The UNDESIRABLE GOVERNESS

F. MARION CRAWFORD

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TORONTO

THE UNDESIRABLE GOVERNESS

BY

F. MARION CRAWFORD

AUTHOR OF "SARACINESCA," "THE DIVA'S RUBY," "THE WHITE SISTER," ETC.

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CHAPTER I

"By-the-bye," began Colonel Follitt, looking at his wife across the tea-things, "have you done anything about getting a governess?"

"No," answered Lady Jane, and a short pause followed, for the subject was a sore one. "I have not done anything about getting a governess," she added presently, in the tone suitable to armed neutrality.

"Oh!" ejaculated the Colonel.

Aware that it would be hardly possible to find fault with the monosyllable, he slowly

stirred his tea. He took it sweet, with cream, for in spite of a fairly successful military career and a well-developed taste for sport, he was a mild man. He was also a ladies' man, and preferred feminine society, even in his own home, to that of fellow-sportsmen and former brother officers. Lady Jane had, indeed, no other fault to find with him; but this one sometimes constituted a serious grievance.

"You talk," said Lady Jane presently, "as if the matter was urgent."

"I said 'oh,'" answered her husband mildly.

"Precisely," retorted the lady; "but I know very well what you meant."

"If I meant anything, I meant that those two girls are all over the place and need some one to look after them."

"I really think I'm able to take care

"They rode races bareback in the paddock."

of them myself for a few days," answered Lady Jane stiffly.

"No doubt, no doubt. But, all the same, I caught them potting rooks in the park this morning with my best gun; and Barker tells me that yesterday, when the men were at dinner, they managed to get Schoolboy and Charley's Aunt out of the stables on the sly and rode races bareback in the paddock, till he came back. I don't know why they did not break their necks."

Lady Jane did not seem much moved by this intelligence, for the Follitts were a sporting family, and she had been used to their ways for a quarter of a century.

"I will speak to them," she said, as if that would insure their necks.

At this point their eldest son came in quietly and sat down half-way between his father and mother. Colonel Follitt was

a well-set-up, tough-looking man, who looked younger than his age and dressed just a little younger than he looked. There were a few lines in his face, his well-trimmed moustache was only just beginning to turn grey, and he had the eyes of a boy. His wife was neither fair nor dark, and quite as well-preserved as he, besides having the advantage of being ten years younger. But the eldest son of this good-looking couple seemed prematurely old. He was tall, thin, and dark, and had the general air and cut of a student. He could ride, because all the Follitts rode, and he shot as well as the average man who is asked to fill a place for a couple of days with an average shooting-party; but he much preferred Sanskrit to horses, and the Upanishads to a day on the moors. From sheer love of study he had passed for the Indian Civil

Service after taking his degree; but instead of taking an appointment he had plunged into the dark sea of Sanskrit literature, and was apparently as much at home in that element as a young salmon in his native stream. His father mildly said that the only thing that might have made him seem human would have been a little of the family susceptibility to feminine charm. But though he was heir to a good estate, he had not yet shown the least inclination to marry, and pretty governesses came and went unnoticed by him. Like most students, he was very fond of his home, but he made frequent journeys to London at all times of the year for the purpose of making researches in the British Museum. Even the most careful mother could feel little or no anxiety about such a son, and Lady Jane, for reasons of her own, sometimes

wished that his brothers would take up their quarters in the neighbourhood of the British Museum for six months at a time.

She gave him his tea now, just as he liked it, and a long silence followed. He sat quite still, looking into his cup with the air of pleasant but melancholy satisfaction peculiar to students who have just left their books.

He looked up at last, towards his mother, with a far-away expression.

"By-the-bye," he asked, "when is the new governess coming?"

A vague smile just moved Colonel Follitt's neat moustache, but Lady Jane's fine brow darkened.

"I am considering the question," she answered, as a judge sometimes replies to a barrister's clever insinuation, saying that the Court will "bear the point in mind."

Noting her manner, and well understanding what it meant, Lionel thought it necessary to make some explanation.

"I was thinking of those girls," he said with profound gravity.

"A little holiday will do them good," said Lady Jane.

"So far as that goes," answered Lionel thoughtfully, "a woman's education is complete when she has forgotten her arithmetic and has learned to play the piano well enough to drive people out of the house."

"My dear," retorted Lady Jane, "your sisters are not learning to play the piano."

"Thank goodness! That is spared us. But they are forgetting their arithmetic."

"According to you," replied his mother, "it is a step in the right direction."

"It's all very well, but that's no reason why they should climb to the top of the

King's Oak by the lodge and pepper every horse that passes with buckshot from a catapult."

Again the Colonel's moustache moved; but his son wore none, and not the shadow of a smile disturbed the grave lines of his mouth.

"I will speak to them," said Lady Jane.

"I wonder what you'll say!"

Before Lady Jane had time to explain what she would say, her second son appeared. He was a startling contrast to his elder brother and less than two years younger: he was a sort of red-haired Hermes; his colouring completely spoiled his beauty, which would have been, perhaps, too perfect for a man, if his complexion had not been freckled like a trout's back and if his hair had been of any colour but that of inflamed carrots. As it was, he was just a

very fine specimen of young humanity, and it would never have occurred to any one to call him even handsome. He was a credit to the family, though he had only got a pass degree at Oxford, for he had been Captain of the boats at Eton, and had pulled Four for the 'Varsity in a winning year. It is true that he showed no taste for any profession or career, and seemed to have made up his mind to spend the rest of his life at home, because there was no finer hunting country in Great Britain; but then, there would always be bread-and-butter and horses for him, without seeking those necessities elsewhere, and if Lionel did not marry, he, Jocelyn, would take a wife. In the meantime he seemed quite unconscious of the admiration that was plentifully accorded to him by that large class of young women who prefer a manly man to a beauty-man.

At all events he was absolutely reticent about his own affairs, and neither his mother nor his brothers could be sure that he had ever said a word to a woman which might not be repeated by the town crier. But there was no mistaking the glances that were bestowed upon him, nor the tone of voice in which some of the very nicest girls spoke to him. They could not help it, poor things. Jocelyn sat down on a low stool between his mother and Lionel, with his heels together, his knees apart, his shoulders bent forward, and his eyes fixed hungrily on the buttered toast. He looked like a big, cheerful mastiff, expecting to be fed by a friendly hand.

Lady Jane proceeded to satisfy his very apparent wants.

"I say," he began, as he watched the cream mingling with the tea, "what is the new Miss Kirk's name?"

"The last governess, a lovely creature with violet eyes."

Miss Kirk had been the last governess — a lovely creature with violet eyes and hair that curled at her temples. Lady Jane had found her photograph in the pocket of a shooting-coat belonging to the Colonel which had been brought to her maid to have a button sewn on, and the circumstance had led to the young lady's abrupt departure. More or less similar circumstances, in some of which her two younger sons had been concerned, had produced similar results in a number of cases. That is why the question of the new governess was a sore point at King's Follitt.

"No one has yet answered my advertisement," answered Lady Jane, "and none of our friends seem to know of just the right person."

"How very odd!" observed the Colonel. "We generally get so many more answers than we want."

"What those girls need is a keeper," said Jocelyn, with an audible accompaniment of toast-crunching.

"You might get one from the County Lunatic Asylum," suggested Lionel thoughtfully. "You could get one for about the same price as a good governess, I should think."

"I don't mean that," answered Jocelyn. "I mean a gamekeeper. They've gone in for poaching, and it's time it was stopped."

"Eh? What?" Colonel Follitt did not understand.

"They've been snaring hares all over the park. That's one thing. Then, they are catching all the trout in the stream with worms. If that isn't poaching, what is? Rather low-down form, too. Worms!"

This roused the Colonel. "Really! Upon my word, it's too bad!"

"What becomes of the game and the fish?" inquired the Colonel.

"They give them to the postman, and he brings them chocolates in exchange," answered Jocelyn. "They lie in wait for him behind the hedge on the Malton road."

"Upon my word!" cried the Colonel again. "There's no doubt about it, Jane, you must get a governess at once. By-the-bye, where are they now?"

"Poaching," answered Jocelyn, crunching steadily.

"They are welcome to the hares," said the Colonel; "but catching trout with worms is a little too much! In March, too!"

While he was speaking his youngest son had entered — a lean young athlete who bore a certain resemblance to both his elder brothers, for he had Lionel's quiet, dark

face, together with something of Jocelyn's build and evident energy. "I think so too," he said crossly, as he sat down beside his brother at the corner of the tea-table. "It's high time that governess came."

"What's the matter now?" asked Jocelyn.

Every one looked at Claude, who seemed slightly ruffled, though he was usually the most even-tempered of the family.

"Oh, nothing! At least, I suppose not. They had the new motor out on the moor this afternoon."

"My new motor!" cried Lady Jane, roused at last.

Motoring was her contribution to the list of the family sports.

"Yes," answered Claude, very quietly now. "Ferguson and I were out looking after the young birds. Rather promising this year, I should say."

He vouchsafed no further information, and began to sip his tea, but Lady Jane was trembling with anger.

"Do you mean to say that they were actually out on the moor — off the road? Where was Raddles? You can't mean to say that he let those two ——" Lady Jane was unable to express her feelings.

"Oh, yes. As soon as I got home I went to see about it, for I supposed you wouldn't be pleased. They had locked the poor devil up in the storeroom of the garage, and he couldn't get out. It's really time something was done."

"But didn't you try to stop them?" asked Lady Jane. "Why didn't you get in and bring them home yourself?"

"They bolted as soon as they saw us," answered Claude, "and a pony sixteen years old is no match for a new motor.

When I last saw them they were going round Thorley's at about twenty-five miles an hour."

"How long ago was that?" asked Lady Jane, for to tell the truth her anger was mingled with some anxiety.

"About three o'clock," answered Claude.

Colonel Follitt rose. "We had better go and look for them at once," he said gravely.

But at that moment the subjects of his uneasiness walked in together, pink and white, smoothed and neat, and smiling innocently in a way that would have done credit to a dachshund that had just eaten all the cake on the table when nobody was looking.

They were a pretty pair, about fourteen and fifteen, the one fair, the other dark, with a fresh complexion. In the dead

"In dead silence they stood quietly."

silence they stood quietly beside the tea-table, apparently waiting for their mother to fill their cups.

"Do you mind telling us where you've been?" she inquired, in a tone that boded no good.

The two girls looked at each other and then looked at her. "We've been on the moor," they said together, with a sweet smile.

"So I gathered from what Claude has just told us."

Lady Jane looked from Gwendolen to Evelyn, and then at Gwendolen again. She had always found it hard to face the air of mild innocence they put on after doing something particularly outrageous.

"Oh, well, since Claude has told you all about it, of course you know. I hope you don't mind very much."

"Raddles says the motor's all right, and that it's a very good test, because if it will stand that it will stand anything."

This reassuring statement was vouchsafed by Evelyn, who was the elder sister and the fair one, and, if anything, the calmer of the two. Both had the sweetest possible way of speaking, and seemed quite surprised that their doings should not be thought quite normal.

"It was awfully low-down of you to go and tell, all the same," Gwendolen observed, smiling at Claude.

"I thought it rather natural," he answered, "as it seemed quite probable that you had broken your necks."

"You deserved to, I must say," said Lady Jane tartly, "though I'm glad you didn't. I shall send you both to a boarding-school to-morrow."

But this appalling threat had been used too often to produce anything more than an excess of meek submissiveness. The delinquents at once assumed the air and bearing of young martyrs, took their cups quietly, and sat down side by side on a little sofa.

"I'll tell you what, you two," said the Colonel: "I won't have any one fishing with worms in my trout streams."

"Why? Is it any harm?" asked Evelyn, apparently surprised.

"Harm!" cried Jocelyn. "It's poaching, it's spoiling the fishing outright, and it's against the law in the close season — that's all."

"We didn't know," said Gwendolen.

"And you'd better not ride Schoolboy without my leave," put in Jocelyn.

"Nor take Charley's Aunt out of her box without asking me," added Claude.

"Nor borrow my best gun to pot rooks with," said the Colonel.

"Nor dare to go near any of the motors, and especially not the new Mercèdes," enjoined Lady Jane very severely.

But by-and-by, when she was dressing for dinner, and had reached the stage of having her hair done, she looked through the evening paper, as she usually did during that tedious process, and she found in the column of advertisements the one she had last inserted, and she read it over.

GOVERNESS WANTED, to take charge of two girls of 14 and 15 respectively; family residing in Yorkshire and London. Must have first-rate degree and references. Charm of manner, symmetry of form, and brilliancy of conversation especially not desired, as husband and three grown-up sons much at home. — Apply by letter to J. F., P.O. Hanton, Yorks.

CHAPTER II

CONSIDERING the nature of Lady Jane's advertisement and the brutal frankness of its wording, she had no right to be surprised because no one answered it immediately. It is not every young or middle-aged spinster of superior education and impeccable manners who will readily admit that she is entirely lacking in charm, symmetry of form, and talent for conversation. Lady Jane had reckoned on this, and was tolerably certain that no governess would offer herself who did not fulfil the conditions so literally as to have had trouble in finding employment anywhere else.

On the day following the small events I have just narrated, Lionel went to town,

as he often did, in order to consult a manuscript in the British Museum. He said that he might be away three or four days, or possibly a week.

That very evening, to her great satisfaction, Lady Jane at last received an application in answer to the tempting offer she had set forth in the column of Wants. The letter was dated from an address in Kensington, and was written in a singularly clear and unadorned hand which pleased Lady Jane at first sight. The writer said that she was twenty-three years of age, and had taken a first at a woman's college, which she named. She gave references to the wives of two distinguished men, who wrote mysterious capital letters after their names and whom Lady Jane promptly found in *Who's Who*. With regard to the unusual qualifications required by the advertisement,

the applicant added, with a touch of sadness, that she fulfilled them only too well. Though not positively deformed, she limped slightly and had one shoulder higher than the other; it was quite needless, she said, to add that she had no charm of manner, and she could assert with confidence that, although she did not suffer from shyness and had no impediment in her speech, it was a painful effort to her to join in ordinary conversation. In conclusion, she said that in spite of her physical disadvantages she had never been ill a day in her life, and was able to walk long distances without fatigue. In fact, walking was good for her lameness. If desired, she would come on trial for a fortnight, or would make the journey merely to show herself, if her expenses were paid. She signed herself "Ellen Scott," and hoped for an early answer.

This certainly looked promising. Lady Jane was in a hurry, and in order to gain time she telegraphed to the two ladies mentioned in the letter, inquiring as to Miss Scott's character, and the answers were perfectly satisfactory. She then wrote to say that, on the whole, the candidate had better come for a fortnight. She added that she expected Miss Scott to dine in her own room.

Lady Jane was alone in her morning room when the new governess arrived and was ushered in. Lady Jane took a good look at her before asking her to sit down. On the whole she thought that Miss Scott had not overstated the case against her appearance. Her limp had been perceptible as she crossed the room, her left shoulder was certainly higher than the other, and figure she had none, in any æsthetic sense.

Her feet were small; but afterwards, when she sat down, Lady Jane saw that the sole of her right shoe was much thicker than the other. Her complexion was not good. It had probably once been clear and rather fair, without much natural colour, but was now disfigured by a redness on one cheek which was almost a blotch, and her small nose was distinctly red. She had nice brown eyes, it is true, and a frank expression when she looked at Lady Jane, but after a moment or two the latter was sure that one eye wandered a little. As if conscious of her defect, or weakness, Miss Scott looked down at once, and when she raised her lids again both eyes were once more focussed in the same line. Her plain dark hat was put on rather far back, and her brown hair was drawn straight up from her forehead and was twisted into a little hard bun

behind. All this Lady Jane took in at a glance.

"Won't you sit down?"

Miss Scott seated herself on the edge of a high chair, but said nothing.

"You must be tired," observed Lady Jane, not unkindly, though rather as a matter of course.

"No," answered Miss Scott, in a submissive tone, "I am not at all tired."

She spoke as if she were rather sorry that she was not, as it seemed to be expected of her; and a pause followed, during which Lady Jane felt a little awkwardness at finding herself face to face with the undesirable governess she had sought, and who knew herself to be undesirable, and was prepared to be apologetic.

"I think I ought to tell you," said Lady Jane at last, "that my girls are a little wild —

rather sporting — I daresay you understand the sort of thing I mean. I hope you have a good deal of firmness of character."

Miss Scott said nothing to this, but nodded gravely as if to say that if she possessed any firmness she would use it. She was evidently a silent young person.

"They are not nasty-tempered at all," Lady Jane continued. "On the contrary. But they are perfect little pickles. Just to give you an idea — the other day they actually locked the chauffeur in and took out my own new motor. I really hope you will be able to prevent that sort of thing."

Again Miss Scott gravely nodded, and this time her right eye certainly wandered a little.

"I daresay you would rather go to your

room and settle yourself a little before seeing them," suggested Lady Jane.

"Please, I think I should like to see them at once."

Lady Jane rang, and told the man who came to send her the two girls.

"Beg pardon, my lady, but the young ladies are gone out."

"Oh, indeed? Don't you think you could find them?"

"I'll try, my lady," answered the footman with perfect gravity, "but it may take an hour or two, as your ladyship knows."

"Oh, yes. Well, then, you had better show Miss Scott to her room, and send somebody to look for them. You see," she added, turning to the new governess, "they have got altogether out of the habit of regular hours. I hope you'll be quite comfortable."

"Thank you," said Miss Scott, who had risen; and she followed the footman meekly with her limping gait.

Lady Jane Follitt had rarely experienced a more intimate satisfaction than she felt when her husband and two younger sons straggled into luncheon, and each in turn glanced quickly at the new governess, and then sat down with an expression of visible disappointment. The Colonel, who was a mild and kindly man, addressed one or two remarks to the newcomer, which she answered as briefly as possible in her somewhat monotonous voice, but Jocelyn and Claude ignored her existence. The girls sat on either side of her, very neat and quiet and well-behaved, but they eyed her from time to time with the distrust which a natural enemy inspires at close quarters. They were taking her measure

for the coming contest, and in the mind of each girl there was already a conviction that it would not be an easy one. They had seen all sorts: the one whose gentle ways and pleasant conversation delighted the Colonel; the one that used to blush and stammer whenever Jocelyn came into the room; the one who was almost a match for Claude at lawn tennis, and who could ride nearly as well as the Follitts themselves, because she was the daughter of an old-fashioned sporting parson, who had spent his substance on horse-flesh, and broken his neck in the hunting field; they had seen Miss Kirk, with her violet eyes, who drew all men in the house after her as easily as the Pied Piper of Hamelin led away the little children; but they had never till now seen one who gave them the impression that she meant business, and would probably

get the better of them. If she did, there would be an end of snaring hares and angling for trout, of riding bareback, and of peppering the passing horses on the Malton road with buckshot from catapults. The future was shrouded in deep gloom, through which stalked hideous spectres of geography, arithmetic, and the history of England. They would be told to sit up straight and not to ink their fingers, and they would be taken to walk instead of being let loose after their meals like a brace of terrier pups, to roam the park and harass man and beast.

