MAN AND WIFE

WILKIE COLLINS

LONDON

1870

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ABOUT AUTHOR



Wilkie Collins (*1824–1889*) was a pioneering English Victorian author who fathered the modern English detective novel. Renowned for intricate plots and suspense, his most famous works, *The Woman in White* (1860) and *The Moonstone* (1868), revolutionized mystery and sensation fiction.

[6]

Key Works:

- **The Woman in White (1860):** The archetypal "sensation novel," famous for its multiple narrators and gripping mystery.
- **The Moonstone (1868):** Widely celebrated as the first true English detective novel and a pioneer of the police procedural genre.
- **Armadale (1866) & No Name (1862):** Further examples of his complex plotting and exploration of social issues.

Life & Legacy:

- **Partnership with Dickens:** Collins was a close friend, mentor, and collaborator of Charles Dickens. They often co-wrote plays and published fiction in Dickens' magazines, such as *All the Year Round*.
- **Unconventional Lifestyle:** A vocal critic of Victorian marriage, Collins never married. He divided his time between his long-term partner Caroline Graves and his common-law wife Martha Rudd.
- **Opium Addiction:** Collins suffered from chronic gout and arthritis, leading to a severe addiction to laudanum (an opium-alcohol mix). He famously hallucinated parts of *The Moonstone* while under the drug's influence.

PREFACE

A Fatal Loophole. A Stolen Identity.

A Marriage Turned Into a Legal Nightmare.

Step into the rigid, unforgiving world of Victorian high society, where a single spoken promise can bind you in chains forever. When Anne Silvester, a well-bred but penniless governess, agrees to a secret, makeshift marriage in Scotland to save her reputation, she enters a trap from which there is no escape. Through a cruel twist of fate and a catastrophic misunderstanding of complex marriage laws, her secret vows accidentally bind her to the wrong man—a brutal, tyrannical aristocrat who will stop at nothing to protect his own dark interests.

What follows is a breathless, high-stakes psychological drama and a legal chess match. To save Anne from a life of domestic tyranny and ruin, her loyal friend Lady Lundie and a brilliant lawyer must untangle a web of lies, hidden documents, and societal prejudice. As the tension mounts inside a gloomy country estate, the story transforms from a romance into a claustrophobic thriller, exploring the

terrifying vulnerability of women under laws that strip them of their rights and dignity.

Experience one of Wilkie Collins's most powerful sensation novels and a true pioneer of the social critique thriller. Masterfully combining intricate legal mysteries, shocking plot twists, and a chilling atmosphere, this timeless classic exposes the dark undercurrents of the Victorian elite and the dangerous power of institutional deception.

PROLOGUE

THE IRISH MARRIAGE

I

THE VILLA AT HAMPSTEAD

On a summer's morning, between thirty and forty years ago, two girls were crying bitterly in the cabin of an East Indian passenger ship, bound outward, from Gravesend to Bombay.

They were both of the same age—eighteen. They had both, from childhood upward, been close and dear friends at the same school. They were now parting for the first time—and parting, it might be, for life.

The name of one was Blanche. The name of the other was Anne.

Both were the children of poor parents, both had been pupil-teachers at the school; and both were destined to earn their own bread. Personally speaking, and socially speaking, these were the only points of resemblance between them.

Blanche was passably attractive and passably intelligent, and no more. Anne was rarely beautiful and rarely endowed. Blanche's parents were worthy people, whose first consideration was to secure, at any sacrifice, the future well-being of their child. Anne's parents were heartless and depraved. Their one idea, in connection with their daughter, was to speculate on her beauty, and to turn her abilities to profitable account.

The girls were starting in life under widely different conditions. Blanche was going to India, to be governess in the household of a

Judge, under care of the Judge's wife. Anne was to wait at home until the first opportunity offered of sending her cheaply to Milan. There, among strangers, she was to be perfected in the actress's and the singer's art; then to return to England, and make the fortune of her family on the lyric stage.

Such were the prospects of the two as they sat together in the cabin of the Indiaman locked fast in each other's arms, and crying bitterly. The whispered farewell talk exchanged between them—exaggerated and impulsive as girls' talk is apt to be—came honestly, in each case, straight from the heart.

"Blanche! you may be married in India. Make your husband bring you back to England."

"Anne! you may take a dislike to the stage. Come out to India if you do."

"In England or out of England, married or not married, we will meet, darling—if it's years hence—with all the old love between us; friends who help each other, sisters who trust each other, for life! Vow it, Blanche!"

"I vow it, Anne!"

"With all your heart and soul?"

"With all my heart and soul!"

The sails were spread to the wind, and the ship began to move in the water. It was necessary to appeal to the captain's authority before the girls could be parted. The captain interfered gently and firmly. "Come, my dear," he said, putting his arm round Anne; "you won't mind *me*! I have got a daughter of my own." Anne's head fell on the sailor's shoulder. He put her, with his own hands, into the shore-boat alongside. In five minutes more the ship had gathered way; the boat was at the landing-stage—and the girls had seen the last of each other for many a long year to come.

This was in the summer of eighteen hundred and thirty-one.

II

Twenty-four years later—in the summer of eighteen hundred and fifty-five—there was a villa at Hampstead to be let, furnished.

The house was still occupied by the persons who desired to let it. On the evening on which this scene opens a lady and two

gentlemen were seated at the dinner-table. The lady had reached the mature age of forty-two. She was still a rarely beautiful woman. Her husband, some years younger than herself, faced her at the table, sitting silent and constrained, and never, even by accident, looking at his wife. The third person was a guest. The husband's name was Vanborough. The guest's name was Kendrew.

It was the end of the dinner. The fruit and the wine were on the table. Mr. Vanborough pushed the bottles in silence to Mr. Kendrew. The lady of the house looked round at the servant who was waiting, and said, "Tell the children to come in."

The door opened, and a girl twelve years old entered, leading by the hand a younger girl of five. They were both prettily dressed in white, with sashes of the same shade of light blue. But there was no family resemblance between them. The elder girl was frail and delicate, with a pale, sensitive face. The younger was light and florid, with round red cheeks and bright, saucy eyes—a charming little picture of happiness and health.

Mr. Kendrew looked inquiringly at the youngest of the two girls.

"Here is a young lady," he said, "who is a total stranger to me."

"If you had not been a total stranger yourself for a whole year past," answered Mrs. Vanborough, "you would never have made that confession. This is little Blanche—the only child of the dearest friend I have. When Blanche's mother and I last saw each other we were two poor schoolgirls beginning the world. My friend went to India, and married there late in life. You may have heard of her husband—the famous Indian officer, Sir Thomas Lundie? Yes: 'the rich Sir Thomas,' as you call him. Lady Lundie is now on her way back to England, for the first time since she left it—I am afraid to say how many years since. I expected her yesterday; I expect her today—she may come at any moment. We exchanged promises to meet, in the ship that took her to India—'vows' we called them in the dear old times. Imagine how changed we shall find each other when we *do* meet again at last!"

"In the meantime," said Mr. Kendrew, "your friend appears to have sent you her little daughter to represent her? It's a long journey for so young a traveler."

"A journey ordered by the doctors in India a year since," rejoined Mrs. Vanborough. "They said Blanche's health required English air. Sir Thomas was ill at the time, and his wife couldn't leave him. She had to send the child to England, and who should she send her to but me? Look at her now, and say if the English air hasn't agreed with her! We two mothers, Mr. Kendrew, seem literally to live again in our children. I have an only child. My friend has an only child. My daughter is little Anne—as *I* was. My friend's daughter is little Blanche—as *she* was. And, to crown it all, those two girls have taken the same fancy to each other which we took to each other in the bygone days at school. One has often heard of hereditary hatred. Is there such a thing as hereditary love as well?"

Before the guest could answer, his attention was claimed by the master of the house.

"Kendrew," said Mr. Vanborough, "when you have had enough of domestic sentiment, suppose you take a glass of wine?"

The words were spoken with undisguised contempt of tone and manner. Mrs. Vanborough's color rose. She waited, and controlled the momentary irritation. When she spoke to her husband it was evidently with a wish to soothe and conciliate him.

"I am afraid, my dear, you are not well this evening?"

"I shall be better when those children have done clattering with their knives and forks."

The girls were peeling fruit. The younger one went on. The elder stopped, and looked at her mother. Mrs. Vanborough beckoned to Blanche to come to her, and pointed toward the French window opening to the floor.

"Would you like to eat your fruit in the garden, Blanche?"

"Yes," said Blanche, "if Anne will go with me."

Anne rose at once, and the two girls went away together into the garden, hand in hand. On their departure Mr. Kendrew wisely started a new subject. He referred to the letting of the house.

"The loss of the garden will be a sad loss to those two young ladies," he said. "It really seems to be a pity that you should be giving up this pretty place."

"Leaving the house is not the worst of the sacrifice," answered Mrs. Vanborough. "If John finds Hampstead too far for him from London, of course we must move. The only hardship that I complain of is the hardship of having the house to let."

Mr. Vanborough looked across the table, as ungraciously as possible, at his wife.

"What have *you* to do with it?" he asked.

Mrs. Vanborough tried to clear the conjugal horizon by a smile.

"My dear John," she said, gently, "you forget that, while you are at business, I am here all day. I can't help seeing the people who come to look at the house. Such people!" she continued, turning to Mr. Kendrew. "They distrust everything, from the scraper at the door to the chimneys on the roof. They force their way in at all hours. They ask all sorts of impudent questions—and they show you plainly that they don't mean to believe your answers, before you have time to make them. Some wretch of a woman says, 'Do you think the drains are right?'—and sniffs suspiciously, before I can say Yes. Some brute of a man asks, 'Are you quite sure this house is solidly built, ma'am?'—and jumps on the floor at the full stretch of his legs, without waiting for me to reply. Nobody believes in our gravel soil and our south aspect. Nobody wants any of our improvements. The moment they hear of John's Artesian well, they look as if they never drank water. And, if they happen to pass my poultry-yard, they instantly lose all appreciation of the merits of a fresh egg!"

Mr. Kendrew laughed. "I have been through it all in my time," he said. "The people who want to take a house are the born enemies of the people who want to let a house. Odd—isn't it, Vanborough?"

Mr. Vanborough's sullen humor resisted his friend as obstinately as it had resisted his wife.

"I dare say," he answered. "I wasn't listening."

This time the tone was almost brutal. Mrs. Vanborough looked at her husband with unconcealed surprise and distress.

"John!" she said. "What *can* be the matter with you? Are you in pain?"

"A man may be anxious and worried, I suppose, without being

actually in pain."

"I am sorry to hear you are worried. Is it business?"

"Yes—business."

"Consult Mr. Kendrew."

"I am waiting to consult him."

Mrs. Vanborough rose immediately. "Ring, dear," she said, "when you want coffee." As she passed her husband she stopped and laid her hand tenderly on his forehead. "I wish I could smooth out that frown!" she whispered. Mr. Vanborough impatiently shook his head. Mrs. Vanborough sighed as she turned to the door. Her husband called to her before she could leave the room.

"Mind we are not interrupted!"

"I will do my best, John." She looked at Mr. Kendrew, holding the door open for her; and resumed, with an effort, her former lightness of tone. "But don't forget our 'born enemies!' Somebody may come, even at this hour of the evening, who wants to see the house."

The two gentlemen were left alone over their wine. There was a strong personal contrast between them. Mr. Vanborough was tall and dark—a dashing, handsome man; with an energy in his face which all the world saw; with an inbred falseness under it which only a special observer could detect. Mr. Kendrew was short and light—slow and awkward in manner, except when something happened to rouse him. Looking in *his* face, the world saw an ugly and undemonstrative little man. The special observer, penetrating under the surface, found a fine nature beneath, resting on a steady foundation of honor and truth.

