window, swam in Lucy's eyes. She drew her breath hard like a hunted creature; there was a singing in her ears, and a dimness in her sight. Lady Randolph's voice asking with a certain satisfaction, yet sympathy, "What is the matter? I hope it is not anything very bad," seemed

to come to her from a distance as from a different world; and when she added, after a moment, soothingly, "You must not vex yourself about it, Lucy, if it is just a piece of folly. Boys are constantly in that way coming to grief: " it was with difficulty that Lucy remembered to what she could refer. Jock! Ah, if it had been but a boyish folly, Sir Tom would have been the first to forgive that; he would have opened his kind heart and taken the offender in, and laughed and persuaded him out of his folly. He would have been like a father to the boy. To feel all that, and how good he was; and yet determinedly to contradict his will and go against him! Oh, how could she do it? and yet what else was there to do?

"It is not about Jock," she answered with a faint voice.

"I beg your pardon, my dear. I was not aware that you knew Jock's tutor well enough for general correspondence. These gentlemen seem to make a great deal of themselves now-a-days, but in my time, Lucy – "

"I do not know him very well, Aunt Randolph. He is only sending me some information. I wish I might ask you a question," she cried suddenly, looking into the Dowager's face with earnest eyes. This lady had perhaps not all the qualities that make a perfect woman, but she had always been very kind to Lucy. She was not unkind to anybody, although there were persons, of whom Jock was one, whom she did not like. And in all circumstances to Lucy, even when there was no immediate prospect that the Randolph family would be any the better for

her, she had always been kind.

"As many as you like, my love," she answered, cordially.

"Yes," said Lucy; "but, dear Aunt Randolph, what I want is that you should let me ask, without asking anything in return. I want to know what you think, but I don't want to explain – "

"It is a strange condition," said Lady Randolph; but then she thought in her superior experience that she was very sure to find out what this simple girl meant without explanations. "But I am not inquisitive," she added, with a smile, "and I am quite willing, dear, to tell you anything I know – "

"It is this," said Lucy, leaning forward in her great earnestness; "do you think a woman is ever justified in doing anything which her husband disapproves?"

"Lucy!" cried Lady Randolph, in great dismay, "when her husband is my Tom, and the thing she wants to do is connected with Jock's tutor – "

Lucy's gaze of astonishment, and her wondering repetition of the words, "connected with Jock's tutor!" brought Lady Randolph to herself. In society, such a suspicion being fostered by all the gossips, comes naturally; but though she was a society-woman, and had not much faith in holy ignorance, she paused here, horrified by her own suggestion, and blushed at herself.

"No, no," she said, "that was not what I meant; but perhaps I could not quite advise, Lucy, where I am so closely concerned."

At which Lucy looked at her somewhat wistfully. "I thought you would perhaps remember," she said, "when you were like

me, Aunt Randolph, and perhaps did not know so well as you know now – "

This touched the elder lady's heart. "Lucy," she said, "my dear, if you were not as innocent as I know you are, you would not ask your husband's nearest relation such a question. But I will answer you as one woman to another, and let Tom take care of himself. I never was one that was very strong upon a husband's rights. I always thought that to obey meant something different from the common meaning of the word. A child must obey; but even a grown-up child's obedience is very different from what is natural and proper in youth; and a full-grown woman, you know, never could be supposed to obey like a child. No wise man, for that matter, would ever ask it or think of it."

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