There was one chance left. Miss Scott might be a musician. There had been one governess of that sort, too, and the girls had enjoyed long hours of sweetest liberty while she was hammering away at the piano in the schoolroom.

"Do you play?" asked Evelyn in a sweet low voice.

"Oh, no," answered Miss Scott. "I don't know one note from another."

The last ray of hope was extinguished, the gloom deepened, and Evelyn relapsed into mournful silence after exchanging a depressed glance with Gwendolen.

These fateful forebodings soon proved to be only too well grounded, and before two days had passed Lady Jane was thoroughly convinced that she had found the long-sought treasure; her own face grew more and more serene, and she motored with a light heart, undisturbed by the tormenting suspicion that a lovely creature with violet eyes might be at that very time telling the story of her life to the Colonel, or sympathising with Lionel's difficulties in pursuit of learning, or blushing under

Jocelyn's nose, or possibly being taught to ride in the paddock by Claude. Not one of them all would go near Miss Scott if he could help it, not one would so much as speak to her unless it were absolutely necessary.

And yet the undesirable governess seemed quite happy in her surroundings, and even smiled sometimes, when she spoke to the girls. It was a pleasant smile, and she had good teeth; and possibly, if any of the men had thought of looking at her face, it would have occurred to them that, if it had not been for her one blotchy cheek, and her red nose, and her way of putting her hair straight back from her forehead that made her look like a skinned rabbit, her face might not have been ugly. But if such a thought had crossed Lady Jane's mind, she would have consoled herself by reflecting on poor

Miss Scott's lameness and her slightly deformed shoulder. There was that wandering eye, too, which was another source of comfort; and then there was the undeniable fact that the girls were kept in the schoolroom in the morning, and that Miss Scott was always with them when they went out.

With the inhuman cruelty of youth, the two girls deliberately tried to walk the lame governess off her feet; but to their amazement and mortification she kept pace with them without difficulty, and was at least as fresh as they were after a tramp of seven or eight miles over the moor. They were still further astonished when they found that she could beat them out and out at tennis, with no apparent effort. They had always supposed that a lame person could not run; but Miss Scott ran like a deer, and,

indeed, she seemed less lame then than when she was only walking.

It was not often that her eye wandered when she was with them, but when it did they felt sure that she was watching them both at the same time, though they were on opposite sides of her; and the sensation was most unpleasant.

They asked her questions about herself, particularly when they were at their lessons, because a little conversation was always a pleasant change; and though she answered very briefly at such times, she did not seem to mind talking of her life at home when they were out for a walk. There was nothing mysterious about Miss Scott: her mother had died when she was very young, and her father was a learned man and a student, who spent his life among books; they lived in Kensington; he had taught

her till she had gone to the college, where she had worked hard because she knew that she must earn her living, but had been very happy because she had made friends; that was where she had learnt to play tennis so well, and she told the girls all about the life there, with a great many amusing little stories. In fact, except during lessons, or when, in the wickedness of their hearts, they tried to get away from her for such illicit purposes as worm-fishing, snaring hares, or popping at rooks with their brothers' guns, they found her a pleasant companion.

"I shall be glad," said Lady Jane at the end of the first week, and with a really friendly smile, "if you will stay on. I see that you have a very good influence on the girls."

"Thank you," answered Miss Scott, and her eye wandered unmistakably.

Lady Jane informed the Colonel of her decision, and he had rarely seen her in a more delightful humour. Miss Scott, she said, was really the ideal governess in every way. She knew her business, she was quiet, modest, and unassuming. All previous governesses had possessed three sets of manners: one for the drawing-room, and of a kind which Lady Jane considered perfectly odious; the second manner was for the schoolroom, and had usually been unsatisfactory; the third was the way they had with the servants, which was of such a nature that the whole household detested them. But Miss Scott was quite different in that respect. By means known to herself, Lady Jane had ascertained that the household approved of her; that the butler included her in what might be called "the clause of favoured nations," by bestowing his

best attention on her small wants at table; that any of the footmen would have cheerfully blacked her shoes; that the housemaids brought her hot water as often as if she had been one of the family, and that Lady Jane's own maid considered her a "perfect lady."

"I am glad that you are satisfied at last, my dear," answered the Colonel thoughtfully. "She's not much to look at, but she can't help that, poor soul."

"Precisely," answered Lady Jane, with evil glee; "she can't help it."

In due time Lionel came back, having been absent nearly a fortnight. He arrived not long before dinner, when Miss Scott was not about, having disappeared to her own quarters for the evening, as usual.

When he had almost finished dressing,

Claude dropped in on his way down. Lionel had always been more intimate with him than with Jocelyn.

"The Lady has done it this time," observed the younger brother, sitting on the arm of an easy-chair before the fire.

"Has the new governess come?" asked Lionel absently.

"Yes, and I rather think she has come to stay for life. Avoid looking at her if you meet her, my dear chap. The Gorgon wasn't in it with her. She would turn a Bengal tiger to stone."

Lionel looked at his brother with curiosity, for he had not often heard him express himself so strongly. "What's the matter with her?"

"I forget all the things," answered Claude; "but I know that she has a big blotch on one cheek and a red nose, and she looks like a

skinned hare, and she's got a hump on one shoulder, and she's lame, and ——"

"Good gracious!" Lionel's jaw had positively dropped at the description, and he was staring at his brother in a most unusual way.

"I forgot," continued Claude: "one eye wanders ——"

"I say," interrupted Lionel, in a tone of irritation, now that his first astonishment had subsided, "it's not good enough, you know. My credulity was badly injured when I was young. What's the new governess's name?"

"Miss Scott," answered Claude; "and I really don't think I've exaggerated. The Governor is awfully depressed about it. The worst of the thing is that she is turning out to be the long-sought treasure, and the Lady is in the seventh heaven."

"It's very odd," observed Lionel thoughtfully. "Is there any one stopping?"

"The Trevelyans are coming to-morrow, and I believe there is to be a big end party this Saturday."

"What Trevelyans?" asked Lionel. "Is it the mad lot, or their ballooning cousins?"

"The balloonists," answered Claude. "They are quite as crazy as the others, though."

"I think I prefer them to the mad ones, myself. The Lincolnshire ones make me rather nervous. I always expect to hear that another of the family has had to be locked up, and it might happen to be the one I had just been talking to. I suppose Miss Scott doesn't come to dinner, does she?"

"Rather not!"

The two brothers went down together,

and during dinner Lionel, who still distrusted Claude's description of the new governess, asked questions about her of the others, and though no one said anything very definite before the servants, the fact that she was lame and far from good-looking was made quite clear to him, as also that his mother was thoroughly satisfied with her services. Indeed, Lady Jane enlarged upon the subject in a way that was almost tiresome.

Lionel was not usually the most punctual member of the household, but on the following morning he was the first in the breakfast-room, and was standing before the fire reading a newspaper, when the door opened quietly and Miss Scott entered alone, closing it after her. She came forward towards Lionel with her beginning of a smile, as if they had met before. He held out his hand

"'Ellen!' he cried, 'in Heaven's name, what has happened?'"

to her mechanically, but his eyes were staring at her with a startled look, and he grew visibly paler every moment.

"How do you do?" she asked quite naturally, as they shook hands.

Lionel could hardly speak. "Ellen!" he cried, "in Heaven's name what has happened?"

Before she could answer both heard the handle of the door moving, and when the two girls entered the room the governess was standing by her own place, waiting for them, and Lionel had turned his back and was poking the fire to hide his emotion.

CHAPTER III

As has already appeared, there were two families of Trevelyans among the Follitts' friends. The Lincolnshire branch was usually described as the mad lot, because at least two members of the family had disappeared suddenly from society, and as it had never been said that they were dead, it was quite easy to say that they were insane. There were numerous more or less idle tales about these two and concerning their property, of which the sane members were supposed to be enjoying the income.

The ballooning branch, which Lionel thought rather the madder of the two, was represented by old Major Trevelyan,

who had invented an airship that would not move, his married son, and his daughter Anne, who were enthusiastic aëronauts, but had no belief at all in the old gentleman's invention; on the other hand, their confidence in their own methods was boundless, and several rather serious accidents had left it quite undiminished.

Young Mrs. Trevelyan sided with her father-in-law, for in her heart she was a dreadful coward in the air, though she feared nothing on land or water; and she found that the best way to be left at home was to quarrel with her husband and sister-in-law about ripping-lines, safety-valves, detachable cars, and other gear. When an ascent was not far off, and her husband, as usual, showed signs of wishing her to accompany him, the wise little lady would get the old gentleman to coach her thoroughly

in his own views, which she then proceeded to air and defend till her husband lost his temper and flatly refused to take her with him, which was precisely the end she desired to gain.

There had lately been one of those ascents which, in the ordinary course of things, had been followed by a descent with some of those results that are frequent in ballooning, if not inevitable. When the three younger members of the family appeared, Anne Trevelyan's handsome nose was decorated with a fine strip of court plaster and her brother had a sprained wrist, which obliged him to carry his arm in a sling. But they all seemed very happy and united, for young Mrs. Trevelyan was the last person in the world to say "I told you so."

Lady Jane approved of ballooning, in principle, because it was distinctly "sport-

ing," but she thought it dangerous compared with motoring.

"It's all very well," retorted Anne Trevelyan, "but you could count on your fingers the people you have ever heard of who have been killed by balloons, whereas every one I know has either killed or been killed by motors."

"I am quite sure I never killed a human being," answered Lady Jane; "and I'm quite alive myself."

"Yes, but how long will it last?" inquired Miss Anne cheerfully.

"And as for danger," answered Lady Jane, "whenever I see you, you have just escaped with your life! It's quite needless to ask why you have a large piece of court plaster on your beautiful nose, my dear, isn't it?"

"Oh, quite!"

As no new ascent was being talked of, Mrs. Trevelyan did not take Lady Jane's side, and the subject was soon dropped. Moreover, in the course of the afternoon a thing so new and surprising happened that it drove all other questions out of the field of interest in the Follitt family. Lionel actually went for a walk with his sisters and the new governess. He made no secret of it, and his start with the girls and Miss Scott was witnessed by the assembled party soon after luncheon. They were all in a large room which was neither a hall, nor a library, nor a drawing-room, nor anything else directly definable. In the days when the children had been much smaller, but not quite small enough to be kept out of the way, it had been their general place of meeting, and the Colonel had christened it the "mess-room," because, as he explained,

it was always in such a mess. Each member of the family had a place in it which was regarded as his or her own — a particular chair, a particular table or a corner of a table, with a place for books and newspapers. Lady Jane often wrote her letters there instead of in her morning room, and the Colonel had a small desk before a window, which he preferred to the much more luxurious arrangements in his study; the three young men often lounged there on rainy days, and even the girls kept what they called their work in an old-fashioned work-basket-table before a small sofa which was their coign of vantage; for by keeping very quiet they sometimes made their elders forget their presence, and they heard many interesting things.

Ordinary acquaintances were never asked into the mess-room, and were not likely

to find their way to it uninvited, as it was not in direct communication with the other large rooms on the ground floor, and could only be reached by a small dark passage which was entered from the hall by a half-concealed door. But the Trevelyans had lately been promoted out of acquaintanceship to the rank of friends — partly, perhaps, because Lady Jane hoped that Lionel might take it into his head to fall in love with Anne, who had always shown, or pretended to show, an unaccountable preference for him. His mother could not imagine why in the world a handsome and rather dashing sort of girl, who was almost too fond of society, should be attracted by that one of the brothers whom almost every one thought the least attractive; but since it was so, and since Anne was a thoroughly nice young woman, and since it was evi-

dently the eldest son's duty to marry, Lady Jane did all she could to bring the two together; and she was not at all pleased when she heard her husband's exclamation of surprise on seeing that Lionel was actually going for a walk with his sisters and the governess.

"Upon my word, my dear, I never expected to see that."

Lady Jane was near him, and looked out; the others heard, and went to different windows to see what was the matter.

"In a long and misspent life," said Claude, who was not twenty-two, "I have never seen anything more extraordinary."

"I say, governor," asked Jocelyn, "there's no insanity in our family, is there?"

"I'm not sure," answered the Colonel. "I believe I once paid your debts, my boy. That's always a bad sign."

Jocelyn did not smile. "Taken in connection with the fact that I never made any more," he answered, "it certainly looks as if we were threatened with softening of the brain."

"And this settles it," put in Claude, watching the fast disappearing figures of Lionel and Miss Scott, who were already walking side by side behind the two girls.

"It's a safe and harmless madness, at all events," laughed Anne Trevelyan, who was close behind Jocelyn and looking over his shoulder.

But the surprise of the party in the mess-room was nothing to the amazement of Evelyn and Gwendolen, who could not believe their eyes and ears. Their taste for forbidden amusements and sports, and their intimate alliance and mutual trust during a long career of domestic crime,

had given them an almost superhuman power of concealing their emotions at the most exciting moments. When they saw that Lionel was coming with them, they behaved as naturally as if it were an every-day occurrence; but as soon as they were half a dozen paces in front of the other two they exchanged glances of intelligence and suspicion, though Evelyn only said in an unnecessarily loud tone that it was "a capital day for a walk," and Gwendolen answered that it was "ripping." They remembered that they had more than once derived great advantage from not altogether dissimilar circumstances; for although none of their brothers had exhibited such barefaced effrontery as to go to walk with them and the governess of the moment, nevertheless it had often happened that their former tormentors had disappeared from the school-

room, or during the afternoon, for as much as an hour at a time, during which the girls left undone those things which they ought to have done and did a variety of other things instead.

On the present occasion they were surprised, but they never lost their nerve, and by the time they were six paces in front they were both already intent on devising means for increasing the distance to a quarter of a mile. Having been allowed to lead the way, it was natural that they should take the direction of the moor, where escape would be easy and pursuit difficult; besides, once there, it was easy to pretend that there was a cat in sight, and a cat on a grouse moor is anathema maranatha, with a price on its head, and to chivvy it is a worthy action in the eyes of all sportsmen. Cats were scarce, it was

true, but Lionel and Miss Scott would be talking together, and how could either of them swear that there was no cat? As a preliminary measure, the two increased their speed at the first hill, and Lionel, who was in extreme haste to ask questions of his companion, refused to walk any faster than before. In a few moments, Evelyn and Gwendolen, though well in sight, were out of earshot.

"Why didn't you tell me that you had had an accident?" asked Lionel in a low tone.

"Because it would not have been true," answered Miss Scott, limping along beside him.

"But you are lame," objected Lionel.

"Very!"

"And you've got one shoulder higher than the other."

"It's quite noticeable, isn't it?"

"And your figure and your complexion ——"

"Awful, aren't they? I suppose I'm absolutely repulsive, am I not?"

The girls were forging steadily ahead.

"No, dear, you never could be that to me," answered Lionel earnestly. "I'm very anxious about you, that's all."

"There's really no cause for anxiety, I assure you."

"But if you have not had an accident you must at least have been very ill?"

"Oh, no," answered Miss Scott in an indifferent tone; "only a little influenza since I saw you two months ago. I don't call that an illness, you know."

"I'm not sure," answered Lionel very gravely. "I've often heard that the influenza may have very serious consequences. I call being lame quite serious enough."

"I daresay it will get better," said Miss Scott cheerfully. "I am quite sure that this kind of lameness can be cured. I'm sorry to have given you such an unpleasant impression."

"Painful would be a better word," said Lionel. "I never had such a shock in my life as when you came into the breakfast-room this morning."

"Yes, I saw. I suppose I had not realised how changed I am."

"If you would only do your hair as you used to," Lionel said, "it would be better. Why in the world have you taken to drawing it back in that way?"

"Did you see your mother's advertisement?" asked Miss Scott.

"No. What had that to do with the way you do your hair?"

Instead of answering, Miss Scott pro-

duced a small newspaper cutting, which she had carried inside her glove with the evident intention of showing it to him. He took it, read it, and slipped it into his pocket with a rather harsh little laugh. "That was ingenious," he said; "but the idea that you, of all people, could ever fulfil such outrageous conditions!"

"I'm perfectly satisfactory, you see. I fill the place very well, and Lady Jane is kindness itself."

"I suppose that hideous frock is also meant to enhance the effect?"

"It does, doesn't it?"

"Oh, yes, indeed it does! Most decidedly! But I should have thought that what has happened to you would have been quite enough to satisfy my mother, without making it so much worse."

By this time they were up on the moor,

which began not more than half a mile from the great house. As Lionel spoke the last words he looked sadly at Miss Scott's blotched face; but it hurt him to see it, and he looked away at once, following his sisters' movements with his eyes. At that very moment he saw them both stoop suddenly to pick up stones from the rough moorland road; having armed themselves, they dashed away like greyhounds from the leash, straight across the moor, in a direction which would soon take them out of sight in the hollow beyond. Miss Scott was watching them too, and showed signs of wishing to give chase at once, but Lionel stopped her.

"They've probably seen a cat," he said quietly.

Miss Scott, who knew nothing about moors, did not understand.

"Cats kill the young birds," Lionel ex-

plained. "The best thing we can do is to sit down and wait. It won't hurt them to have a good run."

As Miss Scott sat down on a boulder by the roadside, he caught sight of the thick sole of her right shoe for the first time. He had often seen cripples wearing just such a shoe on one foot, and he started a little and drew his breath sharply between his teeth as one does at a painful sight. She understood, but was silent for a moment, though she instantly drew back her foot under the edge of her tweed skirt.

"I was afraid it would make a dreadful difference to you," she said, "and I suppose I should never have let you see me like this." He made a quick movement. "No, dear," she continued quietly, "I quite understand; but I couldn't resist the temptation to be near you."

"Besides," he answered, anxious to destroy the painful impression he must have made on her, "you had written that you meant to come, if only on trial. I thought it was a mad idea, but I found it just as impossible to resist as you did, and I should have been awfully disappointed if you had not come. Of course it would have been easier for me if I had known — or if you had not done all you could to make it worse."

She looked at him so steadily while he was speaking that he turned and met her eyes; they seemed to be laughing, though her face was grave.

"I really couldn't paint my cheek, could I?" she asked.

"Oh, no! I did not mean that."