Mr. Vanborough opened the conversation.

"If you ever marry," he said, "don't be such a fool, Kendrew, as I have been. Don't take a wife from the stage."

"If I could get such a wife as yours," replied the other, "I would take her from the stage tomorrow. A beautiful woman, a clever woman, a woman of unblemished character, and a woman who truly loves you. Man alive! what do you want more?"

"I want a great deal more. I want a woman highly connected

and highly bred—a woman who can receive the best society in England, and open her husband's way to a position in the world."

"A position in the world!" cried Mr. Kendrew. "Here is a man whose father has left him half a million of money—with the one condition annexed to it of taking his father's place at the head of one of the greatest mercantile houses in England. And he talks about a position, as if he was a junior clerk in his own office! What on earth does your ambition see, beyond what your ambition has already got?"

Mr. Vanborough finished his glass of wine, and looked his friend steadily in the face.

"My ambition," he said, "sees a Parliamentary career, with a Peerage at the end of it—and with no obstacle in the way but my estimable wife."

Mr. Kendrew lifted his hand warningly. "Don't talk in that way," he said. "If you're joking—it's a joke I don't see. If you're in earnest—you force a suspicion on me which I would rather not feel. Let us change the subject."

"No! Let us have it out at once. What do you suspect?"

"I suspect you are getting tired of your wife."

"She is forty-two, and I am thirty-five; and I have been married to her for thirteen years. You know all that—and you only suspect I am tired of her. Bless your innocence! Have you anything more to say?"

"If you force me to it, I take the freedom of an old friend, and I say you are not treating her fairly. It's nearly two years since you broke up your establishment abroad, and came to England on your father's death. With the exception of myself, and one or two other friends of former days, you have presented your wife to nobody. Your new position has smoothed the way for you into the best society. You never take your wife with you. You go out as if you were a single man. I have reason to know that you are actually believed to be a single man, among these new acquaintances of yours, in more than one quarter. Forgive me for speaking my mind bluntly—I say what I think. It's unworthy of you to keep your wife buried here, as if you were ashamed of her."

"I *am* ashamed of her."

"Vanborough!"

"Wait a little! you are not to have it all your own way, my good fellow. What are the facts? Thirteen years ago I fell in love with a handsome public singer, and married her. My father was angry with me; and I had to go and live with her abroad. It didn't matter, abroad. My father forgave me on his deathbed, and I had to bring her home again. It does matter, at home. I find myself, with a great career opening before me, tied to a woman whose relations are (as you well know) the lowest of the low. A woman without the slightest distinction of manner, or the slightest aspiration beyond her nursery and her kitchen, her piano and her books. Is *that* a wife who can help me to make my place in society?—who can smooth my way through social obstacles and political obstacles, to the House of Lords? By Jupiter! if ever there was a woman to be 'buried' (as you call it), that woman is my wife. And, what's more, if you want the truth, it's because I *can't* bury her here that I'm going to leave this house. She has got a cursed knack of making acquaintances wherever she goes. She'll have a circle of friends about her if I leave her in this neighborhood much longer. Friends who remember her as the famous opera-singer. Friends who will see her swindling scoundrel of a father (when my back is turned) coming drunk to the door to borrow money of her! I tell you, my marriage has wrecked my prospects. It's no use talking to me of my wife's virtues. She is a millstone round my neck, with all her virtues. If I had not been a born idiot I should have waited, and married a woman who would have been of some use to me; a woman with high connections—"

Mr. Kendrew touched his host's arm, and suddenly interrupted him.

"To come to the point," he said—"a woman like Lady Jane Parnell."

Mr. Vanborough started. His eyes fell, for the first time, before the eyes of his friend.

"What do you know about Lady Jane?" he asked.

"Nothing. I don't move in Lady Jane's world—but I do go sometimes to the opera. I saw you with her last night in her box;

and I heard what was said in the stalls near me. You were openly spoken of as the favored man who was singled out from the rest by Lady Jane. Imagine what would happen if your wife heard that! You are wrong, Vanborough—you are in every way wrong. You alarm, you distress, you disappoint me. I never sought this explanation—but now it has come, I won't shrink from it. Reconsider your conduct; reconsider what you have said to me—or you count me no longer among your friends. No! I want no farther talk about it now. We are both getting hot—we may end in saying what had better have been left unsaid. Once more, let us change the subject. You wrote me word that you wanted me here today, because you needed my advice on a matter of some importance. What is it?"

Silence followed that question. Mr. Vanborough's face betrayed signs of embarrassment. He poured himself out another glass of wine, and drank it at a draught before he replied.

"It's not so easy to tell you what I want," he said, "after the tone you have taken with me about my wife."

Mr. Kendrew looked surprised.

"Is Mrs. Vanborough concerned in the matter?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Does she know about it?"

"No."

"Have you kept the thing a secret out of regard for *her*?"

"Yes."

"Have I any right to advise on it?"

"You have the right of an old friend."

"Then, why not tell me frankly what it is?"

There was another moment of embarrassment on Mr. Vanborough's part.

"It will come better," he answered, "from a third person, whom I expect here every minute. He is in possession of all the facts—and he is better able to state them than I am."

"Who is the person?"

"My friend, Delamayn."

"Your lawyer?"

"Yes—the junior partner in the firm of Delamayn, Hawke, and Delamayn. Do you know him?"

"I am acquainted with him. His wife's family were friends of mine before he married. I don't like him."

"You're rather hard to please today! Delamayn is a rising man, if ever there was one yet. A man with a career before him, and with courage enough to pursue it. He is going to leave the firm, and try his luck at the Bar. Everybody says he will do great things. What's your objection to him?"

"I have no objection whatever. We meet with people occasionally whom we dislike without knowing why. Without knowing why, I dislike Mr. Delamayn."

"Whatever you do you must put up with him this evening. He will be here directly."

He was there at that moment. The servant opened the door, and announced—"Mr. Delamayn."

III

Externally speaking, the rising solicitor, who was going to try his luck at the Bar, looked like a man who was going to succeed. His hard, hairless face, his watchful gray eyes, his thin, resolute lips, said plainly, in so many words, "I mean to get on in the world; and, if you are in my way, I mean to get on at your expense." Mr. Delamayn was habitually polite to everybody—but he had never been known to say one unnecessary word to his dearest friend. A man of rare ability; a man of unblemished honor (as the code of the world goes); but not a man to be taken familiarly by the hand. You would never have borrowed money of him—but you would have trusted him with untold gold. Involved in private and personal troubles, you would have hesitated at asking him to help you. Involved in public and producible troubles, you would have said, Here is my man. Sure to push his way—nobody could look at him and doubt it—sure to push his way.

"Kendrew is an old friend of mine," said Mr. Vanborough, addressing himself to the lawyer. "Whatever you have to say to

me you may say before *him*. Will you have some wine?"

"No—thank you."

"Have you brought any news?"

"Yes."

"Have you got the written opinions of the two barristers?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because nothing of the sort is necessary. If the facts of the case are correctly stated there is not the slightest doubt about the law."

With that reply Mr. Delamayn took a written paper from his pocket, and spread it out on the table before him.

"What is that?" asked Mr. Vanborough.

"The case relating to your marriage."

Mr. Kendrew started, and showed the first tokens of interest in the proceedings which had escaped him yet. Mr. Delamayn looked at him for a moment, and went on.

"The case," he resumed, "as originally stated by you, and taken down in writing by our head-clerk."

Mr. Vanborough's temper began to show itself again.

"What have we got to do with that now?" he asked. "You have made your inquiries to prove the correctness of my statement—haven't you?"

"Yes."

"And you have found out that I am right?"

"I have found out that you are right—if the case is right. I wish to be sure that no mistake has occurred between you and the clerk. This is a very important matter. I am going to take the responsibility of giving an opinion which may be followed by serious consequences; and I mean to assure myself that the opinion is given on a sound basis, first. I have some questions to ask you. Don't be impatient, if you please. They won't take long."

He referred to the manuscript, and put the first question.

"You were married at Inchmallock, in Ireland, Mr.

Vanborough, thirteen years since?"

"Yes."

"Your wife—then Miss Anne Silvester—was a Roman Catholic?"

"Yes."

"Her father and mother were Roman Catholics?"

"They were."

"*Your* father and mother were Protestants? and *you* were baptized and brought up in the Church of England?"

"All right!"

"Miss Anne Silvester felt, and expressed, a strong repugnance to marrying you, because you and she belonged to different religious communities?"

"She did."

"You got over her objection by consenting to become a Roman Catholic, like herself?"

"It was the shortest way with her and it didn't matter to *me*."

"You were formally received into the Roman Catholic Church?"

"I went through the whole ceremony."

"Abroad or at home?"

"Abroad."

"How long was it before the date of your marriage?"

"Six weeks before I was married."

Referring perpetually to the paper in his hand, Mr. Delamayn was especially careful in comparing that last answer with the answer given to the head-clerk.

"Quite right," he said, and went on with his questions.

"The priest who married you was one Ambrose Redman—a young man recently appointed to his clerical duties?"

"Yes."

"Did he ask if you were both Roman Catholics?"

"Yes."

"Did he ask anything more?"

"No."

"Are you sure he never inquired whether you had both been Catholics *for more than one year before you came to him to be married*?"

"I am certain of it."

"He must have forgotten that part of his duty—or being only a beginner, he may well have been ignorant of it altogether. Did neither you nor the lady think of informing him on the point?"

"Neither I nor the lady knew there was any necessity for informing him."

Mr. Delamayn folded up the manuscript, and put it back in his pocket.

"Right," he said, "in every particular."

Mr. Vanborough's swarthy complexion slowly turned pale. He cast one furtive glance at Mr. Kendrew, and turned away again.

"Well," he said to the lawyer, "now for your opinion! What is the law?"

"The law," answered Mr. Delamayn, "is beyond all doubt or dispute. Your marriage with Miss Anne Silvester is no marriage at all."

Mr. Kendrew started to his feet.

"What do you mean?" he asked, sternly.

The rising solicitor lifted his eyebrows in polite surprise. If Mr. Kendrew wanted information, why should Mr. Kendrew ask for it in that way? "Do you wish me to go into the law of the case?" he inquired.

"I do."

Mr. Delamayn stated the law, as that law still stands—to the disgrace of the English Legislature and the English Nation.

"By the Irish Statute of George the Second," he said, "every marriage celebrated by a Popish priest between two Protestants, or

between a Papist and any person who has been a Protestant within twelve months before the marriage, is declared null and void. And by two other Acts of the same reign such a celebration of marriage is made a felony on the part of the priest. The clergy in Ireland of other religious denominations have been relieved from this law. But it still remains in force so far as the Roman Catholic priesthood is concerned."

"Is such a state of things possible in the age we live in!" exclaimed Mr. Kendrew.

Mr. Delamayn smiled. He had outgrown the customary illusions as to the age we live in.

"There are other instances in which the Irish marriage-law presents some curious anomalies of its own," he went on. "It is felony, as I have just told you, for a Roman Catholic priest to celebrate a marriage which may be lawfully celebrated by a parochial clergyman, a Presbyterian minister, and a Nonconformist minister. It is also felony (by another law) on the part of a parochial clergyman to celebrate a marriage that may be lawfully celebrated by a Roman Catholic priest. And it is again felony (by yet another law) for a Presbyterian minister and a Nonconformist minister to celebrate a marriage which may be lawfully celebrated by a clergyman of the Established Church. An odd state of things. Foreigners might possibly think it a scandalous state of things. In this country we don't appear to mind it. Returning to the present case, the results stand thus: Mr. Vanborough is a single man; Mrs. Vanborough is a single woman; their child is illegitimate, and the priest, Ambrose Redman, is liable to be tried, and punished, as a felon, for marrying them."