"But I have," said Miss Scott with great gravity.

"What do you mean?" asked Lionel in amazement.

"I wash it off at night," she answered. "It comes off quite easily."

"What?" Lionel almost sprang to his feet. "Do you mean to say ——"

"Yes," answered Miss Scott, smiling. "I've made up for the part. It's well done, isn't it? You know I belonged to the dramatic club at the college, and they thought I was rather good at it. I always did the ugly housemaids with colds in their heads and red noses."

"Your nose too!"

"Yes, my nose too. The paint comes off my face; and this comes off." She stuck out the thick-soled shoe as she spoke. "And this comes off," she added, laying her hand on her shoulder and laughing. "And my figure is just what it always was. Only my teeth and hair are real."

At first Lionel stared at her with some alarm, as if he thought she might be going out of her mind. But she only smiled and looked at him quite quietly; and, now that he knew the truth, he saw the familiar face that was dear to him as if it were not disfigured, and the sudden understanding wrought such a quick revulsion in his feeling and so greatly delighted his natural sense of humour, that he began to laugh silently, as he sat leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, for he had the grave disposition of a thoughtful scholar. But instead of subsiding, his mirth grew by quick degrees, his shoulders shook, and his face twisted till he felt as if his whole being were turning into one vast joke; then, quite suddenly, he stuck out his feet in front of him, leaned back, threw up his head, and broke into a peal of such ringing laugh-

ter as the silent moor had never heard before. And Ellen Scott, who had been dying to laugh for ten days, could not help joining him now, though in a much more musical and pretty fashion; so there the lovers sat on the boulder, side by side, laughing like a pair of lunatics.

The air was bright and still, as it can be in the North of England when the winter is just over and the earth is beginning to wake again, and to dream of her returning loveliness, as a beautiful woman may who has long lain ill in a darkened room. The clear laughter of the two echoed far and wide, even down to the stream in the hollow, where the girls were poking sticks under the big stones at one end of the pool to drive the speckled trout out of their quiet lurking-places; and they were talking in low tones and plotting to hide some fishing-

"Such ringing laughter as the silent moor had never heard before."

tackle out of sight near by, on the mere chance that they might before long get an hour's fishing while Lionel would be talking to Miss Scott. But the instant they heard the far-off sound of mirth overhead, they ran up the slope again, and dropped to the ground just behind a long familiar bunch of gorse, whence they could watch the road unobserved. The manœuvre was executed with a skill that would have done credit to a head stalker.

Lionel and Miss Scott were still laughing, but had reached the milder stage of mirth which is like the after-taste of very dry champagne. They were looking at each other, and it was quite evident to the experienced eyes that watched them through the gorse that they were holding hands, though the hands that were joined were not visible, but were held low down between

them, pressing the boulder on which they sat.

The two girls saw, understood, and rejoiced. They had firmly believed that never, under any conceivable circumstances, could any male being even think of holding Miss Scott's hand; but the impossibility was an accomplished fact before their eyes, and as they could not have any reason for supposing that the two had ever met before, they both instantly concluded that it was a case of love at first sight. Then they looked at each other and they also laughed long and heartily, though not a sound disturbed the air. When the fit was over, they whispered together.

"I think it's going to be all right," said Evelyn, keeping her eye on the couple.

"I'm jolly glad," whispered Gwendolen. "I thought we were in for it this time."

"The last ten days have been awful," said Evelyn, "haven't they?"

"She's a perfect demon," replied the other. "I wish I knew some nice bad words for her, that it wouldn't be wrong or low-down form to say!"

"I've seen things in Shakespeare," said Evelyn thoughtfully, "but I'm not quite sure what they mean."

"You can think them anyway," suggested Gwendolen — "that's better than nothing; and you'll show them to me when we get home, and I can think them too. There can't be anything wrong about that, can there?"

"I don't think so," answered Evelyn; "and we'll never ask anybody, so we can always think that the words are all right."

"Do you suppose he'll kiss her?" asked Gwendolen.

"Not to-day," answered Evelyn, with the superior wisdom of an elder sister. "They never do the first day; and besides, he's sitting on the side that has the blotch."

"Well, then," said Gwendolen, who had a more practical mind, "if there's not going to be anything more to see, and as we can't hear what they are saying, let's go back and tickle the trout!"

Evelyn at once recognised that this was sound counsel, and with the unanimity which characterised all their actions, the two crept backwards till they were below the brow of the knoll, and then rose to their feet and trotted down to the pool again in great gladness of heart.

"How long do you think you can keep it up?" Lionel asked at last. "It's utterly amusing and delightful, but I think it is just a little dangerous for you."

"At the first sight of danger I shall disappear into space," answered Miss Scott. "But I have a little plan of my own," she added, "which I mean to carry out if I can."

"What is it?"

"It will succeed better if I keep you in the dark," she answered. "In the meantime give me some work to do for you in the evenings — copying or looking up things. That will account for your talking to me sometimes, don't you see?"

CHAPTER IV

LIONEL had first known Ellen Scott while she was still a student at the college and was at home during the vacation. It happened in this way. Old Herbert Scott was one of the many learned and industrious, but quite obscure men whose ceaseless industry under the direction of half a dozen distinguished personages makes the British Museum the greatest institution of its kind. He was not a scholar in the ordinary sense of the word, for he had no degree, and had never been at a University. The son of an English officer in the native Indian army, who had been killed at the siege of Kabul, he had obtained a post in

the Customs of Bombay. Though he possessed little or no knowledge of the Classics at that time, he soon became known for his extraordinary proficiency in Mahratta and the kindred dialects. He was, in fact, a natural philologian, and soon advanced himself to the study of Sanskrit. His misfortune was that the subject interested him far more than any material advantage which he might have obtained by mastering it. There is plenty of lucrative employment in India for men who know Sanskrit and have a dozen modern dialects thoroughly well, and who can be trusted; but Herbert Scott cared for nothing but study, and at the age of thirty-two he was as inefficient in the performance of his professional duties as he was learned in the Vedas and the lore of the Brahmans; in fact, he was in danger of losing his means of liveli-

hood, since the Customs were not included in the "covenanted" Indian Civil Service. Happily for him, he was discovered at this time by one of the lights of English learning, who instantly recognised in him the talents and qualities of one who would always be far more useful to others than to himself. He gladly accepted the honourable though modestly paid situation which was offered him in the British Museum — for the twenty-four-year rule had not been invented then; he returned to England, installed himself economically in the cheapest part of Kensington, and went to work.

A good many years passed before Lionel Follitt made his acquaintance in the Museum, and became indebted to him for invaluable assistance. The extraordinary extent and variety of his learning attracted and interested the young man, who at first

had him to dinner at a Club, and soon afterwards proposed to go and see him in Kensington on a Sunday. Mr. Scott seemed pleased. Lionel kept the appointment he had made, and was considerably surprised to find his learned friend in conversation with a pretty and charming young girl.

"My daughter Ellen," Herbert Scott had said, introducing his visitor.

Ellen had made them tea, had seen that they had everything they wanted, and had then discreetly withdrawn, leaving them to the discussion of Sanskrit literature.

The rest needs little explanation. The girl was vastly more to Lionel's taste than any of those he met in his own set: she was modest without being shy, she was clever without ostentation, she could appreciate without flattering, and she could

understand without being vain of her wits. Moreover, though she was not more than pretty so far as features went, she had a lovely complexion, nice brown eyes that sparkled when she was amused, soft wavy hair of no particular colour, and a figure which Lionel thought the most beautiful he had ever seen.

After this first meeting his visits to the British Museum were more frequent, and though his own industry did not relax and his learning profited considerably by them, he often found time to go with Mr. Herbert Scott to Kensington after hours, and even to stay to tea and spend the evening with the father and daughter.

The old Indian knew nothing of Lionel's position in the world, beyond the fact that he was a quiet young gentleman who lived in the country with his parents, and he

would have been a good deal surprised to learn that his studious friend was heir to a noble old estate in Yorkshire. It was soon apparent that the two young people liked each other very much, but Lionel inspired confidence, and the young girl had plenty of common sense; and if the young gentleman from the country took it into his head to marry the daughter of the penniless old student, so much the better. If anything happened to her father she would have to support herself, and as he could not hope to provide for her he had given her the best education that could be had in England. If she did not marry and was left alone in the world, she was at least fit for any employment that might offer.

Herbert Scott had no great knowledge of human nature, but as months went by,

and visits followed visits, he became convinced that there was an understanding between the two, and his hopes increased; yet it was not until Ellen informed him of her intention to accept the position of governess in Lionel's family that her father ventured to ask her a direct question.

"Yes," she said, "I have promised to marry him if his people do not object to me. That will be the difficulty, especially with his mother, who wishes him to marry well. He has not spoken of me at home yet. My plan is to make his mother like me before she has any idea of the truth. Do you think there is anything wrong in that?"

"No," answered Herbert Scott, to whose Anglo-Indian mind anything appealed that had a touch of adventure in it. "But does he know everything? Have you told him?"

"Yes, I have told him."

But when Mr. Scott had gone with Ellen to the station, she had been quite herself in appearance, and he would have been much surprised if he had seen her when she walked into Lady Jane's morning room. The disguise was a part of her little plan which she had not confided to him, any more than she had shown him the singularly uninviting advertisement she had answered. She had timed her journey so as to spend the night in York; she had arrived at the hotel in a long cloak and wearing a veil, and had gone to her room at once, and no one had been surprised at the appearance she presented when she came down for breakfast in the morning. As a matter of fact, she had got the idea of making the change in that way from the account of a celebrated robbery com-

mitted by a woman, which she had read in a newspaper.

On the evening after Lionel's memorable walk with Miss Scott, Anne Trevelyan asked him whether he had found the new governess a pleasant companion, whereat the Colonel smiled pleasantly, and Lady Jane and the others laughed; but Lionel was not in the least disturbed.

"I was very much surprised when I saw her this morning," he replied, truthful to the letter, if not in the spirit — for his amazement had been great. "I know her. She is the daughter of old Herbert Scott of the British Museum, who has helped me a great deal with my work. So I went to walk with her, and we renewed our acquaintance."

Every one seemed disappointed, for the chance of chaffing the least chaffable mem-

ber of the family had seemed unique. But now everything was explained in the dullest possible manner.

"Oh!" ejaculated Anne Trevelyan.

"Fault!" cried the Colonel, who was fond of tennis.

"Punctured!" observed Lady Jane, who motored.

"Crab!" was Jocelyn's observation, as he looked across the table at Miss Trevelyan, for he was the oarsman of the family.

"Hit to leg for six," remarked Claude, who was the cricketer.

After this no one thought it strange that Lionel should treat the governess with great friendliness, and as the Follitts were all kind-hearted people, no allusions were made to her undesirable appearance.

On the contrary, it occurred to Lady Jane before long that the poor girl might

really make some improvement in her looks without endangering her ladyship's peace of mind. Miss Scott was turning out to be so thoroughly satisfactory, and "knew her place so well," that Lady Jane's heart was softened. "I am sure you won't mind my speaking of a rather delicate matter," she said one morning, when she chanced to be alone with Miss Scott for a few moments. "I should certainly not mention it if I did not hope that you will stay till the girls are grown up."

"I will stay as long as I can," answered Miss Scott demurely. "You are all very kind to me, and I am very happy here."

"That's very nice, and I am sure you won't be offended if a much older woman gives you a little piece of advice."

"Oh, not at all! I should be most grateful."

"'The truth is,' answered Lady Jane, 'it's about your hair.'"

"The truth is," answered Lady Jane, "it's about your hair. Are you sure you don't mind? Don't you think that perhaps, if you did not draw it back so very tight, it might look — er — a little less — er — unprepossessing?"

"It's so easy to do it in this way," answered Miss Scott, and she made her right eye wander rather wildly, for that was one of the tricks she had learnt in amateur theatricals. "But I shall be only too happy to try something else, if you do not think it would seem ridiculous."

"I'm sure you needn't be afraid of that," said Lady Jane; "and besides, no one else will notice it, you know. I mean," she added, not wishing to seem unkind, "I mean that no one will care, you know, except me, and I should like you to look — er — a little more like other people."

"I quite understand," answered Miss Scott; "I'll do my best. But I ought to tell you that when my hair isn't pulled straight back, it's wavy."

"All the better," answered Lady Jane. with satisfaction. "That will be very nice.'

She had really felt that, in spite of Miss Scott's admirable qualities, she was almost too hideous to be seen in town with two very smart girls. She might perhaps be taken for a maid.

As I have said, Ellen had nice wavy hair, though it was of no particular colour, and when she came down to breakfast the next morning, having arranged it as she did at home, the change in her appearance was surprising. She still had a red nose, a blotched cheek, and a bump on her shoulder, and she limped; but she no longer looked like a skinned rabbit. Evelyn and Gwen-

dolen exchanged glances, and said in their evil hearts that the change was a step in the right direction, since it must be intended to please Lionel. Lady Jane smiled at her and nodded approvingly, but her prediction proved to be well founded, for neither the Colonel, nor Jocelyn, nor Claude, nor any one of the three Trevelyans, even glanced at the governess. And she had managed to tell Lionel of the advice his mother had given her, so that he showed no surprise.

On that day and the next, a large party of people came for the week-end, and when the house was full the governess and the girls had all their meals apart in the regions of the schoolroom, visited only by Lady Jane and occasionally by Lionel.

But he was obliged to be a good deal with the others, and incidentally with Miss

Trevelyan. He was the last man in the world to fancy that a woman was falling in love with him merely because she always seemed glad to talk with him, and he was inclined to resent the way in which his mother did her best to bring him and Anne together at all times; but when there was a large party he preferred the society of the few whom he knew more or less intimately to the conversation of those whom he rarely met more than three or four times in a year, and had sometimes never met at all — for in London he avoided the crowd as much as he could. The consequence was that, on the present occasion, Anne saw much more of him than when the Trevelyans had been the only people stopping at the house.

If he had been wise in the ways of the world he would have known that when a woman has a fancy for a man she talks to

him about herself, or himself, and has little to say about any one else; and he would have observed before now that Miss Trevelyan asked questions and led the conversation from general subjects to people. She seemed more interested in his brothers than in him, and particularly in Jocelyn — though she actually treated the latter with more coldness, or less cordiality, than the others.

"He has no ambition," she said to Lionel. "I wish he would go in for ballooning!"

Lionel smiled a little. They were strolling along a path on the outskirts of the park, near the Malton road.

"I hadn't associated ballooning with ambition before," he answered, "but I daresay that if you suggested it as a career, he might take a fancy to it."

"Not much!" answered Miss Anne, in

a tone of conviction. "That would be just the way to make him do the opposite."

"I doubt that. But do you mind telling me what the opposite of ballooning would be? Diving, I suppose, wouldn't it?"

"Don't be horrid! You know what I mean."

Lionel did not know, but she had never before shown so clearly what she thought about Jocelyn's opinion of her. Lionel was interested, and thought he knew her well enough to ask a direct question.

"You like Jocelyn, don't you?" He looked at her quietly.

"Do you mind?" inquired Anne, with a short laugh.

"Not a bit. But, as a matter of fact, my mother has got it into her head that it's your duty to like me." He laughed too.

"You're a very calm person."

"I didn't mean to be cheeky," answered Lionel. "But as we are very good friends, and seem to be expected to fall in love with each other, though we never shall, it's just as well to be frank, isn't it?"

"Yes. I was only chaffing. You're quite right."

"Very well. Then you won't mind if I tell you just what I think. You like Jocelyn, and you are quite sure he does not care for you. Is that it?"

Anne Trevelyan did not answer for a moment, and there was a little more colour in her handsome face. "Yes," she said, after a few seconds. "That's it. Rather humiliating, isn't it? All the same, I would rather that you should know."

"Thank you. But you don't give him much encouragement to be nice to you, do you?"

"Well, hardly!" answered Anne, holding up her head. "I don't think it would be very nice if I did, considering that he evidently dislikes me."

"You're quite mistaken," said Lionel in a tone of certainty. "If you did not pretend to ignore him half the time, as you do, you would soon find it out."

"Nonsense! You might as well say that he likes that dreadful governess!"

"I don't think Miss Scott at all dreadful," answered Lionel, in a tone that made his companion look at him quickly. "Her looks are against her, I admit, but I assure you she is a very nice girl."

"I was only thinking of her looks, of course. And I forgot that you knew her father. What did you say he was?"

She asked the question in a tone of real interest, which was intended as a sort of

"'I don't think Miss Scott at all dreadful,' answered Lionel."

apology for having said anything against the governess.

"He's in the British Museum; but he is not really her father. He adopted her and brought her up, that's all. She was left on his doorstep, I believe."

"Really! How interesting! Do tell me all about it."

"There's not very much to tell," said Lionel. "Herbert Scott has been in the Museum five-and-twenty years, I believe, and has always lived in the same little house in Kensington. He began life in India, and I fancy he must be almost sixty. One morning, about twenty-two years ago, he was lying awake at dawn, when he heard a child crying just under his window. At first he paid no attention to the sound, but as it went on persistently, he went down and opened the door. He found a little

girl baby, nicely dressed and quite clean, lying on the doorstep, kicking and screaming. He thought the baby might be about a year old. That's the story."

"Except the rest of it," observed Miss Trevelyan. "The interesting thing would be to know what he did with it — a man living alone, and who had probably never touched a baby in his life!"

"He went to the police and made inquiries, and advertised, but as he could not get any information, and the woman servant he had was a respectable middle-aged widow who was fond of children, they kept it and brought it up. That's all I know."

"I have heard of such things before," said Anne Trevelyan thoughtfully. "The child must have been kidnapped by thieves who tried to get a ransom and failed."

"Or gipsies," suggested Lionel.

"No, not gipsies. They hardly ever give up a child they have stolen, unless they are in danger of being caught; and if that had been the case in your story, the child's parents would probably have claimed it, for they would have been employing detectives, and the police would have been informed. I should think the baby Mr. Scott found must have been an orphan in charge of some relations who were glad to get rid of it."

"That certainly sounds likely," answered Lionel. "I think it will be better not to speak about it to my mother or the others. I'm not quite sure why I've told you."

"You told me because I called Miss Scott dreadful. I am sorry I did. I won't do it again."

"That's all right — you didn't mean it. We were talking about Jocelyn, I remember.

I never understand how women do their thinking, and I suppose that I am not curious enough to study them."

"What has that to do with anything?" asked Miss Trevelyan quickly.

"I was only wondering why, since you like Jocelyn, you are always as disagreeable as possible to him and as nice as possible to me."

Miss Trevelyan laughed and looked away from him. "Of course you don't understand!" she said. "Men never do."

"I'll give you a piece of advice, Miss Anne. The next time you make an ascent, make Jocelyn go with you, and see what happens."

"Nothing would induce him to go, I am sure."

"I think I could manage it, if you will only ask him."

"I'll take odds that you can't," declared Miss Anne emphatically.

"Six to four," offered Lionel, who was not a Follitt for nothing.

"Two to one would be more like it," proposed the young lady. "I only mean sovereigns, of course. I'm not on the make."

"Done!" answered Lionel promptly. "I wish it were thousands!"

"Well, it's in your stable!" laughed Miss Anne, who seemed pleased, "and I suppose you know what you can do."

"There's only one condition. You must ask him before me."

"All right."

CHAPTER V

THE interview which was the consequence of Miss Trevelyan's bet took place the following morning, in the presence of most of the family. As has been said, the Trevelyans had the privilege of the mess-room when the house was full; and as Anne was very much in earnest, she found her way there after breakfast, when she was sure Jocelyn and his brothers would be together. She was not disappointed. They were scattered about the big room when she came in, and the Colonel was writing a note at his little desk before the window.

Lionel guessed why she had come, and gave her a lead at once. He had the morning paper in his hand.

"Have you seen this?" he asked, looking at her directly. "There's been another of those awful motor accidents. The thing ran away, and caught fire, and was smashed by an express train. Frightful, isn't it!"

"Anybody we know?" asked Miss Anne, coming up to him.

"Nothing particular was found of the people," he answered; "but there seems to be an idea that they were foreign tourists. It's one to you, Miss Anne. No one ever seems to get killed in a balloon, unless they go to the North Pole."

"Ballooning is no more dangerous than football," answered Miss Trevelyan, turning her back to the fireplace and looking round the room. "You get rather bumped about sometimes, in coming down, but that's all. Why don't you try it?"

She looked about her vaguely.

"Is that meant for me?" inquired Lionel.

"It's meant for anybody who will come with me next time."

The brothers had dropped their newspapers and were listening, and the Colonel had turned in his seat, after finishing his note, and was looking at her.

"We can't all go," observed Claude.

"And as I have no time for that sort of thing," said Lionel, "the choice is not large, for I don't suppose the Governor is going in for aeronautics."

"Why not?" asked the Colonel, perennially young.

"I wonder what the Lady would say?" laughed Claude.

"Of course my brother will go with us, so it will be quite proper," said Miss Anne coolly.

"The Governor is welcome to my place,"

said Claude. "I've promised to ride a steeplechase next month, and I'm not very keen about breaking any bones before it comes off."

"That narrows the invitation to the Governor and Jocelyn," observed Lionel, "and I'll lay odds that the Governor will be the only one of the family who will accept."

"What odds?" inquired Jocelyn, who had not spoken yet.

"Oh, anything," laughed Lionel. "Five to one if you like."

"Tens?" Jocelyn asked.

"Yes; I'll go fifty against it."

"Done!" answered Jocelyn promptly, for he was hard up, and Lionel knew it.

"Will you really come?" asked Anne, affecting cold surprise.

"Rather!"

"Jocelyn was always a sordid beast,"

observed Claude in a brotherly manner. "He'd sell his soul for fifty pounds."

But Jocelyn remained unmoved. "I don't know about my soul," he answered, "but you may have the brown filly at the price."

"That imp of Satan? Not much!"

Jocelyn made no answer to Claude's disparaging remark about the filly, but turned to Miss Trevelyan in a business-like manner.

"When is it to be, and where?" he asked.

"We'll make the usual start," Anne answered. "But we shall have to wait till Bob's wrist is all right again."

"He isn't wearing it in a sling any more," said Jocelyn, who, for reasons of his own, was in a hurry to win his brother's money.

"Call it three weeks from Monday," said Anne, after a moment's thought, during which she had mentally run over the

list of her numerous engagements. "I'll let you know the hour. We'll start no matter what the weather is, of course. We always do."

So the matter was settled much more easily than she had anticipated, and she was proportionately grateful to Lionel for making her lose her own small bet.

"You'll be forty-nine sovereigns to the bad," she said with a pleasant smile as she paid it, "and it's rather a shady transaction, I suppose. But I'll make it up to you somehow."

"That's all right."

Lionel reflected on human nature afterwards, and more particularly on the ways of young women; but it is due to him and to Anne Trevelyan to say that he did not like her any the less for what she had done. On the contrary, he would cheerfully have

made a larger sacrifice to see her married to his brother, since that happy result would effectually put an end to his mother's plans for his future bliss.

During the remaining three days of the Trevelyans' visit, after the house-party had scattered, he already had reason to congratulate himself on his investment. The singular transaction which had taken place in the mess-room had broken the ice between Anne and Jocelyn, and for the first time in their acquaintance they were seen talking together apart from the others. At dinner, too, they exchanged remarks, and judging from what they said the rest of the party might have supposed that their conversation consisted chiefly in making satirical observations on each other's personal tastes; but now and then, when Jocelyn said something particularly disagreeable,

Anne laughed cheerfully, as though she liked it, and when she returned the thrust with interest Jocelyn's large good-natured mouth twitched a little and then smiled. They acted like a couple of healthy terrier puppies, whose idea of a good game is to bite each other in the back of the neck and catch each other by the hind leg, and then to rush wildly off in opposite directions, only to turn back the next moment and go at each other again, with furious barking and showing of young teeth, which is all a part of the fun. It would be beneath their dignity as fighting dogs not to pretend to fight each other when no sworn enemy is about; but it would be against the laws of puppy honour to do each other any real harm.

Lionel saw and understood, and so did quiet little Mrs. Trevelyan; but the Colo-

nel could not make out what was going on, for he was a mild man who had inherited the sentiments of the Victorian age, and only recognised that he was growing old because he felt that his own methods of being agreeable in the eyes of women were antiquated.

As for Lady Jane, she was not at all disturbed, for Lionel and Anne were as good friends as ever, and were, in fact, more intimate since they had entered into an offensive and defensive alliance. Besides, the presence of the undesirable governess had contributed greatly to her peace of mind. Her gratitude had already shown itself in the advice she had given Miss Scott as to arranging her hair, and the effect was so good that she contemplated some further improvements. What made the governess look like a housemaid, though it was clear

that she was a lady, was her red nose and the blotch. A lady might limp and have a bad figure, and even be a little crooked, but a red nose was distinctly plebeian in Lady Jane's code, and blotches were a somewhat repulsive disfigurement. She was really kind-hearted, but she knew that she was not always tactful, and it was with some trepidation that she approached the subject, having summoned Miss Scott to her morning room to ask whether the girls were doing well at their lessons.

"You are really quite wonderful," said Lady Jane, when the governess assured her that Evelyn now really understood that Henry V. of England did not fight for the French crown on the ground that he was the son of Henry IV. of France, and that Gwendolen had remembered "nine times eight" for three whole days. "And are

you quite sure," Lady Jane asked, "that you wish to stay with us? Does the air here — er — quite agree with you?"

"Oh, yes, indeed!" answered Miss Scott, with alacrity; "besides, I should be perfectly well anywhere."

"Because I sometimes think that, perhaps, your circulation is not as good as it might be."

"Really?" cried Miss Scott, very much surprised, for she had not the faintest idea what Lady Jane was driving at. "I never thought of my circulation."

Lady Jane hesitated, and looked at her, not without a certain motherly kindness. "I've noticed," she said, looking away again, "that you sometimes have — er — in fact, always since I have known you, a slight — er — redness."

"Oh, yes, I know," answered Miss Scott,

with a very slight tremor in her voice, which was really due to the fact that she felt the warning symptoms of coming laughter.

But Lady Jane was afraid that she had touched a sensitive spot, and had given pain. However, she was in for it now.

"Please don't think me meddlesome," she said gently; "but I really know that those little things generally come from a bad circulation, and can be very much improved, if not quite cured, by diet and by taking the right sort of exercise."

"I'm afraid my nose isn't that kind," answered Miss Scott with difficulty, for she could scarcely speak.

"Perhaps not. But Sir Jasper Threlfall is coming next week, and he is such a great authority, you know. I am sure he would be willing — if you don't mind too much ——"

When Miss Scott understood she started in real fright. "Oh, please, please! I'll do anything you like, but please don't ask me to see a doctor!"

There was no mistaking her real distress now, and Lady Jane felt that it was impossible to insist.

"I'm sorry," she said, "but of course, if you feel so strongly about it, I won't say anything more. Perhaps you wouldn't mind very much trying some stuff I always use myself if I happen to get burnt by the wind when motoring. It's not at all nasty, you know — in fact, it's rather nice, and it's very soothing. Will you let me send a bottle to your room? I always keep a supply."

"It's most kind of you, I am sure," answered Ellen, immensely relieved. "I can't tell you how I dread seeing a doctor!

If you will only tell me just what to do, I shall be very grateful."

Lady Jane's lotion for the face was a marvellous compound. Judging from the short, but imposing, statement set forth on the neat Parisian label, it was the highest achievement of two famous French chemists in collaboration with an ancient and celebrated manufactory of perfumery in the Rue de Rivoli. Miss Scott, who was strictly truthful, said that she used it conscientiously, and so she did; but she did not add that she had another little bottle of her own, the contents of which she applied with equal regularity to her nose and her cheek during at least a week after her interview with Lady Jane. When the lotion was almost finished, however, a marked improvement was visible. Her nose was still as red as ever, but the disfiguring blotch grew rapidly

smaller and paler. Lady Jane was delighted, but, with the exception of Lionel, the men of the family were so thoroughly convinced that poor Miss Scott was a dreadful sight, that they did not notice the change at all, while Lady Jane's interest in the cure she was effecting steadily increased. It is well known that a red nose is even harder to cure than a bad complexion, but she did not lose heart. Bottle after bottle of the wonderful lotion was sent to the governess's room, and Lady Jane was soon obliged to order a fresh supply from Paris. Her maid, who had been the first to discover that Ellen was a perfect lady, took a lively interest in the cure.

"It's a wonderful change for the better, miss, if I may say so," she said, "and it's a mercy that her ladyship happens to use the lotion, for I must say she never needed it

"'You mark my words, miss. The Lord knoweth his own.'"

in her life. But the Lord knoweth His own, miss, and Providence never meant that your sweet face should be spoilt by an ugly patch."

The maid was pious, and had reached that age at which piety has some chance of being permanent.

"It's very nice of you to take so much interest," answered Ellen, in the tone which had won the humbler part of the household from the first.

"And pray who wouldn't?" inquired the excellent woman. "Mark my words, miss," she added, as she went out, "the Lord knoweth His own."

Lionel was in the secret, of course, and watched the cure with secret delight and amusement. Evelyn and Gwendolen also noticed the change, and understood perfectly well that if the governess's nose paled to a natural colour, she would be decidedly

pretty, which was a consummation they devoutly wished. They were uncommonly good judges in those matters too, for they had long ago discovered that the amount of liberty they enjoyed was in direct proportion to the good looks of their governess for the time being, though the length of her stay with them was always inversely as her prettiness. Now Miss Scott had at first been terrible to them; but since she was going to be pretty, one of two things was sure to happen. If she stayed, their brothers would make claims upon her time out of school hours, which would leave them free to follow their own devices; but if she grew too pretty she would be sent away, and the two girls were quite sure that such another terror to their liberty could not be found in the three kingdoms, and that any change must be for the better.

At this stage in the cure of her complex-

ion the governess's lameness diminished perceptibly, and Lady Jane's sympathetic maid was sure that the misshapen shoulder was less apparent than before.

"If this goes on," said Evelyn to her sister in the privacy of their own room, "she won't stay long."

"She says the air's good for her," answered Gwendolen cheerfully. "I saw Claude staring at her yesterday. He had such a funny look."

"I know," answered Evelyn wisely. "That's always what they call the beginning of the end. I hope we shall have as long a holiday as last time."

"We'll have some jolly fishing," said Gwendolen. "I'll bet there are heaps of worms in the old corner by the rose bush now, for we haven't disturbed them for a long time."

"There are heaps of things I want to do," rejoined the elder girl in a musing tone. "The men are quite right, you know: fishing with worms isn't at all sporting. The real thing is a fly."

"But we've got no tackle for that," objected the junior partner. "I don't see what we can do."

"We'll cabbage it."

This well-known method of obtaining supplies of all sorts was familiar to Gwendolen, and she nodded gravely.

"There's another thing I must do," she said.

"I know," Evelyn said quickly: "it's the brown filly Jocelyn bought last month. I want to ride her too. We'll toss up for the first mount, as we always do."

"I was thinking," suggested the enterprising Gwendolen, "that if we could manage

to get her and Charley's Aunt out at the same time, when the men are at dinner, we could have a real steeplechase, straight across the park to the King's Oak and back to the stables again."

"That's an idea. Wouldn't they be horrified? They'd say it was awfully dangerous, in and out through the trees!"

"Oh, well," answered Gwendolen philosophically, "you can only break your neck once, you know."

It soon began to look as if these delightful dreams were to be realised, for Miss Scott's appearance improved at an almost phenomenal rate. She was so much better that she was able to put another shoe on her right foot, and the sole was not really very much thicker than the other. She had confessed to Lady Jane that she had not always been lame. It had come upon her very

suddenly one day, and she thought that the regular exercise with the girls had done her good; which was doubtless true, though it might be considered to be an independent proposition. Lady Jane was glad, because a lame governess always attracts attention, and that is just what a governess should not do. The good lady now conceived the idea of improving that poor Miss Scott's looks still further, by suggesting that she should put a little stuffing on the shoulder that was lower than the other. Ellen said she could do it herself, and she produced the desired effect, not by the means suggested, but by reducing the hump itself a very little, and afterwards a little more. At the same time, by some art she had doubtless learned in amateur theatricals, her clothes began to fit her better, until one day the Colonel came upon her accidentally when she was

getting a book in the library, standing on tiptoe and raising both her hands to reach a high shelf, a position which is usually trying to awkwardly made young women; and it suddenly occurred to the still susceptible father of all the Follitts that poor Miss Scott's figure was not really so bad after all.

"Won't you let me help you?" he asked, approaching her of his own accord for the first time since she had been in the house. "What book are you looking for?"

"Oh, thank you," Ellen answered, dropping her hands and colouring slightly, though merely from surprise. "If you would — it's the first volume of Macaulay's History. I'm just too short to reach it."

The Colonel was close to her now, and was looking at her curiously, but not without admiration. He had been vaguely aware

for some time past that her complexion had improved, but with him the habit of not looking at a plain young woman was very strong. What he now saw was a complete surprise. Poor Miss Scott's complexion was as clear and radiant as that of the girls themselves, her brown eyes were bright and soft, and though her thick hair was of no particular colour, it waved charmingly.

All this was so unexpected that Colonel Follitt positively stared at her, though quite unconsciously. But Ellen understood, and was not offended, though she turned to the books again to avoid his gaze. He was at once conscious of his own rudeness, and feared that he had made a bad impression, so he lost no time in getting down the volume that was just out of her reach.

By way of prolonging the interview, however, he made a great show of dusting it,

debating meanwhile whether it would be safe and wise to offer a little apology.

"I really didn't mean to be rude just now," he said with much humility, as he handed her the history. "Our Yorkshire air is doing you a lot of good, isn't it?"

Miss Scott smiled pleasantly, and might have made some answer, but at that moment Jocelyn entered through the open door, and saw the two standing close together in the bright light, directly before him. He suppressed an exclamation of surprise. It was not the first time that he had come upon his young-hearted parent in pleasant conversation with a pretty governess, but it was certainly the first time that he had thought Miss Scott in the least good-looking; for he had inherited his father's knack of keeping his eyes off such unpleasing sights as red noses and blotched cheeks. Besides, he had

in reality been too much occupied of late in admiring Anne Trevelyan to pay any attention to governesses. What he felt now was genuine surprise and nothing else, and he at once came nearer in order to inspect the phenomenon. His impassive face did not betray his thoughts. By the time he was close to the Colonel he had made sure that Miss Scott was really transformed from almost repulsive ugliness to undeniable prettiness, and he merely asked his father an unimportant question about the stables, and added that he had come to hunt up the pedigree of a certain Derby winner about which there had been a discussion in the mess-room after breakfast. For the library at King's Follitt contained a noble collection of turf annals.

But the Colonel's own mind was a perfect encyclopædia of such information, and be-

"'Where are the girls?' she inquired, in a frigid tone."

fore his son moved to get the volume, he was already running off the pedigree in question as glibly as a quick schoolboy would say the multiplication table.

And now another thing happened; for coincidences, like misfortunes, do not often come singly. Lady Jane herself made her appearance; and though she considered Miss Scott's cure to be due to her own kindly efforts, she had not fully realised the result until she saw the charming young face smiling in admiration at her husband's marvellous memory, while Jocelyn stole another glance at Ellen to convince himself that the amazing change was real. Lady Jane had come in almost noiselessly.

"Where are the girls?" she inquired, in a frigid tone.

The Colonel started as if he had heard a runaway motor-car close behind him in

the road, and even the impassive Jocelyn turned his face sharply towards his mother.

"The girls are in the schoolroom," answered Miss Scott, with smiling calm. "I came to find Macaulay's History for them, and the Colonel was good enough to get it down for me."

With this simple and truthful explanation she left the group and went away, taking the book with her.

But from that moment Lady Jane's peace of mind faded away like a pleasant dream, and the familiar spectre began to haunt her again with its green eyes and whispered suggestions. She was ashamed that her manner showed some change towards Miss Scott herself, but she could not help it. Only yesterday at luncheon she, too, had seen Claude looking steadily at the governess with that expression which the girls had at

once recognised — the alert glance and expectant readiness of the sportsman when birds are about; and now she had found two others of her flock in close conversation with the new charmer. As if that were not enough, she realised in a flash that this pretty creature was the undesirable governess whom her eldest son had been treating with so much kindness and familiarity for the sake of the learned and useful Herbert Scott. Coming upon her all at once, it was too much for Lady Jane to bear.

"I really think you might employ your time better," she said in icy tones, and thereupon she turned and went away, leaving the Colonel and Jocelyn together.

Ellen understood very well what had happened, and she regretted her readiness in submitting to the cure. Her life at King's Follitt had been very delightful,

and she foresaw that her stay was now to be limited. On the other hand, she had never intended that it should last very long, and she had meant from the first to leave as soon as she was sure of having made a good impression on Lady Jane. It looked as if the moment had now come, and she talked the matter over with Lionel. It was always easy enough to get rid of the girls for half an hour in the course of a walk; and two or three days after the little scene in the library, Lionel and Ellen were sitting together again, on the rock by the moorland road, while Evelyn and Gwendolen tickled trout in the pool below on the other side of the knoll.