"An infamous law!" said Mr. Kendrew.

"It *is* the law," returned Mr. Delamayn, as a sufficient answer to him.

Thus far not a word had escaped the master of the house. He sat with his lips fast closed and his eyes riveted on the table, thinking.

Mr. Kendrew turned to him, and broke the silence.

"Am I to understand," he asked, "that the advice you wanted from me related to *this*?"

"Yes."

"You mean to tell me that, foreseeing the present interview and the result to which it might lead, you felt any doubt as to the course you were bound to take? Am I really to understand that you hesitate to set this dreadful mistake right, and to make the woman who is your wife in the sight of Heaven your wife in the sight of the law?"

"If you choose to put it in that light," said Mr. Vanborough; "if you won't consider—"

"I want a plain answer to my question—'yes, or no.' "

"Let me speak, will you! A man has a right to explain himself, I suppose?"

Mr. Kendrew stopped him by a gesture of disgust.

"I won't trouble you to explain yourself," he said. "I prefer to leave the house. You have given me a lesson, Sir, which I shall not forget. I find that one man may have known another from the days when they were both boys, and may have seen nothing but the false surface of him in all that time. I am ashamed of having ever been your friend. You are a stranger to me from this moment."

With those words he left the room.

"That is a curiously hotheaded man," remarked Mr. Delamayn. "If you will allow me, I think I'll change my mind. I'll have a glass of wine."

Mr. Vanborough rose to his feet without replying, and took a turn in the room impatiently. Scoundrel as he was—in intention, if not yet in act—the loss of the oldest friend he had in the world staggered him for the moment.

"This is an awkward business, Delamayn," he said. "What would you advise me to do?"

Mr. Delamayn shook his head, and sipped his claret.

"I decline to advise you," he answered. "I take no responsibility, beyond the responsibility of stating the law as it stands, in your case."

Mr. Vanborough sat down again at the table, to consider the

alternative of asserting or not asserting his freedom from the marriage tie. He had not had much time thus far for turning the matter over in his mind. But for his residence on the Continent the question of the flaw in his marriage might no doubt have been raised long since. As things were, the question had only taken its rise in a chance conversation with Mr. Delamayn in the summer of that year.

For some minutes the lawyer sat silent, sipping his wine, and the husband sat silent, thinking his own thoughts. The first change that came over the scene was produced by the appearance of a servant in the dining-room.

Mr. Vanborough looked up at the man with a sudden outbreak of anger.

"What do you want here?"

The man was a well-bred English servant. In other words, a human machine, doing its duty impenetrably when it was once wound up. He had his words to speak, and he spoke them.

"There is a lady at the door, Sir, who wishes to see the house."

"The house is not to be seen at this time of the evening."

The machine had a message to deliver, and delivered it.

"The lady desired me to present her apologies, Sir. I was to tell you she was much pressed for time. This was the last house on the house agent's list, and her coachman is stupid about finding his way in strange places."

"Hold your tongue, and tell the lady to go to the devil!"

Mr. Delamayn interfered—partly in the interests of his client, partly in the interests of propriety.

"You attach some importance, I think, to letting this house as soon as possible?" he said.

"Of course I do!"

"Is it wise—on account of a momentary annoyance—to lose an opportunity of laying your hand on a tenant?"

"Wise or not, it's an infernal nuisance to be disturbed by a stranger."

"Just as you please. I don't wish to interfere. I only wish to say—in case you are thinking of my convenience as your guest—that it will be no nuisance to *me*."

The servant impenetrably waited. Mr. Vanborough impatiently gave way.

"Very well. Let her in. Mind, if she comes here, she's only to look into the room, and go out again. If she wants to ask questions, she must go to the agent."

Mr. Delamayn interfered once more, in the interests, this time, of the lady of the house.

"Might it not be desirable," he suggested, "to consult Mrs. Vanborough before you quite decide?"

"Where's your mistress?"

"In the garden, or the paddock, Sir—I am not sure which."

"We can't send all over the grounds in search of her. Tell the housemaid, and show the lady in."

The servant withdrew. Mr. Delamayn helped himself to a second glass of wine.

"Excellent claret," he said. "Do you get it direct from Bordeaux?"

There was no answer. Mr. Vanborough had returned to the contemplation of the alternative between freeing himself or not freeing himself from the marriage tie. One of his elbows was on the table, he bit fiercely at his fingernails. He muttered between his teeth, "What am I to do?"

A sound of rustling silk made itself gently audible in the passage outside. The door opened, and the lady who had come to see the house appeared in the dining-room.

IV

She was tall and elegant; beautifully dressed, in the happiest combination of simplicity and splendor. A light summer veil hung over her face. She lifted it, and made her apologies for disturbing the gentlemen over their wine, with the unaffected ease and grace of a highly-bred woman.

"Pray accept my excuses for this intrusion. I am ashamed to

disturb you. One look at the room will be quite enough."

Thus far she had addressed Mr. Delamayn, who happened to be nearest to her. Looking round the room her eye fell on Mr. Vanborough. She started, with a loud exclamation of astonishment. "*You!*" she said. "Good Heavens! who would have thought of meeting *you* here?"

Mr. Vanborough, on his side, stood petrified.

"Lady Jane!" he exclaimed. "Is it possible?"

He barely looked at her while she spoke. His eyes wandered guiltily toward the window which led into the garden. The situation was a terrible one—equally terrible if his wife discovered Lady Jane, or if Lady Jane discovered his wife. For the moment nobody was visible on the lawn. There was time, if the chance only offered—there was time for him to get the visitor out of the house. The visitor, innocent of all knowledge of the truth, gaily offered him her hand.

"I believe in mesmerism for the first time," she said. "This is an instance of magnetic sympathy, Mr. Vanborough. An invalid friend of mine wants a furnished house at Hampstead. I undertake to find one for her, and the day *I* select to make the discovery is the day *you* select for dining with a friend. A last house at Hampstead is left on my list—and in that house I meet you. Astonishing!" She turned to Mr. Delamayn. "I presume I am addressing the owner of the house?" Before a word could be said by either of the gentlemen she noticed the garden. "What pretty grounds! Do I see a lady in the garden? I hope I have not driven her away." She looked round, and appealed to Mr. Vanborough. "Your friend's wife?" she asked, and, on this occasion, waited for a reply.

In Mr. Vanborough's situation what reply was possible?

Mrs. Vanborough was not only visible—but audible—in the garden; giving her orders to one of the out-of-door servants with the tone and manner which proclaimed the mistress of the house. Suppose he said, "She is *not* my friend's wife?" Female curiosity would inevitably put the next question, "Who is she?" Suppose he invented an explanation? The explanation would take time, and time would give his wife an opportunity of discovering Lady Jane. Seeing all these considerations in one breathless moment, Mr.

Vanborough took the shortest and the boldest way out of the difficulty. He answered silently by an affirmative inclination of the head, which dextrously turned Mrs. Vanborough into to Mrs. Delamayn without allowing Mr. Delamayn the opportunity of hearing it.

But the lawyer's eye was habitually watchful, and the lawyer saw him.

Mastering in a moment his first natural astonishment at the liberty taken with him, Mr. Delamayn drew the inevitable conclusion that there was something wrong, and that there was an attempt (not to be permitted for a moment) to mix him up in it. He advanced, resolute to contradict his client, to his client's own face.

The voluble Lady Jane interrupted him before he could open his lips.

"Might I ask one question? Is the aspect south? Of course it is! I ought to see by the sun that the aspect is south. These and the other two are, I suppose, the only rooms on the ground-floor? And is it quiet? Of course it's quiet! A charming house. Far more likely to suit my friend than any I have seen yet. Will you give me the refusal of it till tomorrow?" There she stopped for breath, and gave Mr. Delamayn his first opportunity of speaking to her.

"I beg your ladyship's pardon," he began. "I really can't—"

Mr. Vanborough—passing close behind him and whispering as he passed—stopped the lawyer before he could say a word more.

"For God's sake, don't contradict me! My wife is coming this way!"

At the same moment (still supposing that Mr. Delamayn was the master of the house) Lady Jane returned to the charge.

"You appear to feel some hesitation," she said. "Do you want a reference?" She smiled satirically, and summoned her friend to her aid. "Mr. Vanborough!"

Mr. Vanborough, stealing step by step nearer to the window—intent, come what might of it, on keeping his wife out of the room—neither heeded nor heard her. Lady Jane followed him, and tapped him briskly on the shoulder with her parasol.

At that moment Mrs. Vanborough appeared on the garden side of the window.

"Am I in the way?" she asked, addressing her husband, after one steady look at Lady Jane. "This lady appears to be an old friend of yours." There was a tone of sarcasm in that allusion to the parasol, which might develop into a tone of jealousy at a moment's notice.

Lady Jane was not in the least disconcerted. She had her double privilege of familiarity with the men whom she liked—her privilege as a woman of high rank, and her privilege as a young widow. She bowed to Mrs. Vanborough, with all the highly-finished politeness of the order to which she belonged.

"The lady of the house, I presume?" she said, with a gracious smile.

Mrs. Vanborough returned the bow coldly—entered the room first—and then answered, "Yes."

Lady Jane turned to Mr. Vanborough.

"Present me!" she said, submitting resignedly to the formalities of the middle classes.

Mr. Vanborough obeyed, without looking at his wife, and without mentioning his wife's name.

"Lady Jane Parnell," he said, passing over the introduction as rapidly as possible. "Let me see you to your carriage," he added, offering his arm. "I will take care that you have the refusal of the house. You may trust it all to me."

No! Lady Jane was accustomed to leave a favorable impression behind her wherever she went. It was a habit with her to be charming (in widely different ways) to both sexes. The social experience of the upper classes is, in England, an experience of universal welcome. Lady Jane declined to leave until she had thawed the icy reception of the lady of the house.

"I must repeat my apologies," she said to Mrs. Vanborough, "for coming at this inconvenient time. My intrusion appears to have sadly disturbed the two gentlemen. Mr. Vanborough looks as if he wished me a hundred miles away. And as for your husband—" She stopped and glanced toward Mr. Delamayn. "Pardon me for speaking in that familiar way. I have not the

pleasure of knowing your husband's name."

In speechless amazement Mrs. Vanborough's eyes followed the direction of Lady Jane's eyes—and rested on the lawyer, personally a total stranger to her.

Mr. Delamayn, resolutely waiting his opportunity to speak, seized it once more—and held it this time.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "There is some misapprehension here, for which I am in no way responsible. I am *not* that lady's husband."

It was Lady Jane's turn to be astonished. She looked at the lawyer. Useless! Mr. Delamayn had set himself right—Mr. Delamayn declined to interfere further. He silently took a chair at the other end of the room. Lady Jane addressed Mr. Vanborough.

"Whatever the mistake may be," she said, "you are responsible for it. You certainly told me this lady was your friend's wife."

"What!!!" cried Mrs. Vanborough—loudly, sternly, incredulously.

The inbred pride of the great lady began to appear behind the thin outer veil of politeness that covered it.

"I will speak louder if you wish it," she said. "Mr. Vanborough told me you were that gentleman's wife."

Mr. Vanborough whispered fiercely to his wife through his clenched teeth.