"I must do one of two things," Ellen said: "I must either redden my nose and go lame again, or I must go away, since I have ceased to be undesirable."

Lionel looked at her, and then at the ground, and was silent. He meant to marry her before long, but he was inclined to put off the moment when he must tell his father and mother of his intention. The Follitts were not timid people, as a family, and, in spite of his mild ways, the Colonel had distinguished himself in active service; but they were not more remarkable for moral courage than average people usually are, which was one reason why everybody liked them. People with noble qualities are sometimes very hard to live with: the daily exhibition of self-control is both discouraging and fatiguing to ordinary people who have not much of it, and those superior individuals who have no moral timidity rarely hesitate to show us what poor creatures we really are. In this respect Lionel, as well as his father and brother, was very like ordinary

people. But Lady Jane was not, and they knew it, and their genuine affection was tempered by a wholesome dread.

"Which shall it be?" Ellen asked, after a long time.

"Which would you rather do?" asked Lionel weakly.

This time it was she who glanced at Lionel and looked down; but she was not silent, as he had been. "I should like you to make up my mind for me," she said, in a rather low voice.

He knew what that meant, but it no more occurred to him that she was pressing him to make a much more important decision than such a thought had crossed her own mind. The words had come quite naturally, and they were the right ones under the circumstances. Lionel knew that it was time to act if he was not a coward, and the

moral timidity of the Follitts had never gone so far as that. They would all put off a difficult interview or a disagreeable scene as long as possible, but when it was positively necessary to stand up for their beliefs, or their likes or dislikes, they did not run away.

"We must be married in June," Lionel said, after a moment's thought. "In the meantime you had better go back to your father and leave me to settle matters with my mother. It has been an amusing little comedy, and no one need ever know the truth but you and I. To begin it over again would not be worthy of you, and I should be a brute if I allowed it. Besides, I am sure those girls would find you out."

"That's very likely," answered Ellen.

"My mother has grown very fond of you, too, and though she is afraid that we shall all make love to you if you stay,

the good impression will remain if you leave, and that's something, after all."

"She will never consent to your marrying a foundling," Ellen said gravely. "That will be the real difficulty."

"Why need she know that you are not really Herbert Scott's daughter?"

"Because I won't marry you unless she knows the whole truth," answered Ellen with determination. "She will probably be very angry in any case, but she will forgive us in time. Don't you see how dreadful it would be if there should be something more to tell after she has accepted the situation?"

Lionel saw that she was right, and made up his mind to face the whole difficulty at once. He said so.

"Then I'll speak to Lady Jane to-morrow morning," Ellen said. "She will probably be only too glad to let me go at once."

"You may be sure of that!" laughed Lionel, for she had told him what had taken place in the library.

"Then this is going to be good-bye until you come to town again?" she said, rather sadly.

"I suppose so," Lionel admitted disconsolately.

They looked at each other a moment.

"Are you quite — quite sure that you want it?" she asked presently.

"Quite sure," he answered, without hesitation.

"Because men have done such things and have been sorry afterwards. Since I've been here I've understood that it's not going to be nearly so easy for you as I had thought. I've not spoken about it, but I must before you take the final step. It's all so different from what I had expected, or even dreamed of."

"What is different?" Lionel asked.

"The way you live. You see, you never told me anything about it. You only said that your father was a country gentleman, decently well off, and that you could give yourself up to study because you would have enough to live on. You never gave me the least idea that you were very rich people, nor that it was a great old estate and entailed, and all that sort of thing. It makes a difference, you know."

"I don't see why," Lionel objected.

"I do. It's one thing for the son of a quiet, retired officer of no particular position to marry a foundling and a governess. It's quite another, now that you turn out to be great country people, related to half the peerage, and perfectly frightfully rich. I wish you were not."

Lionel laughed. "If I were not," he

answered, "I should not be able to do as I please without asking leave of any one. I should have to go to work to earn our living, and I have not the faintest idea how I should do that. As a matter of fact, I should not have had the right to ask you to marry me, just for the pleasure of starving together."

"That would be better than nothing," answered Ellen, without much reflection. "As it is, I am not sure that I have a right to marry you — though I will, if you'll have me! Every one will call me a scheming adventuress."

"I think not," said Lionel, and his rather gentle and melancholy face grew suddenly obdurate and almost remorseless. "Of course there will be one row and a general exchange of pleasant family amenities. But there will never be another."

"And what will happen if I change my

mind, and tell you that it has all been a mistake, and that I think it would be very wrong of me to marry you, because I should ruin your life?"

"I don't know what would happen," Lionel answered, with a confident smile. "You had better ask a dramatist or a man who writes novels."

He was right in that, for they were the least dramatic pair in the world, and Lionel's courtship had been of the simplest and most conventional sort. Their affection for each other had begun quietly, and had grown the more steadily and strongly for having been quite undisturbed, until it had entirely absorbed their two existences into one growth. The idea of separation seemed as absurd to them now as that the law of gravity should be suddenly reversed, or that trees should grow upside down. They did not realise

that such attachments really have in them the character of fate — the very kind which most surely ends in tragedy when it does not lead to perfect happiness.

Even now, when action was unavoidable and the first great moment seemed to be at hand, they parted without much show of feeling. Each felt perfectly sure of the other, and both were certain that there would not be many more partings.

CHAPTER VI

ELLEN knocked at the door of Lady Jane's morning room and composed her face for the coming interview. She was quite sure that her request to be allowed to leave at once would be granted with enthusiasm, but it was necessary to play her little part with circumspection and dignity.

She found Lady Jane armed to the teeth: to be plain, she was dressed for motoring, and presented a formidable appearance, besides being evidently in a hurry. But Miss Scott was not intimidated; on the contrary, she judged that the interview would be the sooner over.

"I've come to ask if you will let me off my

engagement, and allow me to go home," she said quietly.

Lady Jane stared hard at her for a moment, before speaking.

"Why?"

That was all; but the question was not exactly easy to answer, and she was quite unprepared for it.

"I shall be very grateful if you will let me go," she said.

"But why? You must have a reason, and I think I have a right to know what it is."

Ellen felt inclined to recall to Lady Jane the tone of the advertisement, but was afraid that she might be thought vain of her present improved appearance.

"You have been very kind to me," she said, after a moment's thought; "I shall never forget it. But the greatest kindness of all will be to let me go home."

Lady Jane was still standing; she made a step forward, so that she was quite close to the governess, and she gazed steadily into her eyes.

"Some one has annoyed you," she said suddenly, with great decision. "I am quite sure of it. No, my dear, you need not shake your head. I know it. The fact is, that from being perfectly" — she was going to say hideous, but checked herself — "from being distinctly plain, you have grown to be as pretty as a picture! And the usual result has followed! You've turned all their heads!"

"Really, Lady Jane!" cried Miss Scott in a tone of deprecation, and she could not help blushing in the most charming way possible.

"It's quite true." Lady Jane sat down and looked disconsolately at her neat gaiters.

"It's all my fault for giving you my lotion and making you dress better," she added, evidently in extreme dejection.

Ellen bit her lip. "I can't help being grateful to you for it," she said.

"The worst of it is that I've grown to like you," responded Lady Jane in evident despair. "If it was only because you're such a good governess, and have such wonderful influence over the girls, it wouldn't matter much, would it?"

Ellen smiled, in spite of herself, but could find nothing to say.

"You see," Lady Jane continued, "I have never had a governess I liked, till now. If you knew what I've been through with them! There was that Miss Kirk, with her violet eyes — oh, that Miss Kirk! I wonder I did not beat her! One of the most delightful moments of my life was

when I told her to go. But you! You're the ideal! What possessed me, to give you my lotion! I might have known it would cure you."

She was really distressed, but Miss Scott did not know what to say.

"I saw it coming," Lady Jane went on, presently. "I've seen this coming for days and days! Why in the world must all my men be such utter butterflies — the whole hive of them! I mean — of course, butterflies don't live in hives, do they? — oh, you know what I mean! But when I saw how well you behaved — with such dignity, so unlike that Miss Kirk — well, I thought you would give them all a lesson, and that there would be peace. But I suppose that was impossible."

"But it's not that, I assure you," objected Ellen.

"Nonsense! It's very nice of you to say so, of course, and you may be sure that I shall not ask you to go into details. That wouldn't be quite nice of me, would it? But you can't go! You simply can't, for I won't let you; and I'm sure I don't know what is to be done if you stay."

"I really think I must go, Lady Jane."

"Oh, no!" cried Lady Jane, with the utmost decision. "That's quite ridiculous, you know, so we needn't talk about it. The question is, what will happen next? Do you think, perhaps, that if you stop using the lotion, your complexion will — er ——"

"Get blotchy again?" asked Ellen, completing the sentence. "It may, I suppose; but I think the thing is quite gone. Will you look at my cheek?"

Lady Jane bent down a little, for she was

much the taller, and carefully examined the cheek in question, poking it with one of her heavily gloved fingers.

"No," she said regretfully, "it's just like a healthy baby's. Of course," she added, with what seemed a happy inspiration, "you could do your hair as you used to again, like a skinned rabbit. And I suppose you could wear your clothes in a bunch; and it's not necessary for your health for you to stuff out your shoulder. By-the-bye, it's awfully well done!"

She put out her hands with the evident intention of touching the stuffing; but as there was none, Ellen sprang back, dodging away from her and laughing.

"Oh, please don't!" she cried.

"What's the matter?" asked Lady Jane in surprise.

"I'm so dreadfully ticklish about the

neck! I really cannot bear to have any one touch me. I should have a fit!"

"How very odd! Were you always like that? But some people are. Never mind, I won't touch you, my dear. Only, if you were willing just to make those little changes in your appearance — er — it's a great deal to ask, I suppose, isn't it?"

"Well — frankly, it is, Lady Jane," Ellen laughed, in spite of herself.

But she was immensely disturbed by the unexpected difficulty that faced her, and she had a vision of being obliged to run away as the only means of escaping.

"I don't see what else we can do," returned Lady Jane. "As for parting with you, it's out of the question. My girls are different beings since you have had them in hand. If you knew what my life has been, since they were out of the nursery, compared

with what it is now, you really wouldn't have the heart to talk of leaving me, nor the conscience either!"

"I'm very, very glad that you are pleased," Ellen answered, with an air of meek gratitude, "but I assure you I must ——"

"No doubt, but you shan't, my dear, and there's an end of it!" Lady Jane was ready to lose her temper, but laughed to hide the fact. "It's out of the question at this moment," she continued. "We are all going off to-day, and you must see yourself that the girls cannot be left alone in the house with Lionel! They would set the place on fire, or go to town by themselves and get lost, or do some dreadful thing. Don't you see?"

"I did not know you were all going away," said Ellen, somewhat disturbed.

"Yes. We only made up our minds last

night, or I would have told you. Jocelyn is going up with the Trevelyans in their balloon to-morrow morning, and my husband and I want to see the start; and Claude is to play for Yorkshire at Lords to-morrow, and when we've seen the ascent, the Colonel wants to watch the match, and I mean to chase the balloon in the new motor. I've got an electric searchlight, with accumulators, fitted up so that I can see it all night. Rather sporting, that, isn't it? We may fetch up at John O'Groat's House, or at Land's End, you know — so delightfully uncertain — you cannot tell which way the thing will go. But just fancy my anxiety if I knew all the time that those little pickles were riding steeplechases in the park, or motoring across country and breaking their necks. It's too awful to think of!"

"Quite too dreadful," assented Ellen.

"But you won't be away long, I suppose? I will stay till you come home, at all events, if you wish it."

"Wish it? I should think I did! Besides, you must, my dear. So that's settled, and we'll be off, for it's getting late."

A quarter of an hour later the huge motor was bowling down the Malton road, and King's Follitt was left to Lionel, Miss Scott, and the two girls, very much to the surprise of all four. For on the previous evening Lionel had gone off to his books soon after dinner, and had finished breakfast with his sisters and the governess before any of the others appeared. Indeed, it was not till luncheon that he knew of their abrupt departure.

At the first opportunity, Ellen told him about the interview in the morning, and added that she meant to disappear as soon

as the family returned. That would be the only way open to her.

Lionel was as much surprised as she had been by Lady Jane's attitude, but it seemed promising for the future. At all events, when the time came for him to declare his intention of marrying Miss Scott, he could remind his mother that she had liked Ellen for her own sake; and as she was a truthful and just woman, she would not deny it. That would be something, at all events: matters would have been far worse if she had hated the governess, as she had hated the former ones, each and all.

"We must be married in June," Lionel said again, for having once made up his mind he was not likely to change it. "We will spend the summer abroad, and go to India next winter. By that time they will

have got used to the idea, and a year hence we can come home."

"That sounds delightful," Ellen answered. "I wish we could take my father, for no one knows India as he does. But then, we couldn't be alone all the time, if he came."

"I should like to take him," said Lionel. "Perhaps we could bargain for so many hours a day!"

But they did not take Mr. Herbert Scott of the British Museum to India, or anywhere else; for things turned out very differently. The Fate of the Follitts had been dozing comfortably for some time, but now she suddenly woke up refreshed with sleep, and got into the balloon with Jocelyn and the Trevelyans, and did queer things, which nobody else could have done.

CHAPTER VII

THE wind was fresh from the south-west, with rain, and the night was dark. The balloon was driving along at a dangerous rate, considering the low altitude.

"I give it up," said Bob Trevelyan, who had not spoken for a long time. "We've been travelling five hours, and I haven't the vaguest idea where we are."

"Does it matter much?" inquired Jocelyn lazily.

For he was comfortable where he was, and hoped that it would go on a long time, since he was pleasantly close to Anne Trevelyan in the bottom of the car. No one who has not been up in a gale can have any

idea of the profound quiet which seems to enfold the balloon as it is borne noiselessly along in the arms of the wind, perhaps at thirty or forty miles an hour. If it rains, you hear the drops pattering on the envelope overhead; if you are near the ground at night, the howling of the wind through the unseen trees comes up to you in a rather dismal way; but no matter how hard it blows, there is peace and tranquillity in the car.

Anne Trevelyan and her friend Lady Dorothy Wynne were poring over a map, by the light of an electric lamp which Jocelyn held for them.

"It might matter a little," Anne said, looking up with a laugh as she spoke; "for the only thing that is quite certain is that we are bound to get to the sea pretty soon. I think I'll have a look."

She got up, and all three scrambled to their feet and peered over the edge of the car.

"It really is rather a dirty night," observed Lady Dorothy, with great calm.

"Distinctly," said Anne, admitting what could not be denied.

Jocelyn said nothing, for he knew that a woman who is inaccessible to physical fear is much more reckless than any brave and sensible man has a right to be, and he was beginning to wonder what the end would be like, and how many arms and legs, or even necks, would be broken before morning. For it was his first ascent, and though he was not scared he realised that there was danger.

There had been a good deal of delay at the start, and the breeze had been light from the south during most of the afternoon, though the sky had been threatening. The wind had strengthened, however, as it hauled

to the south-west, and at dusk it had freshened to a gale. Then the darkness had come on quickly, almost suddenly, as it does even on land, when the sky blackens with heavy clouds just at sunset. It was now quite impossible to distinguish anything on the face of the earth below, but all around the horizon there was a faint belt of grey, which was not light, but was not quite pitch darkness. The ominous moaning of the wind amongst the trees began to make itself heard.

"It's not wildly gay here," said Lady Dorothy. "Can't you manage to get above the clouds?"

Bob pointed to the inky sky overhead. "Those clouds are half a mile thick," he said quietly. "There you are! We're in another!"

"How are we off for ballast?" inquired Anne, as the chilly fog filled the car.

"Six bags gone already, and only two left," Bob answered with grim calm.

"Not really?" cried Dorothy in some dismay.

"Yes. How can you expect any balloon to keep up in this rain? She's being battered down by it. We are getting lower every minute."

At that moment the balloon shivered like a live thing, and flapped her loose sides. Bob shovelled some sand overboard.

"We'll keep the last bag," he said; "but to-morrow's breakfast must go. Pass me the bottle of milk — that's heavy."

Jocelyn got a big stoneware bottle from the basket by the light of the electric lamp, and gave it to Trevelyan.

"Don't murder anybody below," he said.

Bob dropped the thing overboard, and almost immediately a dull thud was heard

out of the darkness as it struck the earth. But there was no sound of breaking; they were over a meadow or a ploughed field.

"Give me that pie," said Bob. "Wasn't there a magnum of champagne somewhere? It's got to go too."

"Hullo! What's that?" cried Anne joyfully. "I believe it's the moon, and we're out of the clouds!"

"By Jove!" ejaculated Jocelyn, who was not easily surprised, and was not at all enthusiastic about the beauties of nature.

The inky cloud had not been so deep as Bob had supposed, and the balloon, responding the instant her ballast was lightened, had struck upwards to the clear outer air; the moon had risen, and was still almost full, and in the far sky, beyond her radiance, the stars twinkled softly as on a summer night.

The four young people almost held their

"The huge black shadow of the balloon ran swiftly over it."

breath while they were silently borne along in a vision of transcendent beauty. Beneath them, the dark clouds had been whirling in the gale that tore and churned and wrung them with its unseen airy hands; above, there was the peace of heaven itself and the loveliness of earth's first moonlight on the evening after the first day. The moving mass of cloud below looked suddenly motionless, vast and solid as grey rock, and the huge black shadow of the balloon and the car ran swiftly over it, clear and sharply outlined.

It only lasted a few minutes, for the heavy rain had soaked everything and a descent was inevitable. Soon the wet fog rose and closed overhead again, the moon took strange opalescent colours, and was dimmed and then disappeared, as the balloon sank steadily into the storm.

"If we had only had a fine night, we could have got to Scotland," said Dorothy Wynne, in a tone of profound regret.

"Don't you be too sure!" answered Bob. "With this wind it looks more like the North Sea!"

"Then if our ballast had held out we could have got across to Norway," retorted the young lady, who was not to be daunted by trifles.

But at this moment the car jerked violently, throwing all its four occupants against one side of itself. It turned and rolled and jumped like a skiff in a breaking sea.

"Hang on, girls!" cried Bob Trevelyan. "We're on our trial rope already!"

The two young women were already hanging on by the rigging for dear life; and Jocelyn was making it especially easy for Anne to hang on. Indeed, she had a sen-

sation which was very like being carried along in his arms — which surprised her, for she knew she was not particularly light in spite of her slim waist. A slender ash sapling can be as heavy as a common pine nearly twice its size.

Presently the jerking was varied by a violent wrench, which laid the car on its side, and almost upset it.

"Bad for that tree-top," observed Bob, as the balloon sailed away again. "What next, I wonder? Does any one see anything? One ought to, with that moon up there; but it's as dark as Erebus."

"It's the blackest moonlight night I've ever known," laughed Anne.

Possibly she found it more amusing than the other did, and she certainly felt more safe than Lady Dorothy possibly could. Jocelyn was a surprisingly strong young

man, and may have exaggerated her danger a little.

"I believe we are over a desert island," said her friend cheerfully. "I've not seen any lights for an age."

The conversation was interrupted by a tremendous wrench, and the car was wrestling with another tree-top.

"That was a rather thrilling moment!" laughed Anne Trevelyan.

"I tell you what," said Bob, not laughing at all, "at the first open space we come to, down we go! We're sinking every minute, and I don't want to stop her with my nose against the next oak we strike."

He spoke quietly, but the others understood their danger, and all four peered down over the edge of the car in breathless silence, while the balloon moved on in a series of irregular bounds, as the trail-rope

encountered more or less resistance. A faint grey line now became visible ahead, where the belt of trees ended.

"If we clear the trees, I'll pop the valve," said Bob quietly. "There must be open ground beyond. Be ready with the anchor, Anne; Jocelyn will help you. It's a night for the ripping line, and I'll manage that myself."

All four clung to the rigging in silence for some moments. Then the report of the suddenly opened valve rang through the air like a muffled gunshot. Two seconds passed, not more, and Bob ripped.

"Look out for the bump, girls!"

The fast sinking car descended, slanting on the wind, till it struck the ground with considerable force and was instantly overturned. The four clung on with all their might, almost where they were, while Tre-

velyan ripped again; the balloon swayed wildly, darted forward a couple of yards, wrenching the car along after it, and then collapsed like a dying game-cock.

Bob crawled out of the wreck first, and then helped the others, and in the gloom the two young girls silently straightened their hats; for that is the first impulse of feminine humanity after an accident. If a woman could be raised from the dead by radium, which begins to look possible, she would straighten her hat before doing anything else.

"This is all very well, but where are we?" asked Lady Dorothy, as soon as that was done.

"In a meadow," answered Jocelyn. "Lucky it's not a ploughed field."

"What a night!" groaned the young girl.

For they had been dry and comfortable under the vast shelter of the inflated balloon, but they were now almost instantly soaked through and through by the lashing rain, and the two girls staggered as they stood up and faced the raging gale. Again Jocelyn's arm was very useful to Miss Anne.

"We must make for shelter at once," her brother said. "After all, we are in England, and we can't be very far from civilisation. No one will steal the balloon on a night like this."

"The old thing looks comfortable enough," observed Jocelyn. "Rather done, though!"

He and Anne followed her brother and Dorothy, who led the way, linking arms and bending their heads to the storm, while they waded through what felt like a field of wet bathing sponges. Against the dim grey

light they could see the trees over which they had lately passed, writhing and twisting in the gale.

"If this is a meadow, it's a pretty big one," said Anne.

At that moment Bob uttered an exclamation: he and his companion had struck a narrow path covered with fine white gravel that gleamed in the uncertain light.

"We're in a park!" cried Trevelyan. "What luck! That means a good-sized house, at all events."

"And a possible dinner," added Lady Dorothy cheerfully.

But Jocelyn and Anne said nothing, because they were so busy in helping each other to walk. All four tramped steadily along the path for a couple of hundred yards or more, till they brought up short before an insurmountable obstacle that sud-

denly loomed up out of the dark; it was nothing less than a stone wall, at least fifteen feet high, which evidently enclosed the grounds, and seemed to be topped by a row of murderous-looking split spikes. The path turned aside some twenty feet from it, and seemed to wander away aimlessly towards the trees.

"This is an odd sort of place we've dropped into!" said Lady Dorothy; and all four stood in a row and stared at the forbidding wall.

"They evidently don't encourage trespassers," observed Trevelyan.

"Only an idiot would waste all that money," said Jocelyn, who was still hard up, and momentarily looked at everything from the financial point of view.

"I rather wish we were on the other side of it," Anne said.

"You'll be left waiting, dear," answered Lady Dorothy, who adored American slang.

"Follow the path," Jocelyn advised. "It must lead to the house in the end."

There was clearly nothing else to be done, and for some minutes no sound was heard but the regular tread of four pairs of strong shoes crunching the fine gravel, and the swish of the driving rain, and the howling of the wind in the trees not far off. They could still see the wall stretching away into the gloom.

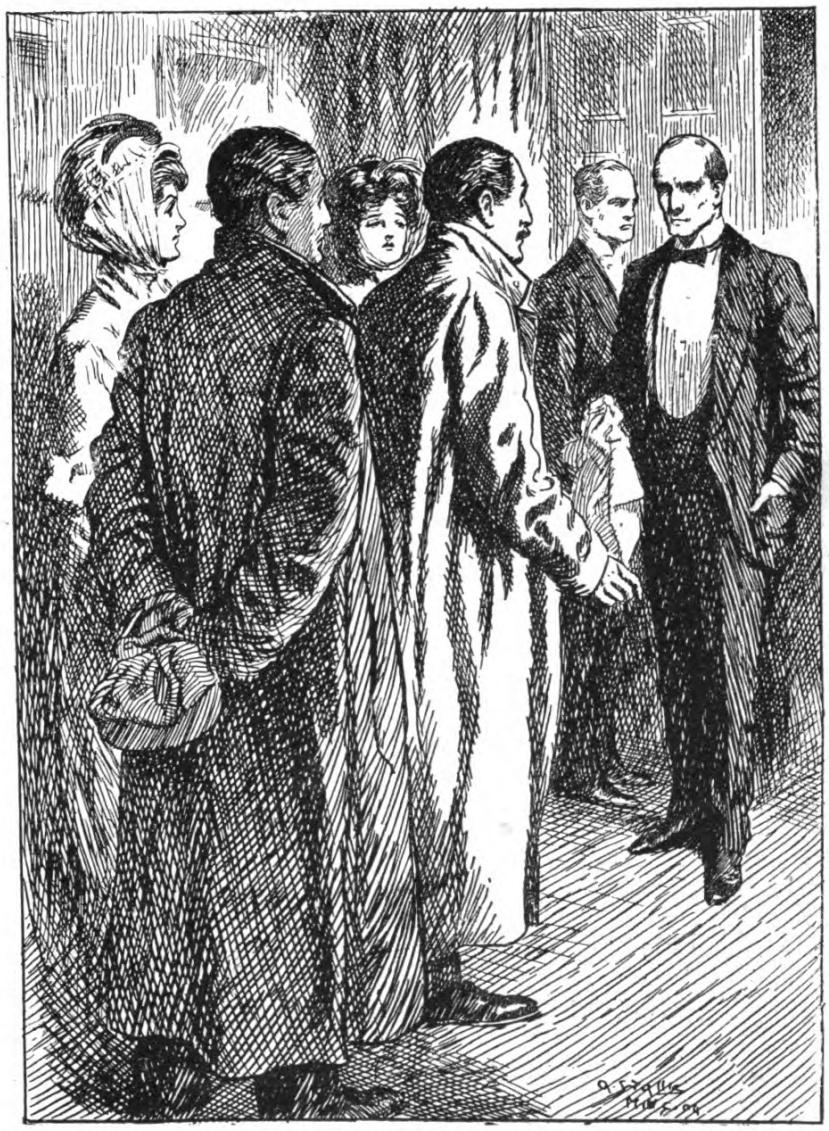
Suddenly, there were lights in the distance, and a big house loomed against the stormy sky; an ugly, square, uninviting house, as they saw in a few minutes, for the sight had revived their spirits, and they walked faster. Before long they struck the drive, towards which the path led, and across the gravelled space to the front door.

Trevelyan rang, and the others huddled round him on the steps, to get shelter from the rain.

A footman in a quiet brown livery opened in a few moments, and they did not notice that he seemed exceedingly surprised when he saw them; indeed, his astonishment was altogether out of proportion to the circumstances, for his jaw dropped, and he gasped audibly. All the four were dazzled by the blaze of light from the vestibule, after having been so long out of doors in the dark, and did not notice the man's manner. Trevelyan at once explained what brought them; and as soon as the footman understood, he let them in, shut and locked the door, put the key in his pocket, and went off, muttering something about the master of the house.

A few moments later the latter appeared

in person, in evening dress, and carrying his napkin in his hand, having evidently left his dinner in the utmost haste. Though tired and half stupefied by the storm, the four aeronauts were strongly impressed by his personality. He was by no means an ill-looking man, yet there was something extraordinary and almost terrifying in his appearance. He was tall, lean, strongly made, and of a dark complexion, with smooth iron-grey hair; his jaw was broad and square, his lips thin and determined. One sees many such men in England, but not with eyes like his. They were round, but deep-set, and they were at once luminous and hard, like those of the nobler birds of prey. I know a tamer of wild beasts who has just such eyes as those; one would almost say that he could not shut the lids if he tried, even for sleep, and it is easy to



"'We are awfully sorry to intrude on your privacy in this way,' he said."

understand why the big tigers slink down and crouch under them, watching him cautiously, as if his look would kill.

Trevelyan spoke first. "We are awfully sorry to intrude on your privacy in this way," he said, remembering the spiked wall of the park, and reflecting that it looked as forbidding as its owner. "We are balloonists, and were caught in the storm, and had to come down where we could, for fear of being blown out to sea — and it happened to be in your grounds. Is the sea far off?"

"A quarter of a mile," answered the master of the house, in a deep, quiet voice, much as a tamer speaks to his lions.

Anne and Dorothy exchanged glances.

"Then, considering what a narrow escape we've had," Trevelyan continued, "I hope you won't mind our having trespassed."

At the last word a smile dawned on the grim face of the master of the house. "I fancy you are the first people who have ever succeeded in trespassing here," he said.

"I should think so!" cried Lady Dorothy. "We saw your wall."

They were beginning to think it strange that they were not asked to come in, and Trevelyan was a trifle impatient. "Should you mind very much if we came in and dried ourselves a bit?" he asked. "The ladies are soaking."

"And I am very sorry to bother you," added Dorothy, "but really we are starving. We had to throw all our eatables overboard as ballast, you see."

The master of the house did not answer at once, and seemed absorbed in his reflections. He thoughtfully stroked his long upper lip. "By all means," he said at last,

very slowly. "Of course! Come in, and make yourselves as comfortable as you can."

The vestibule in which this conversation had taken place opened upon a hall of moderate size and plainly furnished, where a coal fire was burning brightly. The host drew aside to let them pass in, and they began to warm themselves. He looked up, apparently in some inexplicable perplexity.

"Where have you come from?" he asked.

"From London," Trevelyan answered. "Is there any way of going back to-night? By-the-bye, where are we?"

"You're in Yorkshire, and the nearest station is Hamley, six miles from here."

"By Jove!" ejaculated Jocelyn, on learning that he was not forty miles from King's Follitt. "What's the last train to York?"

"Eight thirty-seven," answered the host, and he looked at his watch. "It's almost that now. No train before to-morrow morning, I'm sorry to say. You're nearly five miles from any other house, too."

Then Lady Dorothy Wynne, who had a sweet low voice, turned it to its most persuasive tone. "I'm very, very sorry," she said, "but I'm afraid we shall have to trespass on your kindness still further, and ask shelter for the night."

Again the master of the house stroked his upper lip with a thoughtful expression before answering. His reluctance to offer any hospitality to the dripping party was quite apparent, and he looked at the waiting footman, who looked at him.

From far away the sound of voices, talking and laughing, reached the hall in the silence that followed Dorothy's speech.

Clearly there was a large party at dinner.

"By all means! Of course!" The host used the very words he had used before. "I can certainly put you up, though I've rather a large party in the house. Never mind; there is always room for more. John, call Mrs. Williams."

During the footman's absence Trevelyan thought it was at last time to introduce the party. "My name is Trevelyan," he said. "This is Lady Dorothy Wynne, and this is my sister."

"My name is Follitt," said Jocelyn, speaking for himself.

The man's peculiar eyes turned from one face to the other as he heard the names, and nodded slightly. A tamer might inspect a new set of wild beasts with much the same look while making up his mind

how to treat each. "My name is Steele," he answered. "I hope you will soon be none the worse for your wetting."

The arrival of Mrs. Williams at this juncture rendered an answer unnecessary. She looked half a governess and half a housekeeper; she was a quiet, superior sort of person, with a stiff starched collar and gold-rimmed eye-glasses, and she wore a black silk dress, with a large bunch of keys at her side.

Mr. Steele spoke to her very slowly and distinctly. "These ladies and gentlemen," he said, "have descended in the grounds with their balloon. There is no train to-night, as you know, and there is no other place to which they can go, so they must tarry here till to-morrow morning. There are still some empty bedrooms, I think?"

"Three, sir. There are Five, Six, and Seven in the new wing unoccupied."

Mr. Steele nodded, and looked at Mrs. Williams, and then at the footman. Trevelyan was sure that they exchanged a glance of intelligence.

"You may find my house-party rather mixed," said the host, almost with geniality, now that he had at last made up his mind. "The fact is, I have a sort of gathering of relations and distant connections. I like to see many people about me, of all ages. You won't mind dining with us? We had just sat down when you came, so that there is plenty of time. I daresay you will be glad to go to bed directly afterwards. You must be very tired, I'm sure."

He said a few words to Mrs. Williams in an undertone, leading the way with her to the stairs, and she answered by a quick

succession of nods. The others followed, and went up after her, while Mr. Steele went back to his guests.

The bedrooms to which the housekeeper showed the party lacked individuality, and though they were thoroughly comfortable, there was not the least attempt at luxury, or even good taste. The furniture was new, but very plain, and the chintz was fresh, but utterly uninteresting, if not quite hideous. A few cheap prints hung on the walls.

"I'm sure there's no lady of the house," said Anne to Dorothy, and she proceeded to extract information from the housekeeper.

Mr. Steele was not married. He had no near relations — at least, not in the house; but he liked to be surrounded by many people, and the place was generally full. Mrs. Williams would say no more,

or possibly there was nothing more to be said; but she did her best to make the newcomers comfortable, and produced dry skirts and shoes for the ladies.

A few minutes later they were all ushered into the dining-room, where at least five-and-twenty men were seated at a big table. All turned their heads and looked curiously at the newly-arrived guests.

Mr. Steele rose to meet the latter as they entered. There were four vacant places on his left.

"Will you and Miss Trevelyan sit together by me," he said, speaking to Lady Dorothy, "and the two gentlemen beyond?"

The arrangement seemed a singular one; but the four took their seats, and as Jocelyn slipped in next to Anne, her brother was the only one who found himself beside a stranger.

He glanced at his neighbour, who was a mild-eyed, benevolent old gentleman, whose smooth grey hair was neatly parted and brushed over his ears. He wore a single stud with a large carbuncle set in it, and he had black silk mittens on his bony little hands. He returned Trevelyan's glance pleasantly, and then went on eating his fish with a faint smile.

Mr. Steele began to talk with Lady Dorothy, and though his voice was not loud, it seemed to dominate the conversation as far as she was concerned, so that she heard no one else.

"May I ask if Mr. and Miss Trevelyan are connected with the Dorsetshire family of that name?" he inquired, after a few preliminary phrases.

"They are the Dorsetshire Trevelyans themselves," answered Lady Dorothy. "He is the eldest son."

"Oh, indeed — indeed," repeated Mr. Steele, thoughtfully. "Thank you," he added quietly; "it was mere curiosity. Do you go in for any sport besides ballooning? Golf, for instance? We have excellent links here, and we play a good deal." He spoke louder, and looked down the table. "Mr. Weede over there is one of our crack players."

At this remark a pale young clergyman in spectacles, who sat at the other end of the table, looked up with a deprecatory smile.

"You will make me vain of my poor accomplishment, if you say such things," he said humbly. "Remember the Preacher, Mr. Steele: 'Vanity of vanities, all is not vanity that glitters!'"

Lady Dorothy laughed kindly in an encouraging way, because he seemed so humble.

But every one at once began to talk of golf, almost excitedly.

"My friends are almost all very fond of out-of-door games," said Mr. Steele to Lady Dorothy, as if in explanation.

"Do you mind telling me who that good-looking man is?" she asked. "The third from the other end on the left? The one with the grey moustache and a tired face, who looks like an old soldier."

"Trevelyan is his name, and he is an old army man. But do tell me something about your trip," Mr. Steele went on quickly: "you must have had a terrible time of it in such a storm."

"It wasn't very successful," the young girl answered carelessly; "but we get used to all sorts of weather in balloons, you know. The last time I was up, we came down rather suddenly in a cricket field where there

was a match going on. I remember that I got some most extraordinary bruises! I can't help looking at that man — Mr. Trevelyan, you say he is. I see why you asked about my friend here — they may be connections. Where does this one belong?"

"He's a Lincolnshire man," answered the host briefly, and as if he did not care about him.

"Oh, the 'mad' Trevelyans, we call them! Then he is really a connection of my friend. Their grandfathers were cousins, I believe. What is this one's first name?"

"Randolph, I believe. I've never made an ascent in a balloon. I should really like to know whether it's a new sensation worth trying. Do you mind telling me how it struck you, the first time you rose above a cloud?"

"Cosy," Lady Dorothy answered without hesitation — "distinctly cosy! There's never any tiresome wind in a balloon, you know, as there is on a yacht, to blow you about. It goes along with you, and it's so amusing to travel very fast and yet not feel that you are moving at all. And there's always some excitement when you come down, for it's never twice alike, and of course bones are only bones after all, and you always may break one or two. I suppose that's where the sport comes in."

At this moment a distant peal of thunder was heard above the general conversation. Lady Dorothy looked at her host, as if expecting him to say something in answer to her explanations; but his expression had changed, and he seemed suddenly preoccupied.

"I'm glad we're not in the balloon now,"

she said. "The gale is going to end in a regular thunderstorm!"

Mr. Steele was speaking to the butler in a low voice. "Have those curtains drawn closer," Lady Dorothy heard him say, "and be quick as you can with the rest of the dinner!"

It was clear that either he, or some of his guests, were nervous about thunder and lightning. A second peal, much nearer than the first, made the windows rattle. The conversation, which had already dropped to a lower key, now ceased altogether, and a sort of embarrassed silence followed, while most of the diners glanced nervously round the room and towards the tall windows. Mr. Steele looked as if he were bracing himself to meet an unexpected danger; his brows were knitted, his stern mouth was tightly shut, and he was evi-

dently scanning the faces of his guests with anxiety.