"The whole thing is a mistake. Go into the garden again!"

Mrs. Vanborough's indignation was suspended for the moment in dread, as she saw the passion and the terror struggling in her husband's face.

"How you look at me!" she said. "How you speak to me!"

He only repeated, "Go into the garden!"

Lady Jane began to perceive, what the lawyer had discovered some minutes previously—that there was something wrong in the villa at Hampstead. The lady of the house was a lady in an anomalous position of some kind. And as the house, to all appearance, belonged to Mr. Vanborough's friend, Mr. Vanborough's friend must (in spite of his recent disclaimer) be in

some way responsible for it. Arriving, naturally enough, at this erroneous conclusion, Lady Jane's eyes rested for an instant on Mrs. Vanborough with a finely contemptuous expression of inquiry which would have roused the spirit of the tamest woman in existence. The implied insult stung the wife's sensitive nature to the quick. She turned once more to her husband—this time without flinching.

"Who is that woman?" she asked.

Lady Jane was equal to the emergency. The manner in which she wrapped herself up in her own virtue, without the slightest pretension on the one hand, and without the slightest compromise on the other, was a sight to see.

"Mr. Vanborough," she said, "you offered to take me to my carriage just now. I begin to understand that I had better have accepted the offer at once. Give me your arm."

"Stop!" said Mrs. Vanborough, "your ladyship's looks are looks of contempt; your ladyship's words can bear but one interpretation. I am innocently involved in some vile deception which I don't understand. But this I do know—I won't submit to be insulted in my own house. After what you have just said I forbid my husband to give you his arm."

Her husband!

Lady Jane looked at Mr. Vanborough—at Mr. Vanborough, whom she loved; whom she had honestly believed to be a single man; whom she had suspected, up to that moment, of nothing worse than of trying to screen the frailties of his friend. She dropped her highly-bred tone; she lost her highly-bred manners. The sense of her injury (if this was true), the pang of her jealousy (if that woman was his wife), stripped the human nature in her bare of all disguises, raised the angry color in her cheeks, and struck the angry fire out of her eyes.

"If you can tell the truth, Sir," she said, haughtily, "be so good as to tell it now. Have you been falsely presenting yourself to the world—falsely presenting yourself to *me*—in the character and with the aspirations of a single man? Is that lady your wife?"

"Do you hear her? do you see her?" cried Mrs. Vanborough, appealing to her husband, in her turn. She suddenly drew back from him, shuddering from head to foot. "He hesitates!" she said

to herself, faintly. "Good God! he hesitates!"

Lady Jane sternly repeated her question.

"Is that lady your wife?"

He roused his scoundrel-courage, and said the fatal word:

"No!"

Mrs. Vanborough staggered back. She caught at the white curtains of the window to save herself from falling, and tore them. She looked at her husband, with the torn curtain clenched fast in her hand. She asked herself, "Am I mad? or is he?"

Lady Jane drew a deep breath of relief. He was not married! He was only a profligate single man. A profligate single man is shocking—but reclaimable. It is possible to blame him severely, and to insist on his reformation in the most uncompromising terms. It is also possible to forgive him, and marry him. Lady Jane took the necessary position under the circumstances with perfect tact. She inflicted reproof in the present without excluding hope in the future.

"I have made a very painful discovery," she said, gravely, to Mr. Vanborough. "It rests with *you* to persuade me to forget it! Good evening!"

She accompanied the last words by a farewell look which aroused Mrs. Vanborough to frenzy. She sprang forward and prevented Lady Jane from leaving the room.

"No!" she said. "You don't go yet!"

Mr. Vanborough came forward to interfere. His wife eyed him with a terrible look, and turned from him with a terrible contempt. "That man has lied!" she said. "In justice to myself, I insist on proving it!" She struck a bell on a table near her. The servant came in. "Fetch my writing-desk out of the next room." She waited—with her back turned on her husband, with her eyes fixed on Lady Jane. Defenseless and alone she stood on the wreck of her married life, superior to the husband's treachery, the lawyer's indifference, and her rival's contempt. At that dreadful moment her beauty shone out again with a gleam of its old glory. The grand woman, who in the old stage days had held thousands breathless over the mimic woes of the scene, stood there grander than ever, in her own woe, and held the three people who looked

at her breathless till she spoke again.

The servant came in with the desk. She took out a paper and handed it to Lady Jane.

"I was a singer on the stage," she said, "when I was a single woman. The slander to which such women are exposed doubted my marriage. I provided myself with the paper in your hand. It speaks for itself. Even the highest society, madam, respects *that*!"

Lady Jane examined the paper. It was a marriage-certificate. She turned deadly pale, and beckoned to Mr. Vanborough. "Are you deceiving me?" she asked.

Mr. Vanborough looked back into the far corner of the room, in which the lawyer sat, impenetrably waiting for events. "Oblige me by coming here for a moment," he said.

Mr. Delamayn rose and complied with the request. Mr. Vanborough addressed himself to Lady Jane.

"I beg to refer you to my man of business. *He* is not interested in deceiving you."

"Am I required simply to speak to the fact?" asked Mr. Delamayn. "I decline to do more."

"You are not wanted to do more."

Listening intently to that interchange of question and answer, Mrs. Vanborough advanced a step in silence. The high courage that had sustained her against outrage which had openly declared itself shrank under the sense of something coming which she had not foreseen. A nameless dread throbbed at her heart and crept among the roots of her hair.

Lady Jane handed the certificate to the lawyer.

"In two words, Sir," she said, impatiently, "what is this?"

"In two words, madam," answered Mr. Delamayn; "waste paper."

"He is *not* married?"

"He is *not* married."

After a moment's hesitation Lady Jane looked round at Mrs. Vanborough, standing silent at her side—looked, and started back

in terror. "Take me away!" she cried, shrinking from the ghastly face that confronted her with the fixed stare of agony in the great, glittering eyes. "Take me away! That woman will murder me!"

Mr. Vanborough gave her his arm and led her to the door. There was dead silence in the room as he did it. Step by step the wife's eyes followed them with the same dreadful stare, till the door closed and shut them out. The lawyer, left alone with the disowned and deserted woman, put the useless certificate silently on the table. She looked from him to the paper, and dropped, without a cry to warn him, without an effort to save herself, senseless at his feet.

He lifted her from the floor and placed her on the sofa, and waited to see if Mr. Vanborough would come back. Looking at the beautiful face—still beautiful, even in the swoon—he owned it was hard on her. Yes! in his own impenetrable way, the rising lawyer owned it was hard on her.

But the law justified it. There was no doubt in this case. The law justified it.

The trampling of horses and the grating of wheels sounded outside. Lady Jane's carriage was driving away. Would the husband come back? (See what a thing habit is! Even Mr. Delamayn still mechanically thought of him as the husband—in the face of the law! in the face of the facts!)

No. Then minutes passed. And no sign of the husband coming back.

It was not wise to make a scandal in the house. It was not desirable (on his own sole responsibility) to let the servants see what had happened. Still, there she lay senseless. The cool evening air came in through the open window and lifted the light ribbons in her lace cap, lifted the little lock of hair that had broken loose and drooped over her neck. Still, there she lay—the wife who had loved him, the mother of his child—there she lay.

He stretched out his hand to ring the bell and summon help.

At the same moment the quiet of the summer evening was once more disturbed. He held his hand suspended over the bell. The noise outside came nearer. It was again the trampling of horses and the grating of wheels. Advancing—rapidly advancing—stopping at the house.

Was Lady Jane coming back?

Was the husband coming back?

There was a loud ring at the bell—a quick opening of the house-door—a rustling of a woman's dress in the passage. The door of the room opened, and the woman appeared—alone. Not Lady Jane. A stranger—older, years older, than Lady Jane. A plain woman, perhaps, at other times. A woman almost beautiful now, with the eager happiness that beamed in her face.

She saw the figure on the sofa. She ran to it with a cry—a cry of recognition and a cry of terror in one. She dropped on her knees—and laid that helpless head on her bosom, and kissed, with a sister's kisses, that cold, white cheek.

"Oh, my darling!" she said. "Is it thus we meet again?"

Yes! After all the years that had passed since the parting in the cabin of the ship, it was thus the two school-friends met again.

II: The March of Time

V

Advancing from time past to time present, the Prologue leaves the date last attained (the summer of eighteen hundred and fifty-five), and travels on through an interval of twelve years—tells who lived, who died, who prospered, and who failed among the persons concerned in the tragedy at the Hampstead villa—and, this done, leaves the reader at the opening of the story in the spring of eighteen hundred and sixty-eight.

The record begins with a marriage—the marriage of Mr. Vanborough and Lady Jane Parnell.

In three months from the memorable day when his solicitor had informed him that he was a free man, Mr. Vanborough possessed the wife he desired, to grace the head of his table and to push his fortunes in the world—the Legislature of Great Britain being the humble servant of his treachery, and the respectable accomplice of his crime.

He entered Parliament. He gave (thanks to his wife) six of the

grandest dinners, and two of the most crowded balls of the season. He made a successful first speech in the House of Commons. He endowed a church in a poor neighborhood. He wrote an article which attracted attention in a quarterly review. He discovered, denounced, and remedied a crying abuse in the administration of a public charity. He received (thanks once more to his wife) a member of the Royal family among the visitors at his country house in the autumn recess. These were his triumphs, and this his rate of progress on the way to the peerage, during the first year of his life as the husband of Lady Jane.

There was but one more favor that Fortune could confer on her spoiled child—and Fortune bestowed it. There was a spot on Mr. Vanborough's past life as long as the woman lived whom he had disowned and deserted. At the end of the first year Death took her—and the spot was rubbed out.

She had met the merciless injury inflicted on her with a rare patience, with an admirable courage. It is due to Mr. Vanborough to admit that he broke her heart, with the strictest attention to propriety. He offered (through his lawyer) a handsome provision for her and for her child. It was rejected, without an instant's hesitation. She repudiated his money—she repudiated his name. By the name which she had borne in her maiden days—the name which she had made illustrious in her Art—the mother and daughter were known to all who cared to inquire after them when they had sunk in the world.

There was no false pride in the resolute attitude which she thus assumed after her husband had forsaken her. Mrs. Silvester (as she was now called) gratefully accepted for herself, and for Miss Silvester, the assistance of the dear old friend who had found her again in her affliction, and who remained faithful to her to the end. They lived with Lady Lundie until the mother was strong enough to carry out the plan of life which she had arranged for the future, and to earn her bread as a teacher of singing. To all appearance she rallied, and became herself again, in a few months' time. She was making her way; she was winning sympathy, confidence, and respect everywhere—when she sank suddenly at the opening of her new life. Nobody could account for it. The doctors themselves were divided in opinion. Scientifically speaking, there was no reason why she should die. It was a mere figure of speech—in no degree satisfactory to any

reasonable mind—to say, as Lady Lundie said, that she had got her deathblow on the day when her husband deserted her. The one thing certain was the fact—account for it as you might. In spite of science (which meant little), in spite of her own courage (which meant much), the woman dropped at her post and died.

In the latter part of her illness her mind gave way. The friend of her old schooldays, sitting at the bedside, heard her talking as if she thought herself back again in the cabin of the ship. The poor soul found the tone, almost the look, that had been lost for so many years—the tone of the past time when the two girls had gone their different ways in the world. She said, "we will meet, darling, with all the old love between us," just as she had said almost a lifetime since. Before the end her mind rallied. She surprised the doctor and the nurse by begging them gently to leave the room. When they had gone she looked at Lady Lundie, and woke, as it seemed, to consciousness from a dream.

"Blanche," she said, "you will take care of my child?"

"She shall be *my* child, Anne, when you are gone."

The dying woman paused, and thought for a little. A sudden trembling seized her.

"Keep it a secret!" she said. "I am afraid for my child."

"Afraid? After what I have promised you?"

She solemnly repeated the words, "I am afraid for my child."

"Why?"

"My Anne is my second self—isn't she?"

"Yes."

"She is as fond of your child as I was of you?"

"Yes."

"She is not called by her father's name—she is called by mine. She is Anne Silvester as I was. Blanche! *Will she end like me?*"

The question was put with the laboring breath, with the heavy accents which tell that death is near. It chilled the living woman who heard it to the marrow of her bones.

"Don't think that!" she cried, horror-struck. "For God's sake,

don't think that!"

The wildness began to appear again in Anne Silvester's eyes. She made feebly impatient signs with her hands. Lady Lundie bent over her, and heard her whisper, "Lift me up."

She lay in her friend's arms; she looked up in her friend's face; she went back wildly to her fear for her child.

"Don't bring her up like me! She must be a governess—she must get her bread. Don't let her act! don't let her sing! don't let her go on the stage!" She stopped—her voice suddenly recovered its sweetness of tone—she smiled faintly—she said the old girlish words once more, in the old girlish way, "Vow it, Blanche!" Lady Lundie kissed her, and answered, as she had answered when they parted in the ship, "I vow it, Anne!"

The head sank, never to be lifted more. The last look of life flickered in the filmy eyes and went out. For a moment afterward her lips moved. Lady Lundie put her ear close to them, and heard the dreadful question reiterated, in the same dreadful words: "She is Anne Silvester—as I was. *Will she end like me?*"

VI

Five years passed—and the lives of the three men who had sat at the dinner-table in the Hampstead villa began, in their altered aspects, to reveal the progress of time and change.

Mr. Kendrew; Mr. Delamayn; Mr. Vanborough. Let the order in which they are here named be the order in which their lives are reviewed, as seen once more after a lapse of five years.

How the husband's friend marked his sense of the husband's treachery has been told already. How he felt the death of the deserted wife is still left to tell. Report, which sees the inmost hearts of men, and delights in turning them outward to the public view, had always declared that Mr. Kendrew's life had its secret, and that the secret was a hopeless passion for the beautiful woman who had married his friend. Not a hint ever dropped to any living soul, not a word ever spoken to the woman herself, could be produced in proof of the assertion while the woman lived. When she died Report started up again more confidently than ever, and appealed to the man's own conduct as proof against the man himself.

He attended the funeral—though he was no relation. He took a few blades of grass from the turf with which they covered her grave—when he thought that nobody was looking at him. He disappeared from his club. He traveled. He came back. He admitted that he was weary of England. He applied for, and obtained, an appointment in one of the colonies. To what conclusion did all this point? Was it not plain that his usual course of life had lost its attraction for him, when the object of his infatuation had ceased to exist? It might have been so—guesses less likely have been made at the truth, and have hit the mark. It is, at any rate, certain that he left England, never to return again. Another man lost, Report said. Add to that, a man in ten thousand—and, for once, Report might claim to be right.

Mr. Delamayn comes next.

The rising solicitor was struck off the roll, at his own request—and entered himself as a student at one of the Inns of Court. For three years nothing was known of him but that he was reading hard and keeping his terms. He was called to the Bar. His late partners in the firm knew they could trust him, and put business into his hands. In two years he made himself a position in Court. At the end of the two years he made himself a position out of Court. He appeared as "Junior" in "a famous case," in which the honor of a great family, and the title to a great estate were concerned. His "Senior" fell ill on the eve of the trial. He conducted the case for the defendant and won it. The defendant said, "What can I do for you?" Mr. Delamayn answered, "Put me into Parliament." Being a landed gentleman, the defendant had only to issue the necessary orders—and behold, Mr. Delamayn was in Parliament!

In the House of Commons the new member and Mr. Vanborough met again.

They sat on the same bench, and sided with the same party. Mr. Delamayn noticed that Mr. Vanborough was looking old and worn and gray. He put a few questions to a well-informed person. The well-informed person shook his head. Mr. Vanborough was rich; Mr. Vanborough was well-connected (through his wife); Mr. Vanborough was a sound man in every sense of the word; *but*—nobody liked him. He had done very well the first year, and there it had ended. He was undeniably clever, but he produced a disagreeable impression in the House. He gave splendid

entertainments, but he wasn't popular in society. His party respected him, but when they had anything to give they passed him over. He had a temper of his own, if the truth must be told; and with nothing against him—on the contrary, with everything in his favor—he didn't make friends. A soured man. At home and abroad, a soured man.

VII

Five years more passed, dating from the day when the deserted wife was laid in her grave. It was now the year eighteen hundred and sixty six.

On a certain day in that year two special items of news appeared in the papers—the news of an elevation to the peerage, and the news of a suicide.

Getting on well at the Bar, Mr. Delamayn got on better still in Parliament. He became one of the prominent men in the House. Spoke clearly, sensibly, and modestly, and was never too long. Held the House, where men of higher abilities bored it. The chiefs of his party said openly, "We must do something for Delamayn," The opportunity offered, and the chiefs kept their word. Their Solicitor-General was advanced a step, and they put Delamayn in his place. There was an outcry on the part of the older members of the Bar. The Ministry answered, "We want a man who is listened to in the House, and we have got him." The papers supported the new nomination. A great debate came off, and the new Solicitor-General justified the Ministry and the papers. His enemies said, derisively, "He will be Lord Chancellor in a year or two!" His friends made genial jokes in his domestic circle, which pointed to the same conclusion. They warned his two sons, Julius and Geoffrey (then at college), to be careful what acquaintances they made, as they might find themselves the sons of a lord at a moment's notice. It really began to look like something of the sort. Always rising, Mr. Delamayn rose next to be Attorney-General. About the same time—so true it is that "nothing succeeds like success"—a childless relative died and left him a fortune. In the summer of 'sixty-six a Chief Judgeship fell vacant. The Ministry had made a previous appointment which had been universally unpopular. They saw their way to supplying the place of their Attorney-General, and they offered the judicial appointment to Mr. Delamayn. He preferred remaining in the

House of Commons, and refused to accept it. The Ministry declined to take No for an answer. They whispered confidentially, "Will you take it with a peerage?" Mr. Delamayn consulted his wife, and took it with a peerage. The London *Gazette* announced him to the world as Baron Holchester of Holchester. And the friends of the family rubbed their hands and said, "What did we tell you? Here are our two young friends, Julius and Geoffrey, the sons of a lord!"

And where was Mr. Vanborough all this time? Exactly where we left him five years since.

He was as rich, or richer, than ever. He was as well-connected as ever. He was as ambitious as ever. But there it ended. He stood still in the House; he stood still in society; nobody liked him; he made no friends. It was all the old story over again, with this difference, that the soured man was sourer; the gray head, grayer; and the irritable temper more unendurable than ever. His wife had her rooms in the house and he had his, and the confidential servants took care that they never met on the stairs. They had no children. They only saw each other at their grand dinners and balls. People ate at their table, and danced on their floor, and compared notes afterward, and said how dull it was. Step by step the man who had once been Mr. Vanborough's lawyer rose, till the peerage received him, and he could rise no longer; while Mr. Vanborough, on the lower round of the ladder, looked up, and noted it, with no more chance (rich as he was and well-connected as he was) of climbing to the House of Lords than your chance or mine.

The man's career was ended; and on the day when the nomination of the new peer was announced, the man ended with it.

He laid the newspaper aside without making any remark, and went out. His carriage set him down, where the green fields still remain, on the northwest of London, near the footpath which leads to Hampstead. He walked alone to the villa where he had once lived with the woman whom he had so cruelly wronged. New houses had risen round it, part of the old garden had been sold and built on. After a moment's hesitation he went to the gate and rang the bell. He gave the servant his card. The servant's master knew the name as the name of a man of great wealth, and of a Member of Parliament. He asked politely to what fortunate

circumstance he owed the honor of that visit. Mr. Vanborough answered, briefly and simply, "I once lived here; I have associations with the place with which it is not necessary for me to trouble you. Will you excuse what must seem to you a very strange request? I should like to see the dining-room again, if there is no objection, and if I am disturbing nobody."

The "strange requests" of rich men are of the nature of "privileged communications," for this excellent reason, that they are sure not to be requests for money. Mr. Vanborough was shown into the dining-room. The master of the house, secretly wondering, watched him.

He walked straight to a certain spot on the carpet, not far from the window that led into the garden, and nearly opposite the door. On that spot he stood silently, with his head on his breast—thinking. Was it *there* he had seen her for the last time, on the day when he left the room forever? Yes; it was there. After a minute or so he roused himself, but in a dreamy, absent manner. He said it was a pretty place, and expressed his thanks, and looked back before the door closed, and then went his way again. His carriage picked him up where it had set him down. He drove to the residence of the new Lord Holchester, and left a card for him. Then he went home. Arrived at his house, his secretary reminded him that he had an appointment in ten minutes' time. He thanked the secretary in the same dreamy, absent manner in which he had thanked the owner of the villa, and went into his dressing-room. The person with whom he had made the appointment came, and the secretary sent the valet upstairs to knock at the door. There was no answer. On trying the lock it proved to be turned inside. They broke open the door, and saw him lying on the sofa. They went close to look—and found him dead by his own hand.

VIII

Drawing fast to its close, the Prologue reverts to the two girls—and tells, in a few words, how the years passed with Anne and Blanche.

Lady Lundie more than redeemed the solemn pledge that she had given to her friend. Preserved from every temptation which might lure her into a longing to follow her mother's career; trained for a teacher's life, with all the arts and all the advantages that money could procure, Anne's first and only essays as a

governess were made, under Lady Lundie's own roof, on Lady Lundie's own child. The difference in the ages of the girls—seven years—the love between them, which seemed, as time went on, to grow with their growth, favored the trial of the experiment. In the double relation of teacher and friend to little Blanche, the girlhood of Anne Silvester the younger passed safely, happily, uneventfully, in the modest sanctuary of home. Who could imagine a contrast more complete than the contrast between her early life and her mother's? Who could see anything but a deathbed delusion in the terrible question which had tortured the mother's last moments: "Will she end like me?"

But two events of importance occurred in the quiet family circle during the lapse of years which is now under review. In eighteen hundred and fifty-eight the household was enlivened by the arrival of Sir Thomas Lundie. In eighteen hundred and sixty-five the household was broken up by the return of Sir Thomas to India, accompanied by his wife.

Lady Lundie's health had been failing for some time previously. The medical men, consulted on the case, agreed that a sea-voyage was the one change needful to restore their patient's wasted strength—exactly at the time, as it happened, when Sir Thomas was due again in India. For his wife's sake, he agreed to defer his return, by taking the sea-voyage with her. The one difficulty to get over was the difficulty of leaving Blanche and Anne behind in England.

Appealed to on this point, the doctors had declared that at Blanche's critical time of life they could not sanction her going to India with her mother. At the same time, near and dear relatives came forward, who were ready and anxious to give Blanche and her governess a home—Sir Thomas, on his side, engaging to bring his wife back in a year and a half, or, at most, in two years' time. Assailed in all directions, Lady Lundie's natural unwillingness to leave the girls was overruled. She consented to the parting—with a mind secretly depressed, and secretly doubtful of the future.

At the last moment she drew Anne Silvester on one side, out of hearing of the rest. Anne was then a young woman of twenty-two, and Blanche a girl of fifteen.