"Do you often have bad thunderstorms here?" Lady Dorothy asked, to attract his attention and break the silence.

"Seldom," he answered abstractedly, and not looking at her. "Most of my guests dislike them very much."

"How very odd!"

She glanced down the table, and saw the nice-looking Mr. Trevelyan leaning far back in his chair, his eyes half closed and his face very white.

Mr. Steele made an attempt to revive the conversation, talking in loud tones to the whole table about a lawn tennis tournament, for which he said there would be a number of pretty prizes.

Bob Trevelyan was eating steadily, and took no interest in what was going on.

Suddenly he felt that the benevolent old gentleman was plucking at his sleeve very quietly. He turned, and saw that his neighbour was earnestly gazing at him. At that moment a third peal rang out, and the glasses on the table trembled.

"Did he tell you who I am?" asked the old gentleman in an undertone, and bending his head towards the master of the house.

"I beg your pardon: no — I don't think I was introduced," Bob answered.

"He would have told you that I am Mr. Simpson; and so I was," said the grey-haired man. "But that," he added in low and tragic tones, "was by another mother. I am the Dowager Empress of China, and I am here incognito, disguised as a man."

"What in the world do you mean?" asked Trevelyan, very much taken aback.

"It is a sad story, and a long one." The old gentleman shook his head mysteriously. "They thought I took too active a part in politics. Possibly I did, but at the time of the Boxer riots many outrageous doings were unjustly traced to me. I give you my solemn assurance, on the word of an empress, that I did not order the attack on the Legations! Do you believe me, or not?"

He gazed at Bob with fixed eyes, but Trevelyan could only stare back in blank surprise.

"They brought me here in tea chests," he continued earnestly, "disguised as a Chinese idol. It was a terrible humiliation. The Empress-mother in Pekin, who gives audiences, is a painted doll with a gramophone inside her, which quite accounts for her remarkably accurate memory."

Mr. Steele overheard this singular statement. "Really, Mr. Simpson," he said in stern tones, "I must beg you not to poke fun at Mr. Trevelyan."

"Trevelyan!" cried the nice-looking man at the other end, bending forward in his chair to see Bob's face. "Did you say Trevelyan?"

"Yes," Bob answered, also leaning forward — "that's my name. Why?"

"It's mine too," answered the other excitedly. "Are you Dorset or Lincolnshire?"

"Dorsetshire," Bob answered promptly.

Every one was listening now, and Mr. Steele seemed very anxious, to judge by his face.

"If you were a Lincolnshire Trevelyan I'd break your neck directly after dinner," observed the nice-looking man, and he

suddenly grew calm again, and seemed to take no further interest in Bob.

The latter began to understand; and when the Empress of China suddenly dissolved in tears and repeated that hers was a very, very sad story, he had no doubts left as to where he and his friends were.

At this point the Rev. Mr. Weede pointed a thin finger at Lady Dorothy, and addressed the company in pulpit tones. "Providence," he said, "in its inscrutable wisdom, has been pleased to afflict our dear sister with the delusion that she entered these consecrated precincts in a balloon. The prayers of the congregation are requested for —"

"Mr. Weede," cried Mr. Steele in ringing tones, "I must insist that you do not indulge in jests unworthy of a gentleman and not befitting your cloth!"

The young golfing clergyman smiled

blandly, quite unabashed, and answered in a single syllable, sharp and clear — "Fore!"

At this wholly unexpected and irrelevant retort, Anne Trevelyan broke into a laugh.

"One to the parson!" observed Jocelyn in an undertone.

Things might have ended then, but at this moment an old gentleman with a very beautiful white beard and smooth snowy hair began to sing to himself a music-hall song of forty years ago in a thin and quavering tenor voice:

"Up in a balloon, boys, up in a balloon,
All among the little stars, sailing round the moon!"

"Silence!" roared Mr. Steele from the head of the table.

The old gentleman broke down under the rebuke, and began to weep piteously.

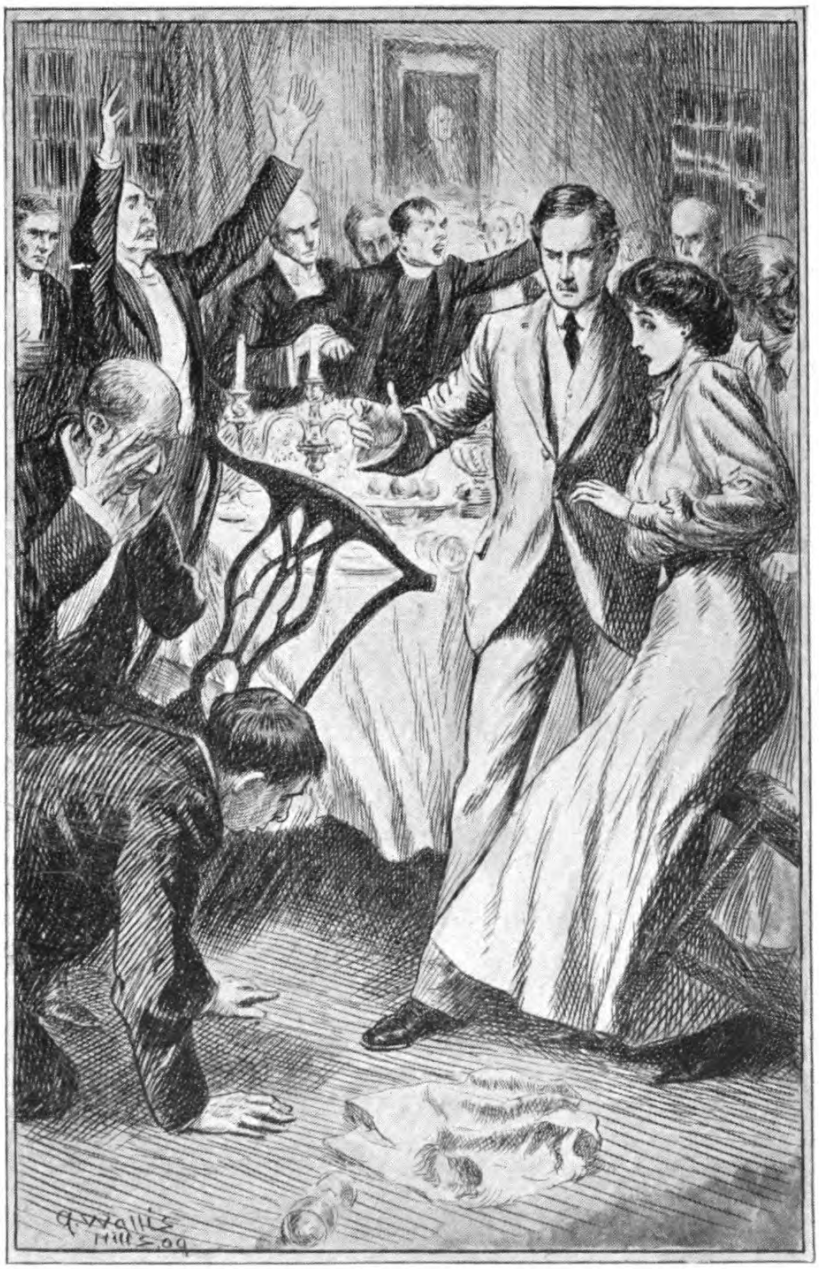
"I know my voice isn't what it was,' he whined, between his sobs — "when I used to sing the late Mr. Gladstone to sleep, after his great speeches — 'Lullaby baby, on the tree-top.'"

He began to sing again, through his tears.

Mr. Steele struck the table with his fist.

"Stop that immediately!" he shouted. "Lady Dorothy — Miss Trevelyan," he continued, in the silence that followed, "I don't know what you must think! The thunderstorm is to blame ——"

At that moment the howling squall broke open the window at the other end of the room, and a clap of thunder followed instantly. The shaded candles on the table were almost all out, and only a few electric lights illuminated the scene of indescribable panic and confusion that followed a second later.



"A scene of indescribable panic followed."

"Fire! Fire! Save the child!" yelled old Randolph Trevelyan above the noise.

Chairs were overturned, shrieks of laughter and wailing sobs filled the air, men rushed wildly hither and thither, falling over each other and rolling on the floor; the dismal, long-drawn howl of a famished wolf pierced the babel of sounds, and a heavy man, running round the room on all fours, stumbled against Lady Dorothy's feet, and lay there in a heap, suddenly silent. But still above all the rest rang Randolph Trevelyan's despairing yells: "Save the child! Save the child! I'll give you ten thousand pounds if you can save the child!"

Bob Trevelyan had Lady Dorothy fast by the wrist. Jocelyn held Anne Trevelyan by the waist close against him, and she did not feel at all frightened; but it is true that she was naturally courageous.

"I believe we're in a mad-house!" cried Lady Dorothy; but only Bob heard her through the noise, and she laughed rather nervously.

"Come along!" Trevelyan called out to Jocelyn.

They made for the nearest door at once. Mr. Steele had picked up the young man who thought he was a wolf, and was holding him firmly. The numerous servants, who were trained men, were already leading the most noisy of the party towards another door. Old Trevelyan's wild yells rent the air as he was carried off: "The child! The child!"

None of the four aeronauts ever forgot the cry, repeated in heart-rending tones, almost without a break. They heard it after they had left the dining-room, but when they had got to the foot of the staircase it ceased suddenly.

They reached their rooms, high up in the new wing. Each of the young girls had one to herself, and the two men were to sleep in the third. But in their haste they all four rushed into the last; Bob turned up the electric light and Jocelyn locked the door.

"A lunatic asylum!" laughed Anne. "Of all places to come down in! You told me it was," she added, speaking to Jocelyn, "but it seemed so absurd that I couldn't believe it."

"And our cousin Randolph is the show-piece, poor chap," said Bob.

Lady Dorothy and Jocelyn looked at him, expecting more.

"What happened to his child?" asked Dorothy.

"I was going to ask the same question," said Jocelyn.

"It was burnt to death. It's rather an awful story, and I don't wonder he went mad. I believe he had only been married two or three years when it happened. He was in the Carabineers, I believe; at all events they went to India as soon as they were married, and it was while they were there that his father died and he came into the estate. But he did not mean to leave the service, and he sent his wife to England with the little baby, six months before the regiment was ordered home. Half an hour before he got to his place, when he came home himself, the house took fire, and his wife and child were burnt to death. He went mad then and there, and there was nothing to be done but to lock him up."

"How awful!" exclaimed Dorothy. "I shall never forget his voice."

The four were silent, and as nothing

happened Jocelyn unlocked the door and opened it a little. In the distance sounds of footsteps could still be heard in the passages, and the opening and shutting of a door now and then, and voices from different directions, but that was all. The patients who occupied the nearest rooms were either already locked in, or were of a quieter sort and had been allowed to stay downstairs.

Jocelyn was just going to shut the door again, when Mrs. Williams appeared. He admitted her, and she looked round quietly before speaking.

"Of course, you must have understood where you are," she said gravely. "This is a private asylum — Dr. Steele's Sanatorium. The patients who are considered harmless play games and dine together, and the Doctor takes none who are already

violent or have shown homicidal or suicidal tendencies. It is a very exclusive establishment, especially for gentlemen of position and means. I may say that I was housekeeper at the late Duke of Barchester's before I came here. The Doctor wishes me to say how sorry he is that there was trouble just this evening. Lunatics don't mind anything so much as a thunderstorm, and thunder and lightning just drive them out of their poor senses, such as they are, which isn't much to boast of. There's that poor Mr. Weede, for instance, such a quiet gentleman, and a Christian soul if ever there was one. They never knew he was at all queer till one day, while he was preaching, he just stopped a minute and called out 'Fore!' as the gentlemen do when they play; and then he went on preaching about golf being the only salvation for sinners' souls,

till the congregation all ran out and the sexton and policeman got him into a cab, still preaching."

"Something like a sermon, that," observed Jocelyn stolidly.

"Yes, sir," answered Mrs. Williams gravely; "they say he was at it for more than half an hour, and hadn't half finished when they took him away. But I came to say," she went on, speaking to Bob Trevelyan, "that the Doctor would like to speak to you alone, sir, if you don't mind. He will come to your room, or see you in his study, as you prefer, but he is very anxious to see you."

"It must be about cousin Randolph," Bob said, glancing at his sister. "I'll go to the Doctor's study, Mrs. Williams, if you'll show me the way."

"Very good, sir. I'll be back directly,"

she added, "to see that the ladies have everything quite comfortable for the night."

Trevelyan followed the housekeeper through many passages and down a good many stairs, till she brought him to the door of Dr. Steele's study and knocked, and then opened the door for him to go in.

The Doctor was standing before the fire; when he saw Bob he came forward and moved a comfortable chair into position while he spoke.

"I'm sorry to trouble you," he said, "but I am so placed that I think it is my duty to ask your advice in a very important matter."

Trevelyan smiled pleasantly, and sat down.

"If it's my advice you want, I warn you that I'm not thought clever," he said. "Unless it's about balloons."

Dr. Steele's face was very grave, and he paid no attention to what Bob said.

"I understood at dinner that you were a distant cousin of Sir Randolph Trevelyan's," he said. "I am sorry to say that he is just dead."

"Dead! How awfully sudden!"

The poor man's despairing cry still rang in Bob's ears.

"He had an aneurism of the heart," Dr. Steele explained, "and this last attack killed him. He fell dead as he reached the door of his room. I have two good physicians in residence here, and they came at once. He was quite dead."

"I'm exceedingly sorry to hear it," Bob said gravely; "but I don't quite see how I can be of use. I'm not his heir. There are several of the Lincolnshire people alive."

"Precisely. But do you know his story?"

"Of course. His wife and child were burnt to death, and he went mad."

"That is not the point," answered Dr. Steele. "They found the mother's body, or what was left of it, but they found no trace of the child."

"Poor little thing! It was probably burnt to ashes. There was nothing to find!"

"I'm not sure. There is a possibility that it may have been kidnapped, for you may remember that the house was found to have been set on fire by thieves, who got away with a large quantity of valuables in the confusion, and afterwards wrote to the family, offering to produce the child for a ransom of five thousand pounds. Sir Randolph had been in India and had not seen the baby for many months, and he was already in an asylum, and much worse than when you saw him this evening, before the

thunderstorm. Babies a year old are very much alike, he could not have recognised his daughter, a large estate was involved, and a lunatic's evidence is worth nothing, of course. The relations declared that none of them had ever seen the infant, and as a recognition was out of the question, their counsel advised them to pay no attention to the blackmailers. Thieves would be quite capable of producing a child as the heir, and of keeping some hold on it, in order to extract more blackmail when it grew up. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly. I'm inclined to think that the heirs did right, though it was to their own future advantage."

"No doubt. But within the last few weeks the situation has changed. I am morally persuaded that Sir Randolph's daughter is alive and well, and that at the present

moment, since her father is dead, she is the sole heir to the great Lincolnshire estate."

"By Jove!" cried Bob. "That's interesting. Of course I'll help her to get her own in any way I can! Where is she? And how are you sure she's the right baby?"

"It's just a common criminal story. The baby had a nurse, of course, and she was no better than she should be. The leader of the gang that burnt and robbed the house had begun operations by establishing himself in the village as a travelling photographer with a van. He had a proper license for the van, and took very good photographs, and he got permission from Lady Trevelyan to make a series of views of the park and the house. By way of strengthening his position he made love to the nurse, and she became his accomplice, and shared the profits

afterwards. But she was soft-hearted about children, and insisted that the baby should not run any risk. She handed it over to the photographer-burglar just before the house was set on fire. That's the story."

"How do you know it's true?"

"Simple enough. Being a born criminal, she afterwards committed other crimes, and was at last caught and sent to penal servitude. And now she is dying of cancer, and has 'experienced religion,' as those people call it, and has confessed the whole story to the chaplain, who has written about it to me. For she had always kept track of Sir Randolph, and knew that he had been brought here some years ago."

"But what proof is there that she is telling the truth?"

"This. Before she parted with the baby, she broke a sixpence in two, sewed half of

it into the baby's clothes and kept the other half."

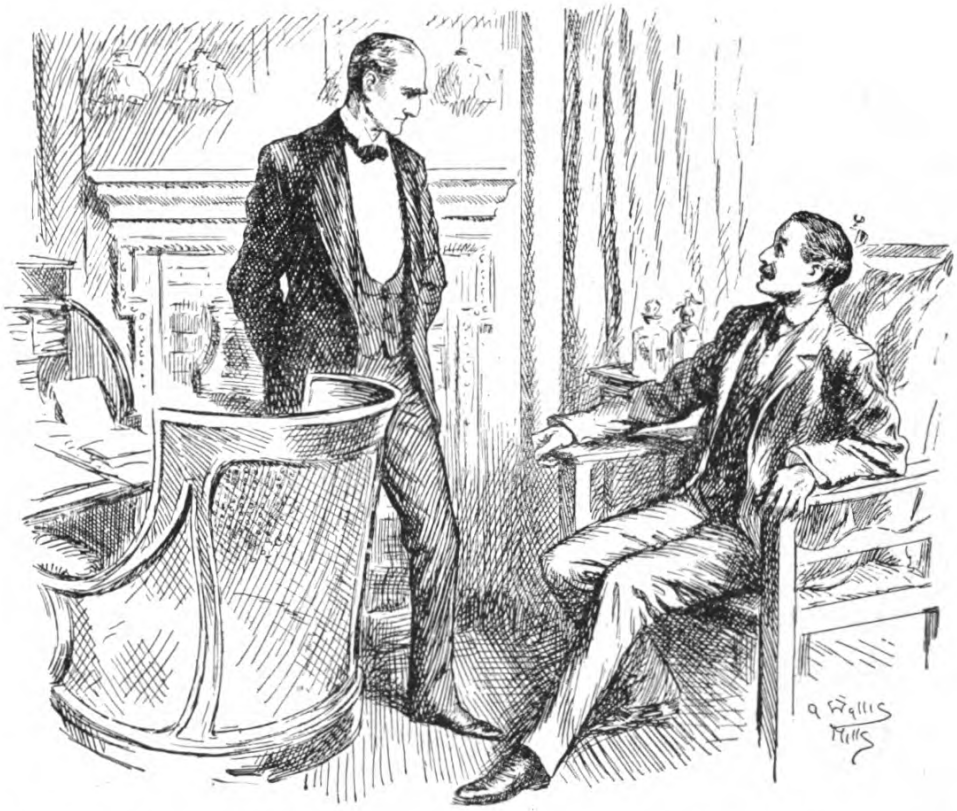
"But the clothes must have disappeared long ago!"