"My dear," she said, simply, "I must tell *you* what I cannot tell Sir Thomas, and what I am afraid to tell Blanche. I am going

away, with a mind that misgives me. I am persuaded I shall not live to return to England; and, when I am dead, I believe my husband will marry again. Years ago your mother was uneasy, on her deathbed, about *your* future. I am uneasy, now, about Blanche's future. I promised my dear dead friend that you should be like my own child to me—and it quieted her mind. Quiet my mind, Anne, before I go. Whatever happens in years to come—promise me to be always, what you are now, a sister to Blanche."

She held out her hand for the last time. With a full heart Anne Silvester kissed it, and gave the promise.

IX

In two months from that time one of the forebodings which had weighed on Lady Lundie's mind was fulfilled. She died on the voyage, and was buried at sea.

In a year more the second misgiving was confirmed. Sir Thomas Lundie married again. He brought his second wife to England toward the close of eighteen hundred and sixty six.

Time, in the new household, promised to pass as quietly as in the old. Sir Thomas remembered and respected the trust which his first wife had placed in Anne. The second Lady Lundie, wisely guiding her conduct in this matter by the conduct of her husband, left things as she found them in the new house. At the opening of eighteen hundred and sixty-seven the relations between Anne and Blanche were relations of sisterly sympathy and sisterly love. The prospect in the future was as fair as a prospect could be.

At this date, of the persons concerned in the tragedy of twelve years since at the Hampstead villa, three were dead; and one was self-exiled in a foreign land. There now remained living Anne and Blanche, who had been children at the time; and the rising solicitor who had discovered the flaw in the Irish marriage—once Mr. Delamayn: now Lord Holchester.

THE STORY

FIRST SCENE

THE SUMMERHOUSE

I

THE OWLS

In the spring of the year eighteen hundred and sixty-eight there lived, in a certain county of North Britain, two venerable White Owls.

The Owls inhabited a decayed and deserted summerhouse. The summerhouse stood in grounds attached to a country seat in Perthshire, known by the name of Windygates.

The situation of Windygates had been skillfully chosen in that part of the county where the fertile lowlands first begin to merge into the mountain region beyond. The mansion-house was intelligently laid out, and luxuriously furnished. The stables offered a model for ventilation and space; and the gardens and grounds were fit for a prince.

Possessed of these advantages, at starting, Windygates, nevertheless, went the road to ruin in due course of time. The curse of litigation fell on house and lands. For more than ten years an interminable lawsuit coiled itself closer and closer round the place, sequestering it from human habitation, and even from human approach. The mansion was closed. The garden became a wilderness of weeds. The summerhouse was choked up by creeping plants; and the appearance of the creepers was followed by the appearance of the birds of night.

For years the Owls lived undisturbed on the property which they had acquired by the oldest of all existing rights—the right of

taking. Throughout the day they sat peaceful and solemn, with closed eyes, in the cool darkness shed round them by the ivy. With the twilight they roused themselves softly to the business of life. In sage and silent companionship of two, they went flying, noiseless, along the quiet lanes in search of a meal. At one time they would beat a field like a setter dog, and drop down in an instant on a mouse unaware of them. At another time—moving spectral over the black surface of the water—they would try the lake for a change, and catch a perch as they had caught the mouse. Their catholic digestions were equally tolerant of a rat or an insect. And there were moments, proud moments, in their lives, when they were clever enough to snatch a small bird at roost off his perch. On those occasions the sense of superiority which the large bird feels everywhere over the small, warmed their cool blood, and set them screeching cheerfully in the stillness of the night.

So, for years, the Owls slept their happy sleep by day, and found their comfortable meal when darkness fell. They had come, with the creepers, into possession of the summerhouse. Consequently, the creepers were a part of the constitution of the summerhouse. And consequently the Owls were the guardians of the Constitution. There are some human owls who reason as they did, and who are, in this respect—as also in respect of snatching smaller birds off their roosts—wonderfully like them.

The constitution of the summerhouse had lasted until the spring of the year eighteen hundred and sixty-eight, when the unhallowed footsteps of innovation passed that way; and the venerable privileges of the Owls were assailed, for the first time, from the world outside.

Two featherless beings appeared, uninvited, at the door of the summerhouse, surveyed the constitutional creepers, and said, "These must come down"—looked around at the horrid light of noonday, and said, "That must come in"—went away, thereupon, and were heard, in the distance, agreeing together, "Tomorrow it shall be done."

And the Owls said, "Have we honored the summerhouse by occupying it all these years—and is the horrid light of noonday to be let in on us at last? My lords and gentlemen, the Constitution is destroyed!"

They passed a resolution to that effect, as is the manner of their kind. And then they shut their eyes again, and felt that they had done their duty.

The same night, on their way to the fields, they observed with dismay a light in one of the windows of the house. What did the light mean?

It meant, in the first place, that the lawsuit was over at last. It meant, in the second place that the owner of Windygates, wanting money, had decided on letting the property. It meant, in the third place, that the property had found a tenant, and was to be renovated immediately out of doors and in. The Owls shrieked as they flapped along the lanes in the darkness. And that night they struck at a mouse—and missed him.

The next morning, the Owls—fast asleep in charge of the Constitution—were roused by voices of featherless beings all round them. They opened their eyes, under protest, and saw instruments of destruction attacking the creepers. Now in one direction, and now in another, those instruments let in on the summerhouse the horrid light of day. But the Owls were equal to the occasion. They ruffled their feathers, and cried, "No surrender!" The featherless beings plied their work cheerfully, and answered, "Reform!" The creepers were torn down this way and that. The horrid daylight poured in brighter and brighter. The Owls had barely time to pass a new resolution, namely, "That we do stand by the Constitution," when a ray of the outer sunlight flashed into their eyes, and sent them flying headlong to the nearest shade. There they sat winking, while the summerhouse was cleared of the rank growth that had choked it up, while the rotten woodwork was renewed, while all the murky place was purified with air and light. And when the world saw it, and said, "Now we shall do!" the Owls shut their eyes in pious remembrance of the darkness, and answered, "My lords and gentlemen, the Constitution is destroyed!"

II

THE GUESTS

Who was responsible for the reform of the summerhouse? The new tenant at Windygates was responsible.

And who was the new tenant?

Come, and see.

In the spring of eighteen hundred and sixty-eight the summerhouse had been the dismal dwelling-place of a pair of owls. In the autumn of the same year the summerhouse was the lively gathering-place of a crowd of ladies and gentlemen, assembled at a lawn party—the guests of the tenant who had taken Windygates.

The scene—at the opening of the party—was as pleasant to look at as light and beauty and movement could make it.

Inside the summerhouse the butterfly-brightness of the women in their summer dresses shone radiant out of the gloom shed round it by the dreary modern clothing of the men. Outside the summerhouse, seen through three arched openings, the cool green prospect of a lawn led away, in the distance, to flowerbeds and shrubberies, and, farther still, disclosed, through a break in the trees, a grand stone house which closed the view, with a fountain in front of it playing in the sun.

They were half of them laughing, they were all of them talking—the comfortable hum of their voices was at its loudest; the cheery pealing of the laughter was soaring to its highest notes—when one dominant voice, rising clear and shrill above all the rest, called imperatively for silence. The moment after, a young lady stepped into the vacant space in front of the summerhouse, and surveyed the throng of guests as a general in command surveys a regiment under review.

She was young, she was pretty, she was plump, she was fair. She was not the least embarrassed by her prominent position. She was dressed in the height of the fashion. A hat, like a cheese-plate, was tilted over her forehead. A balloon of light brown hair soared, fully inflated, from the crown of her head. A cataract of beads poured over her bosom. A pair of cockchafers in enamel

(frightfully like the living originals) hung at her ears. Her scanty skirts shone splendid with the blue of heaven. Her ankles twinkled in striped stockings. Her shoes were of the sort called "Watteau." And her heels were of the height at which men shudder, and ask themselves (in contemplating an otherwise lovable woman), "Can this charming person straighten her knees?"

The young lady thus presenting herself to the general view was Miss Blanche Lundie—once the little rosy Blanche whom the Prologue has introduced to the reader. Age, at the present time, eighteen. Position, excellent. Money, certain. Temper, quick. Disposition, variable. In a word, a child of the modern time—with the merits of the age we live in, and the failings of the age we live in—and a substance of sincerity and truth and feeling underlying it all.

"Now then, good people," cried Miss Blanche, "silence, if you please! We are going to choose sides at croquet. Business, business, business!"

Upon this, a second lady among the company assumed a position of prominence, and answered the young person who had just spoken with a look of mild reproof, and in a tone of benevolent protest.

The second lady was tall, and solid, and five-and-thirty. She presented to the general observation a cruel aquiline nose, an obstinate straight chin, magnificent dark hair and eyes, a serene splendor of fawn-colored apparel, and a lazy grace of movement which was attractive at first sight, but inexpressibly monotonous and wearisome on a longer acquaintance. This was Lady Lundie the Second, now the widow (after four months only of married life) of Sir Thomas Lundie, deceased. In other words, the stepmother of Blanche, and the enviable person who had taken the house and lands of Windygates.

"My dear," said Lady Lundie, "words have their meanings—even on a young lady's lips. Do you call croquet, 'business?' "

"You don't call it pleasure, surely?" said a gravely ironical voice in the background of the summerhouse.

The ranks of the visitors parted before the last speaker, and disclosed to view, in the midst of that modern assembly, a gentleman of the bygone time.

The manner of this gentleman was distinguished by a pliant grace and courtesy unknown to the present generation. The attire of this gentleman was composed of a many-folded white cravat, a close-buttoned blue dress-coat, and nankeen trousers with gaiters to match, ridiculous to the present generation. The talk of this gentleman ran in an easy flow—revealing an independent habit of mind, and exhibiting a carefully-polished capacity for satirical retort—dreaded and disliked by the present generation. Personally, he was little and wiry and slim—with a bright white head, and sparkling black eyes, and a wry twist of humor curling sharply at the corners of his lips. At his lower extremities, he exhibited the deformity which is popularly known as "a clubfoot." But he carried his lameness, as he carried his years, gaily. He was socially celebrated for his ivory cane, with a snuffbox artfully let into the knob at the top—and he was socially dreaded for a hatred of modern institutions, which expressed itself in season and out of season, and which always showed the same, fatal knack of hitting smartly on the weakest place. Such was Sir Patrick Lundie; brother of the late baronet, Sir Thomas; and inheritor, at Sir Thomas's death, of the title and estates.

Miss Blanche—taking no notice of her stepmother's reproof, or of her uncle's commentary on it—pointed to a table on which croquet mallets and balls were laid ready, and recalled the attention of the company to the matter in hand.

"I head one side, ladies and gentlemen," she resumed. "And Lady Lundie heads the other. We choose our players turn and turn about. Mamma has the advantage of me in years. So mamma chooses first."

With a look at her stepdaughter—which, being interpreted, meant, "I would send you back to the nursery, miss, if I could!"—Lady Lundie turned and ran her eye over her guests. She had evidently made up her mind, beforehand, what player to pick out first.

"I choose Miss Silvester," she said—with a special emphasis laid on the name.

At that there was another parting among the crowd. To us (who know her), it was Anne who now appeared. Strangers, who saw her for the first time, saw a lady in the prime of her life—a lady plainly dressed in unornamented white—who advanced slowly,

and confronted the mistress of the house.

A certain proportion—and not a small one—of the men at the lawn-party had been brought there by friends who were privileged to introduce them. The moment she appeared every one of those men suddenly became interested in the lady who had been chosen first.

"That's a very charming woman," whispered one of the strangers at the house to one of the friends of the house. "Who is she?"

The friend whispered back.

"Miss Lundie's governess—that's all."

The moment during which the question was put and answered was also the moment which brought Lady Lundie and Miss Silvester face to face in the presence of the company.

The stranger at the house looked at the two women, and whispered again.

"Something wrong between the lady and the governess," he said.

The friend looked also, and answered, in one emphatic word:

"Evidently!"

There are certain women whose influence over men is an unfathomable mystery to observers of their own sex. The governess was one of those women. She had inherited the charm, but not the beauty, of her unhappy mother. Judge her by the standard set up in the illustrated gift-books and the print-shop windows—and the sentence must have inevitably followed. "She has not a single good feature in her face."

There was nothing individually remarkable about Miss Silvester, seen in a state of repose. She was of the average height. She was as well made as most women. In hair and complexion she was neither light nor dark, but provokingly neutral just between the two. Worse even than this, there were positive defects in her face, which it was impossible to deny. A nervous contraction at one corner of her mouth drew up the lips out of the symmetrically right line, when, they moved. A nervous uncertainty in the eye on the same side narrowly escaped

presenting the deformity of a "cast." And yet, with these indisputable drawbacks, here was one of those women—the formidable few—who have the hearts of men and the peace of families at their mercy. She moved—and there was some subtle charm, Sir, in the movement, that made you look back, and suspend your conversation with your friend, and watch her silently while she walked. She sat by you and talked to you—and behold, a sensitive something passed into that little twist at the corner of the mouth, and into that nervous uncertainty in the soft gray eye, which turned defect into beauty—which enchained your senses—which made your nerves thrill if she touched you by accident, and set your heart beating if you looked at the same book with her, and felt her breath on your face. All this, let it be well understood, only happened if you were a man.

If you saw her with the eyes of a woman, the results were of quite another kind. In that case you merely turned to your nearest female friend, and said, with unaffected pity for the other sex, "What *can* the men see in her!"

The eyes of the lady of the house and the eyes of the governess met, with marked distrust on either side. Few people could have failed to see what the stranger and the friend had noticed alike—that there was something smoldering under the surface here. Miss Silvester spoke first.

"Thank you, Lady Lundie," she said. "I would rather not play."

Lady Lundie assumed an extreme surprise which passed the limits of good-breeding.

"Oh, indeed?" she rejoined, sharply. "Considering that we are all here for the purpose of playing, that seems rather remarkable. Is anything wrong, Miss Silvester?"

A flush appeared on the delicate paleness of Miss Silvester's face. But she did her duty as a woman and a governess. She submitted, and so preserved appearances, for that time.

"Nothing is the matter," she answered. "I am not very well this morning. But I will play if you wish it."

"I do wish it," answered Lady Lundie.

Miss Silvester turned aside toward one of the entrances into the

summerhouse. She waited for events, looking out over the lawn, with a visible inner disturbance, marked over the bosom by the rise and fall of her white dress.

It was Blanche's turn to select the next player.

In some preliminary uncertainty as to her choice she looked about among the guests, and caught the eye of a gentleman in the front ranks. He stood side by side with Sir Patrick—a striking representative of the school that is among us—as Sir Patrick was a striking representative of the school that has passed away.

The modern gentleman was young and florid, tall and strong. The parting of his curly Saxon locks began in the center of his forehead, traveled over the top of his head, and ended, rigidly-central, at the ruddy nape of his neck. His features were as perfectly regular and as perfectly unintelligent as human features can be. His expression preserved an immovable composure wonderful to behold. The muscles of his brawny arms showed through the sleeves of his light summer coat. He was deep in the chest, thin in the flanks, firm on the legs—in two words a magnificent human animal, wrought up to the highest pitch of physical development, from head to foot. This was Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn—commonly called "the honorable;" and meriting that distinction in more ways than one. He was honorable, in the first place, as being the son (second son) of that once-rising solicitor, who was now Lord Holchester. He was honorable, in the second place, as having won the highest popular distinction which the educational system of modern England can bestow—he had pulled the stroke-oar in a University boat-race. Add to this, that nobody had ever seen him read anything but a newspaper, and that nobody had ever known him to be backward in settling a bet—and the picture of this distinguished young Englishman will be, for the present, complete.

Blanche's eye naturally rested on him. Blanche's voice naturally picked him out as the first player on her side.

"I choose Mr. Delamayn," she said.

As the name passed her lips the flush on Miss Silvester's face died away, and a deadly paleness took its place. She made a movement to leave the summerhouse—checked herself abruptly—and laid one hand on the back of a rustic seat at her side. A gentleman behind her, looking at the hand, saw it clench itself so

suddenly and so fiercely that the glove on it split. The gentleman made a mental memorandum, and registered Miss Silvester in his private books as "the devil's own temper."

Meanwhile Mr. Delamayn, by a strange coincidence, took exactly the same course which Miss Silvester had taken before him. He, too, attempted to withdraw from the coming game.

"Thanks very much," he said. "Could you additionally honor me by choosing somebody else? It's not in my line."

Fifty years ago such an answer as this, addressed to a lady, would have been considered inexcusably impertinent. The social code of the present time hailed it as something frankly amusing. The company laughed. Blanche lost her temper.

"Can't we interest you in anything but severe muscular exertion, Mr. Delamayn?" she asked, sharply. "Must you always be pulling in a boat-race, or flying over a high jump? If you had a mind, you would want to relax it. You have got muscles instead. Why not relax *them*?"

The shafts of Miss Lundie's bitter wit glided off Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn like water off a duck's back.

"Just as you please," he said, with stolid good-humor. "Don't be offended. I came here with ladies—and they wouldn't let me smoke. I miss my smoke. I thought I'd slip away a bit and have it. All right! I'll play."

"Oh! smoke by all means!" retorted Blanche. "I shall choose somebody else. I won't have you!"

The honorable young gentleman looked unaffectedly relieved. The petulant young lady turned her back on him, and surveyed the guests at the other extremity of the summerhouse.

"Who shall I choose?" she said to herself.

A dark young man—with a face burned gipsy-brown by the sun; with something in his look and manner suggestive of a roving life, and perhaps of a familiar acquaintance with the sea—advanced shyly, and said, in a whisper:

"Choose me!"

Blanche's face broke prettily into a charming smile. Judging from appearances, the dark young man had a place in her

estimation peculiarly his own.

"You!" she said, coquettishly. "You are going to leave us in an hour's time!"

He ventured a step nearer. "I am coming back," he pleaded, "the day after tomorrow."

"You play very badly!"

"I might improve—if you would teach me."

"Might you? Then I will teach you!" She turned, bright and rosy, to her stepmother. "I choose Mr. Arnold Brinkworth," she said.

Here, again, there appeared to be something in a name unknown to celebrity, which nevertheless produced its effect—not, this time, on Miss Silvester, but on Sir Patrick. He looked at Mr. Brinkworth with a sudden interest and curiosity. If the lady of the house had not claimed his attention at the moment he would evidently have spoken to the dark young man.

But it was Lady Lundie's turn to choose a second player on her side. Her brother-in-law was a person of some importance; and she had her own motives for ingratiating herself with the head of the family. She surprised the whole company by choosing Sir Patrick.

"Mamma!" cried Blanche. "What can you be thinking of? Sir Patrick won't play. Croquet wasn't discovered in his time."

Sir Patrick never allowed "his time" to be made the subject of disparaging remarks by the younger generation without paying the younger generation back in its own coin.

"In *my* time, my dear," he said to his niece, "people were expected to bring some agreeable quality with them to social meetings of this sort. In your time you have dispensed with all that. Here," remarked the old gentleman, taking up a croquet mallet from the table near him, "is one of the qualifications for success in modern society. And here," he added, taking up a ball, "is another. Very good. Live and learn. I'll play! I'll play!"

Lady Lundie (born impervious to all sense of irony) smiled graciously.

"I knew Sir Patrick would play," she said, "to please me."

Sir Patrick bowed with satirical politeness.

"Lady Lundie," he answered, "you read me like a book." To the astonishment of all persons present under forty he emphasized those words by laying his hand on his heart, and quoting poetry. "I may say with Dryden," added the gallant old gentleman:

"Old as I am, for ladies' love unfit,

The power of beauty I remember yet."

Lady Lundie looked unaffectedly shocked. Mr. Delamayn went a step farther. He interfered on the spot—with the air of a man who feels himself imperatively called upon to perform a public duty.

"Dryden never said that," he remarked, "I'll answer for it."

Sir Patrick wheeled round with the help of his ivory cane, and looked Mr. Delamayn hard in the face.

"Do you know Dryden, Sir, better than I do?" he asked.

The Honorable Geoffrey answered, modestly, "I should say I did. I have rowed three races with him, and we trained together."

Sir Patrick looked round him with a sour smile of triumph.

"Then let me tell you, Sir," he said, "that you trained with a man who died nearly two hundred years ago."

Mr. Delamayn appealed, in genuine bewilderment, to the company generally:

"What does this old gentleman mean?" he asked. "I am speaking of Tom Dryden, of Corpus. Everybody in the University knows *him*."

"I am speaking," echoed Sir Patrick, "of John Dryden the Poet. Apparently, everybody in the University does *not* know *him*!"

Mr. Delamayn answered, with a cordial earnestness very pleasant to see:

"Give you my word of honor, I never heard of him before in my life! Don't be angry, Sir. *I'm* not offended with *you*." He smiled, and took out his brierwood pipe. "Got a light?" he asked, in the friendliest possible manner.

Sir Patrick answered, with a total absence of cordiality:

"I don't smoke, Sir."

Mr. Delamayn looked at him, without taking the slightest offense:

"You don't smoke!" he repeated. "I wonder how you get through your spare time?"

Sir Patrick closed the conversation:

"Sir," he said, with a low bow, "you *may* wonder."

While this little skirmish was proceeding Lady Lundie and her stepdaughter had organized the game; and the company, players and spectators, were beginning to move toward the lawn. Sir Patrick stopped his niece on her way out, with the dark young man in close attendance on her.

"Leave Mr. Brinkworth with me," he said. "I want to speak to him."

Blanche issued her orders immediately. Mr. Brinkworth was sentenced to stay with Sir Patrick until she wanted him for the game. Mr. Brinkworth wondered, and obeyed.

During the exercise of this act of authority a circumstance occurred at the other end of the summerhouse. Taking advantage of the confusion caused by the general movement to the lawn, Miss Silvester suddenly placed herself close to Mr. Delamayn.

"In ten minutes," she whispered, "the summerhouse will be empty. Meet me here."

The Honorable Geoffrey started, and looked furtively at the visitors about him.

"Do you think it's safe?" he whispered back.

The governess's sensitive lips trembled, with fear or with anger, it was hard to say which.

"I insist on it!" she answered, and left him.

Mr. Delamayn knitted his handsome eyebrows as he looked after her, and then left the summerhouse in his turn. The rose-garden at the back of the building was solitary for the moment. He took out his pipe and hid himself among the roses. The smoke

came from his mouth in hot and hasty puffs. He was usually the gentlest of masters—to his pipe. When he hurried that confidential servant, it was a sure sign of disturbance in the inner man.

III

THE DISCOVERIES

But two persons were now left in the summerhouse—Arnold Brinkworth and Sir Patrick Lundie.

"Mr. Brinkworth," said the old gentleman, "I have had no opportunity of speaking to you before this; and (as I hear that you are to leave us, today) I may find no opportunity at a later time. I want to introduce myself. Your father was one of my dearest friends—let me make a friend of your father's son."

He held out his hands, and mentioned his name.