"No: they didn't. When the thieves found that they could not get any ransom, they left the baby on the doorstep of an old bachelor in Kensington, who took care of it and ultimately adopted it. I suppose he is a sentimental person, for he kept the clothes in which he found the child, and, what is more, he has now discovered the half-sixpence sewn up in the little frock, just where the dying woman says it was."

"Jolly good luck for the girl! Where is she?"

"She goes by the name of Ellen Scott, and is governess in Colonel Follitt's family here in Yorkshire."

"Miss Scott! Why, I saw her at King's



"'Miss Scott! Why, I saw her at King's Follitt a month ago.'"

Follitt a month ago! And young Follitt, who is with us, is one of the Colonel's younger sons. He can tell you all about her."

"It's a singular coincidence, to say the least," answered Dr. Steele, "but I know more about Miss Scott at present than she knows herself. In communicating with her adoptive father I have begged him not to let her know anything till all is quite certain; but it will be impossible to conceal the facts from her any longer, since Sir Randolph is dead. The relations, who believe themselves the heirs, must be informed that his daughter has been found and will claim the estate. They must know that as soon as they know of his death, and I cannot put off writing to them."

"What can I do?" inquired Bob.

"Do you know any of your Lincolnshire relations?"

"Yes, I fancy I know most of them. They'll show fight, you may be sure."

"Perhaps, if you explained the case to them, and showed them these copies of the more important documents, they would change their minds. Sir Randolph's solicitors have been very active. We have the sworn evidence of the woman, who is still alive, and of Mr. Herbert Scott as to the date when the infant was left on his doorstep, and he has produced the baby's frock, with the half-sixpence sewn up in the hem, and the woman has sworn to that also. Besides, the handwriting of the letters written to the family after the fire, offering to give up the child for a ransom, has been declared by experts to be that of the travelling photographer, of whose writing several specimens have been found in the village, on the backs of photographs he sold. There is also

evidence that he disappeared on the night of the fire, leaving his van and all his belongings. In fact, everything was ready, and Sir Randolph's solicitors were about to begin proceedings to establish Miss Ellen Scott's identity as Diana Trevelyan."

"Nice name," observed Bob.

"Very. Are you inclined, as a member of the family, to run over to Lincolnshire and lay the case before your cousins? If they can be persuaded to give up their claim without a suit, a vast amount of money will be saved — and it can only end in one way, I can assure you. There's not a link missing."

"All right," answered Trevelyan. "Who are poor Randolph's solicitors? I shall have to know the name and address."

Dr. Steele handed him the neat package of copies that lay tied up on the desk. The

lawyer's name was stamped on the outside of the first paper.

"I suppose I had better say nothing to my sister and our friends?" said Bob in a tone of interrogation.

"I think not. Miss Scott should be informed by the solicitors."

"She'll have a surprise," observed Bob, thinking of the blotched face and red nose of the pimping governess he had seen at King's Follitt. "I'll just tell my party that you wanted to inform me of poor Randolph's death."

"Precisely. That will explain our interview."

So that was the end of the ballooning adventure. After thanking Dr. Steele very warmly for his hospitality the party left on the following morning, the balloon having been duly packed and carted to the station and put on the London train.

It will be clear to the most simple-minded reader that the descent of the party in the grounds of the asylum was not the grand incident which really led to the identification of Miss Scott by establishing the long-sought link in the evidence. That would have been thrilling, of course; but such things do not happen in real life, and when they do people do not believe they do. The simple result of the coincidence was that Bob Trevelyan took the affair in hand, and managed it so that it was all settled very quickly and out of court, which saved ever so much time and money, to the great disappointment of several solicitors.

CHAPTER VIII

Lady Jane Follitt had last seen the balloon driving through rain-clouds at dusk, somewhere between Peterborough and York. It had not been nearly such good sport as she had anticipated, for the breeze had been light during the early part of the afternoon, and she had been obliged to go slowly in order not to outrun the aeronauts, and when they had begun to travel faster it had grown dark, and she could not see them even with her searchlight! She made up her mind that there was nothing in ballooning after all, and she was wet and tired when she got back to London late at night, and found Claude and her husband waiting for her.

The Colonel talked of going down to King's Follitt the next day.

"And leave me here to do my shopping alone?" said Lady Jane indignantly. "Not much! We'll go down in the motor on Thursday, if you don't mind."

She had almost always done her shopping alone, but that did not matter. When she said "if you don't mind" in that tone, the mild Colonel knew his place and did his duty.

Claude's match was not over yet, and he must stay in town another day; Jocelyn was with the Trevelyans, and was hardly likely to get home for twenty-four hours or more; but the Colonel was at leisure, and could not be allowed to go home alone in order to make love to Miss Scott. Lady Jane had never felt any anxiety about Lionel, because he knew the governess's

father, and had been just as kind to her when she was hideous.

So he and Ellen had another day to themselves, and though she hardly let the girls go out of her sight, the two had plenty of opportunity of talking together. The result of their confabulations was that Ellen was to do her best to get away from King's Follitt with Lady Jane's consent, but that if she did not succeed within a fortnight Lionel should tell his mother that he intended to marry the girl, and if there was a terrible fuss, then it could not be helped, that was all. Ellen, on mature consideration, made up her mind that it would be cowardly to run away, but that she would leave after the inevitable interview with the infuriated Lady Jane.

That was what they both thought best, after long consideration, and they made up their minds to do it.

Herbert Scott was determined that his adopted child should not suffer a bitter disappointment after her expectations had been raised to the highest pitch, and he accordingly took care that no hint of what was coming should reach her, till all was settled beyond any possibility of failure — at least, if that could be managed. His sense of humour, too, was delighted by the prospect of the surprise which the change in her prospects would produce in the Follitt household, accompanied as it would be by the announcement of her long-standing engagement to Lionel. But after all, the excellent Mr. Scott himself could not quite believe that a noble estate and a good old name had been the rightful dowry of the poor little doorstep baby he had taken in so long ago. His only fear for the future had been lest her own father should become sane again,

as suddenly as he had gone mad, and claim his daughter; and when Dr. Steele wrote him that old Trevelyan was dead, Herbert Scott made incomprehensible observations aloud to himself in several oriental dialects, not one of them expressive of regret.

Things did not turn out exactly as he expected. Lady Jane and the Colonel came home in due time, when the shopping in London was done. Claude returned in a very good humour from the cricket-match, for Yorkshire had won and he himself had brought up his average; but he went off almost immediately to ride the promised steeplechase. Jocelyn came back one morning, rather silent and uncommunicative, to claim the fifty pounds he had won of Lionel, and immediately departed again, saying that he would write. He said something about having been in a madhouse, which the others took for chaff.

Therefore, when the crisis came the two younger sons were not at home, and it happened in this way: the Colonel lost his head, Lady Jane lost her temper, Lionel lost his patience, and Miss Scott lost her position as governess.

There was no doubt about Colonel Follitt's admiration for the once Undesirable One. He talked to her at table, he brought her books from the library, he accidentally found himself in the way when she passed; and one day he announced his intention of going for a walk with her and his two daughters, as Lionel had done several times.

"That you shall not do!" said Lady Jane with severity.

"Why not, my dear?" asked her mild husband.

"It's not decent," answered Lady Jane with disgust. "I won't have it!"

"Really!" cried the Colonel, with polite surprise. "If a man cannot walk out with his own daughters ——"

"Not with Miss Scott. Thank goodness, I still have some authority! The idea of such a thing! Besides, it's growing on you. When vice doesn't disappear it always grows worse with old age."

"Old age, indeed!" The Colonel was mildly indignant.

"Now, that Miss Kirk," Lady Jane exclaimed, not heeding him, "at least she was pretty. No one ever denied that, I suppose. Well, that was some excuse; but it's positively disgusting to see a man of sixty —— "

"Fifty-five," interrupted the Colonel.

"— of nearly fifty-six devoting himself to a miserable, dowdy little rat of a London governess, who came here with a blotchy face and a hump on one shoulder,

and her hair drawn back like a skinned rabbit's!"

"Dear me!" exclaimed the Colonel, with exasperating mildness.

"And besides," Lady Jane concluded, sticking up her aristocratic nose in wrath, "she's distinctly plebeian!"

"I'm sorry, mother, but you're quite mistaken," said Lionel, looking up from his paper, and bending his brows. "She talks just as we do, and nobody could possibly tell that she didn't belong to our set."

Lady Jane stared at her eldest son in surprise. They were all three in the mess-room after luncheon. "My dear Lionel," she retorted, with pitying scorn, "if you don't know a lady when you see one, I really can't teach you the difference, can I?"

"Miss Scott is a lady in every way," Lionel answered, with a good deal of em-

phasis, and fixing his eyes on his mother's in an odd way.

"Good heaven!" cried Lady Jane. "I believe you're another of her victims!"

"I am going to marry Miss Scott in June," Lionel said, rising suddenly, and looking down at her and his father — for he was very tall.

"What?" cried Lady Jane, her jaw dropping.

"What?" cried the Colonel, no longer mild.

And the walls of the mess-room echoed "what" in the name of the absent members of the family.

"Are you quite mad?" asked Lady Jane, breathless in her amazed surprise.

"Impudent puppy!" the Colonel cried, getting red in the face. "My dear, the girl must leave the house this instant!"

"I'll send for her and tell her so at once!"

"It's not of the least use to get so excited," said Lionel, calmly sitting down and taking up his paper again. "We shall be married in June, and there's nothing more to be said."

Thereupon he appeared to go on reading, without paying any more attention to his father and mother.

"This is monstrous!" Lady Jane was beside herself. "Lionel!" She came and stood beside his chair. "You're not in earnest! This is some silly attempt at a joke!"

"Drop it, my boy!" cried the Colonel, taking the cue from his wife.

"I'm not joking." Lionel looked up quietly. "You'll be very fond of her some day, when you get over the idea that she's been governess to the girls. Really, there's

nothing to be said. I made up my mind long ago; and as the estate is entailed you can't even cut me off with a shilling! Happily, you are quite powerless, for we can live very comfortably on my five hundred a year."

Lady Jane glared, and the Colonel put on that singularly disagreeable expression which has come into use amongst Englishmen since they gave up swearing as a means of showing what they are thinking about. It is a particularly unpleasant look, and bodes evil when it appears.

"Miss Scott will go at once, of course," Lionel added, as they said nothing. "I only ask you not to be rude to her."

"As if one could be rude to a governess!" cried Lady Jane, stalking off with her head in the air and going out.

"All that Sanskrit stuff has gone to your

head, my boy," said the Colonel, following her.

Lady Jane went to her morning room and rang the bell. Her hand trembled a little. "Ask Miss Scott to come to me before going out with the young ladies," she said to the footman.

Ellen lost no time in answering the summons, and appeared dressed for walking, and wearing a plain grey felt hat, which happened to be very becoming. As soon as she entered, she saw that Lady Jane was in a rage, and guessed that it concerned her.

"My son has just given me to understand that he has — er — agreed to marry you. What have you to say to this amazing statement?"

Miss Scott looked much taller than usual, and held her head quite as high as Lady Jane herself; but she answered very quietly,

and almost gently. "Yes," she said, "it's quite true. That's all I have to say."

"And you have the assurance to tell me so to my face?" cried Lady Jane.

"Oh, yes, since it's true," answered the young girl sweetly.

"It's not to be believed!"

Lady Jane's face was as hard as a portrait done in enamel; her eyes glittered like pale sapphires, and she began to walk up and down the room, looking straight in front of her.

"I'm afraid you must believe it, unless your son changes his mind," said Miss Scott with great gentleness.

"Oh, he shall change his mind! Never fear! A governess! There are laws to prevent such things — I'm sure there are!"

"And a foundling, too," said Ellen, more sweetly than ever. "I'm sure you will

think that makes it much worse," she added, as Lady Jane stopped suddenly in her walk and glared at her. "Yes, I was left on Mr. Scott's doorstep early one morning when I was a baby, and he adopted me and gave me his name, and called me Ellen. It's rather dreadful, isn't it?"

"Dreadful! It's vile, the way you have played on his feelings in secret and led him to this! But, thank Heaven, he is my son. He must have some sense, somewhere!"

"He has a great deal," said Miss Scott, unmoved. "I'm sure of it."

"If anything could make matters worse, it is your brazen assurance," cried Lady Jane, beside herself. "There is no reason why I should put up with it another moment, and I shall expect you to leave the house in an hour. Do you understand?"

"I was going to ask your leave to do so,"

answered Ellen; "for the truth is, I have some very urgent business in town, and my solicitors have written begging me to come at once."

Lady Jane's face assumed an expression of blank astonishment. "Your solicitors! What nonsense is this?"

"In view of the fact that Lionel has told you about our engagement, it may have some importance — even in your eyes."

There was something so extraordinarily calm about the young person's manner, that Lady Jane began to take another view of the matter. "I believe you must be an escaped lunatic," she said with deliberation, and fixing her cold eyes on the governess's pretty face.

But nothing happened; she did not shrink and cower under the glance, as Lady

Jane supposed that an escaped lunatic would, on being found out.

"Perhaps you would like to see the last letter I have received?" said Miss Scott.

Lady Jane hesitated, for it seemed beneath her dignity to prolong the interview. She would have turned her back on the governess if she had not been made really curious by her calm and dignified manner, and by her allusion to "solicitors." Just then, too, it occurred to the injured matron that the girl might have committed some offence for which she was to be tried, and that the "solicitors" were those whom her adopted father had engaged for the defence. This was ingenious, if it was nothing else. Lady Jane, who was both very angry and at the same time very curious, suddenly contracted her eyelids, as if she were short-sighted, and held her head higher than

ever. "I am willing to look at the letter," she said, "on the mere chance that it may show your — er — atrocious conduct — in a somewhat less — er — unfavourable light!"

Miss Scott smiled sweetly, and produced a large envelope from the inside of her coat — for, being a governess, she possessed a pocket. She handed the paper to Lady Jane, who saw at a glance that it was a genuine solicitor's letter, from a highly respectable firm of whom she had often heard. The envelope was addressed to "Miss Ellen Scott," but when Lady Jane took out and unfolded the contents, she saw that they were addressed to "Miss Diana Trevelyan."

"Trevelyan?" she cried angrily. "Diana Trevelyan? What absurdity is this? What have you to do with any Diana Trevelyan, pray?"

"'You? The daughter of Sir Randolph? You're mad!'"

"It's me," Miss Scott answered patiently, in a small voice.

"You?" Lady Jane's eyes glittered and glared again.

"Yes. I was a doorstep baby, as I told you; and now they've found out at last that I am Diana Trevelyan, the only child of Sir Randolph, who died in an insane asylum a few days ago."

"You? The daughter of Sir Randolph? You're mad!"

"No, I'm not mad, though my father was. If you will only read the letter, you will understand. You see, all his Lincolnshire estates come to me, so it makes rather a difference, doesn't it?"

"Rather a difference!"

No words could describe Lady Jane's tone as she repeated the words. At the mere thought that, instead of speaking out

her irate mind to a poor little governess with whom her son had been silly enough to fall in love, she had been railing at Miss Diana Trevelyan, a charming girl and an heiress, quite as good as herself, and the most desirable daughter-in-law she could wish for, she suddenly got red in the face, and buried herself in the documents, in which she presently became absorbed.

As she read the wonderful story, and learned that the other Lincolnshire Trevelyans had thought it best not to question Ellen's right — or Diana's — her wrath subsided, and joy rose in its place, as it would in any mother's heart, over what could only be a genuine love match, though it had turned out so vastly advantageous. At last she folded the many sheets together and put them back into the envelope, which she held in one hand while she covered her

eyes with the other for a moment. "I don't quite know what to say," she said simply, and then looked up with a rather shy smile. "I was awfully nasty, I know. I'm sure you would have been a very good wife to Lionel without a name or a fortune, my dear. I can't imagine why it seemed so dreadful to me five minutes ago! I was quite stupidly angry, and you must forgive me, please. You will, won't you?"

She was almost pathetic in her defeat, though she was quite ridiculous too, and knew it.

Ellen laughed gaily. "My dear Lady Jane," she said, "I'll forgive you with all my heart if you'll only forgive me for something much worse that I did to you?"

"I'll forgive you anything — I'm so happy!" answered the elder woman, smiling.

"I've been a fairly good governess to

the girls, haven't I?" asked the young girl. "And well-behaved, too? And if I wanted it, you'd give me a good character, wouldn't you? That is, if I hadn't fallen in love with your eldest son?"

"Oh, that wouldn't have mattered," said Lady Jane. "It was his falling in love with you that I couldn't stand! Of course I would give you a good character!"

"Thank you. Now I'll make my confession. I used to be good at theatricals, and when I saw your advertisement I made up for the place."

"Made up? It was all a sham?"

Lady Jane started in surprise.

"The limp was a sham, the hump was a little pillow, the blotches were liquid rouge, my eyes never wander unless I choose to make them do it, and I had never worn my hair like that in my life! Can you for-

give me for having cheated you all, when I read your advertisement? I suppose it was just devilry that made me do it — and I wanted to see more of Lionel, since we were engaged. After all, I was quite fit for the place, wasn't I? All I had to do was to make myself thoroughly undesirable; and I did!"

"And to think that I wasted all that good lotion on you!" cried Lady Jane, laughing.

She would have thought the whole trick an abominable fraud on the part of Ellen Scott, but quite entered into the fun of the practical joke, since it had been played by Miss Diana Trevelyan. After all, she never made any pretence of being magnanimous or bursting with noble sentiments. She was just an ordinary woman of the world, and a very good mother, who had been

horrified at the idea that her eldest son should marry badly, and was delighted to find that he was going to marry well after all; and let any natural mother who would not feel just as she did, find fault with her and call her worldly!

That is the story of that Undesirable Governess they had at King's Follitt last year, and it explains why Lionel and Jocelyn were married on the same day to two Trevelyan girls who were only very distantly related. In a nice story-book it would of course have been the penniless younger son who would have married the governess-heiress, and the heir of King's Follitt would have married Anne Trevelyan, who was not particularly well off. But in real life things do not happen in that way, and yet people are happy just the same — when they are.

The darker side of the whole affair was

that, after Ellen turned into somebody else, those girls ran perfectly wild, and fell back into their old ways of poaching and exchanging game for chocolates with the postman; and they sat up in the King's Oak by the lodge and peppered the passing horses on the Malton road with catapults, and potted rooks, and rode steeplechases in the park on the best horses in the stable; and they strenuously did all those things which they should have left undone, to the total exclusion of the other things, till Lady Jane felt that she was going mad, and it looked as if no one but the matron of a police station could ever be satisfactory as a governess at King's Follitt.

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