Arnold recognized it directly. "Oh, Sir Patrick!" he said, warmly, "if my poor father had only taken your advice—"

"He would have thought twice before he gambled away his fortune on the turf; and he might have been alive here among us, instead of dying an exile in a foreign land," said Sir Patrick, finishing the sentence which the other had begun. "No more of that! Let's talk of something else. Lady Lundie wrote to me about you the other day. She told me your aunt was dead, and had left you heir to her property in Scotland. Is that true?—It is?—I congratulate you with all my heart. Why are you visiting here, instead of looking after your house and lands? Oh! it's only three-and-twenty miles from this; and you're going to look after it today, by the next train? Quite right. And—what? what?—coming back again the day after tomorrow? Why should you come back? Some special attraction here, I suppose? I hope it's the right sort of attraction. You're very young—you're exposed to all sorts of temptations. Have you got a solid foundation of good sense at the bottom of you? It is not inherited from your poor father, if you have. You must have been a mere boy when he ruined his children's prospects. How have you lived from that time to this? What were you doing when your aunt's will made an idle man of you for life?"

The question was a searching one. Arnold answered it, without the slightest hesitation; speaking with an unaffected modesty and simplicity which at once won Sir Patrick's heart.

"I was a boy at Eton, Sir," he said, "when my father's losses ruined him. I had to leave school, and get my own living; and I have got it, in a roughish way, from that time to this. In plain English, I have followed the sea—in the merchant-service."

"In plainer English still, you met adversity like a brave lad, and you have fairly earned the good luck that has fallen to you," rejoined Sir Patrick. "Give me your hand—I have taken a liking to you. You're not like the other young fellows of the present time. I shall call you 'Arnold.' You mustn't return the compliment and call me 'Patrick,' mind—I'm too old to be treated in that way. Well, and how do you get on here? What sort of a woman is my sister-in-law? and what sort of a house is this?"

Arnold burst out laughing.

"Those are extraordinary questions for you to put to me," he said. "You talk, Sir, as if you were a stranger here!"

Sir Patrick touched a spring in the knob of his ivory cane. A little gold lid flew up, and disclosed the snuffbox hidden inside. He took a pinch, and chuckled satirically over some passing thought, which he did not think it necessary to communicate to his young friend.

"I talk as if I was a stranger here, do I?" he resumed. "That's exactly what I am. Lady Lundie and I correspond on excellent terms; but we run in different grooves, and we see each other as seldom as possible. My story," continued the pleasant old man, with a charming frankness which leveled all differences of age and rank between Arnold and himself, "is not entirely unlike yours; though I *am* old enough to be your grandfather. I was getting my living, in my way (as a crusty old Scotch lawyer), when my brother married again. His death, without leaving a son by either of his wives, gave me a lift in the world, like you. Here I am (to my own sincere regret) the present baronet. Yes, to my sincere regret! All sorts of responsibilities which I never bargained for are thrust on my shoulders. I am the head of the family; I am my niece's guardian; I am compelled to appear at this lawn-party—and (between ourselves) I am as completely out of my element as a man can be. Not a single familiar face meets *me* among all these

fine people. Do you know anybody here?"

"I have one friend at Windygates," said Arnold. "He came here this morning, like you. Geoffrey Delamayn."

As he made the reply, Miss Silvester appeared at the entrance to the summerhouse. A shadow of annoyance passed over her face when she saw that the place was occupied. She vanished, unnoticed, and glided back to the game.

Sir Patrick looked at the son of his old friend, with every appearance of being disappointed in the young man for the first time.

"Your choice of a friend rather surprises me," he said.

Arnold artlessly accepted the words as an appeal to him for information.

"I beg your pardon, Sir—there's nothing surprising in it," he returned. "We were schoolfellows at Eton, in the old times. And I have met Geoffrey since, when he was yachting, and when I was with my ship. Geoffrey saved my life, Sir Patrick," he added, his voice rising, and his eyes brightening with honest admiration of his friend. "But for him, I should have been drowned in a boat-accident. Isn't *that* a good reason for his being a friend of mine?"

"It depends entirely on the value you set on your life," said Sir Patrick.

"The value I set on my life?" repeated Arnold. "I set a high value on it, of course!"

"In that case, Mr. Delamayn has laid you under an obligation."

"Which I can never repay!"

"Which you will repay one of these days, with interest—if I know anything of human nature," answered Sir Patrick.

He said the words with the emphasis of strong conviction. They were barely spoken when Mr. Delamayn appeared (exactly as Miss Silvester had appeared) at the entrance to the summerhouse. He, too, vanished, unnoticed—like Miss Silvester again. But there the parallel stopped. The Honorable Geoffrey's expression, on discovering the place to be occupied, was, unmistakably an expression of relief.

Arnold drew the right inference, this time, from Sir Patrick's language and Sir Patrick's tones. He eagerly took up the defense of his friend.

"You said that rather bitterly, Sir," he remarked. "What has Geoffrey done to offend you?"

"He presumes to exist—that's what he has done," retorted Sir Patrick. "Don't stare! I am speaking generally. Your friend is the model young Briton of the present time. I don't like the model young Briton. I don't see the sense of crowing over him as a superb national production, because he is big and strong, and drinks beer with impunity, and takes a cold shower bath all the year round. There is far too much glorification in England, just now, of the mere physical qualities which an Englishman shares with the savage and the brute. And the ill results are beginning to show themselves already! We are readier than we ever were to practice all that is rough in our national customs, and to excuse all that is violent and brutish in our national acts. Read the popular books—attend the popular amusements; and you will find at the bottom of them all a lessening regard for the gentler graces of civilized life, and a growing admiration for the virtues of the aboriginal Britons!"

Arnold listened in blank amazement. He had been the innocent means of relieving Sir Patrick's mind of an accumulation of social protest, unprovided with an issue for some time past. "How hot you are over it, Sir!" he exclaimed, in irrepressible astonishment.

Sir Patrick instantly recovered himself. The genuine wonder expressed in the young man's face was irresistible.

"Almost as hot," he said, "as if I was cheering at a boat-race, or wrangling over a betting-book—eh? Ah, we were so easily heated when I was a young man! Let's change the subject. I know nothing to the prejudice of your friend, Mr. Delamayn. It's the cant of the day," cried Sir Patrick, relapsing again, "to take these physically-wholesome men for granted as being morally-wholesome men into the bargain. Time will show whether the cant of the day is right.—So you are actually coming back to Lady Lundie's after a mere flying visit to your own property? I repeat, that is a most extraordinary proceeding on the part of a landed gentleman like you. What's the attraction here—eh?"

Before Arnold could reply Blanche called to him from the lawn.

His color rose, and he turned eagerly to go out. Sir Patrick nodded his head with the air of a man who had been answered to his own entire satisfaction. "Oh!" he said, "*that's* the attraction, is it?"

Arnold's life at sea had left him singularly ignorant of the ways of the world on shore. Instead of taking the joke, he looked confused. A deeper tinge of color reddened his dark cheeks. "I didn't say so," he answered, a little irritably.

Sir Patrick lifted two of his white, wrinkled old fingers, and good-humoredly patted the young sailor on the cheek.

"Yes you did," he said. "In red letters."

The little gold lid in the knob of the ivory cane flew up, and the old gentleman rewarded himself for that neat retort with a pinch of snuff. At the same moment Blanche made her appearance on the scene.

"Mr. Brinkworth," she said, "I shall want you directly. Uncle, it's your turn to play."

"Bless my soul!" cried Sir Patrick, "I forgot the game." He looked about him, and saw his mallet and ball left waiting on the table. "Where are the modern substitutes for conversation? Oh, here they are!" He bowled the ball out before him on to the lawn, and tucked the mallet, as if it was an umbrella, under his arm. "Who was the first mistaken person," he said to himself, as he briskly hobbled out, "who discovered that human life was a serious thing? Here am I, with one foot in the grave; and the most serious question before me at the present moment is, Shall I get through the hoops?"

Arnold and Blanche were left together.

Among the personal privileges which Nature has accorded to women, there are surely none more enviable than their privilege of always looking their best when they look at the man they love. When Blanche's eyes turned on Arnold after her uncle had gone out, not even the hideous fashionable disfigurements of the inflated "chignon" and the tilted hat could destroy the triple charm of youth, beauty, and tenderness beaming in her face. Arnold looked at her—and remembered, as he had never remembered yet, that he was going by the next train, and that he was leaving her in the society of more than one admiring man of his own age. The experience of a whole fortnight passed under the

same roof with her had proved Blanche to be the most charming girl in existence. It was possible that she might not be mortally offended with him if he told her so. He determined that he *would* tell her so at that auspicious moment.

But who shall presume to measure the abyss that lies between the Intention and the Execution? Arnold's resolution to speak was as firmly settled as a resolution could be. And what came of it? Alas for human infirmity! Nothing came of it but silence.

"You don't look quite at your ease, Mr. Brinkworth," said Blanche. "What has Sir Patrick been saying to you? My uncle sharpens his wit on everybody. He has been sharpening it on *you*?"

Arnold began to see his way. At an immeasurable distance—but still he saw it.

"Sir Patrick is a terrible old man," he answered. "Just before you came in he discovered one of my secrets by only looking in my face." He paused, rallied his courage, pushed on at all hazards, and came headlong to the point. "I wonder," he asked, bluntly, "whether you take after your uncle?"

Blanche instantly understood him. With time at her disposal, she would have taken him lightly in hand, and led him, by fine gradations, to the object in view. But in two minutes or less it would be Arnold's turn to play. "He is going to make me an offer," thought Blanche; "and he has about a minute to do it in. He *shall* do it!"

"What!" she exclaimed, "do you think the gift of discovery runs in the family?"

Arnold made a plunge.

"I wish it did!" he said.

Blanche looked the picture of astonishment.

"Why?" she asked.

"If you could see in my face what Sir Patrick saw—"

He had only to finish the sentence, and the thing was done. But the tender passion perversely delights in raising obstacles to itself. A sudden timidity seized on Arnold exactly at the wrong moment. He stopped short, in the most awkward manner

possible.

Blanche heard from the lawn the blow of the mallet on the ball, and the laughter of the company at some blunder of Sir Patrick's. The precious seconds were slipping away. She could have boxed Arnold on both ears for being so unreasonably afraid of her.

"Well," she said, impatiently, "if I did look in your face, what should I see?"

Arnold made another plunge. He answered: "You would see that I want a little encouragement."

"From *me*?"

"Yes—if you please."

Blanche looked back over her shoulder. The summerhouse stood on an eminence, approached by steps. The players on the lawn beneath were audible, but not visible. Any one of them might appear, unexpectedly, at a moment's notice. Blanche listened. There was no sound of approaching footsteps—there was a general hush, and then another bang of the mallet on the ball and then a clapping of hands. Sir Patrick was a privileged person. He had been allowed, in all probability, to try again; and he was succeeding at the second effort. This implied a reprieve of some seconds. Blanche looked back again at Arnold.

"Consider yourself encouraged," she whispered; and instantly added, with the ineradicable female instinct of self-defense, "within limits!"

Arnold made a last plunge—straight to the bottom, this time.

"Consider yourself loved," he burst out, "without any limits at all."

It was all over—the words were spoken—he had got her by the hand. Again the perversity of the tender passion showed itself more strongly than ever. The confession which Blanche had been longing to hear, had barely escaped her lover's lips before Blanche protested against it! She struggled to release her hand. She formally appealed to Arnold to let her go.

Arnold only held her the tighter.

"Do try to like me a little!" he pleaded. "I am so fond of *you*!"