HARUM SCARUM'S FORTUNE

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Title: Harum Scarum's Fortune

Author: Esmè Stuart

Release Date: March 31, 2014 [eBook #45281]

Language: English

*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HARUM SCARUM'S FORTUNE ***

Produced by Al Haines.

HARUM SCARUM'S FORTUNE

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JARROLDS *Publishers* LONDON
Limited, 10 and 11 Warwick Lane, E.C.

First Printed in 1910
Reprinted 1913
" 1915
" 1916
" 1917
" 1918
" 1919
" 1921
" 1923
" 1924
" 1925

By the same author :
HARUM SCARUM
HARUM SCARUM MARRIED

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Harum Scarum's Fortune

CHAPTER I.
DO YOU REMEMBER?

Toney Whitburn pulled in her thorough-bred suddenly by a gap in the park and looked at her companion. The two had met by chance and they had had a canter together, so that the exercise had made the girl look radiant, and her hair, though twisted round her well-shaped head, rebelled at the restriction, and in protest curled itself round her temples and the nape of her neck.

"Do you know—I'm twenty-one to-morrow. Isn't it terrible?"

"Terrible!" answered the young Squire, Lewis Waycott, with a smile half of amusement and half of sympathy.

"You don't think so, but I do! You know I've honestly tried to become 'a young lady with expectations.' I've been to a finishing school at Paris, and I've tried to learn German at Dresden, and I've gone to sleep through ever so many concerts, and I've seen all the old things at Rome—and yet——"

"You haven't succeeded? You are just the same as you were, thank Heaven!"

Toney's joyous laugh woke the echoes.

"No, I've failed utterly, though, honest Injun, I have tried! Aunt Dove says so! She's always implying what a national misfortune it is that to-morrow I shall be my own mistress, but now, will you—you have always been awfully chummy—will you be the judge?"

"Between you and Lady Dove?"

"Yes. You know I offered to be her companion—and I meant it——"

"You always mean what you say, Toney."

"I try to because Pups always did— Oh, if only he could just come to me now and say, 'Toney, you must'—no, he always said *we* must—do this and that with our money."

"I wish he could—but if you ask me, Toney, I should say give it all to Lady Dove, as she seems mighty jealous of your having it."

For a moment Toney looked at her companion with wide open and surprised eyes, then she answered gravely,

"Do you really mean that?"

"Yes, I do," he muttered.

”You are quite wrong. The dear old General would rise from his grave if I gave away his present. Oh, I couldn’t; besides—I believe he wished Aunt Dove not to have it, so it would be betraying trust if—— No, I’ve got to keep it, but the thing is what I’m to do with it!”

”It’s not many people who are puzzled what to do with money. I suppose—you’ll——”

”What? I never knew you jib before.”

”I was going to say you’ll have lots of offers—and marry some Nabob——”

Toney laughed.

”How odd you should say that! Do you know, I wanted to ask your opinion about that very thing, because I can trust you. What does one say if people make you offers?”

The two had been waiting by the gate that led into the plantation. It was a lovely October day with the sunshine turning yellow leaves into gold and decay made glorious by its touches. Toney was so unconscious that her remark was at all comical, that her companion dared not laugh, nor did he even dare to look surprised.

”If you love the man, say ’yes,’ and if you don’t, say ’no.’”

”Thank you. I see it does seem easy and simple. Dear old Crumpet—by the way, this was the gap she went through on our first visit to you—do you remember? Well, when we went to Italy together——”

”Lady Dove did not approve!”

”Of course not, but she was wrong. No one could have done it better than Crumpet. She was just delighted over everything, and I had to hide my yawns often not to make her sorry; I couldn’t stand more than one gallery a day, and one ruin thrown in, I really couldn’t, but she loved it all. Do you know every now and then she used to burst out into a soft little laugh all to herself just because she was so happy, and I was so scrumptiously pleased to hear it, that I swallowed an extra gallery and did another old ruin without letting her see how sleepy it made me.”

”But she was with you to do as you liked, I thought!”

”Oh, to see Crumpet laugh was what I really enjoyed! Do you remember what she used to be like, and now what with the Reverend, and Harry, and Toney, she is quite too happy, she says. But that isn’t what I wanted to say, you’ll see her to-morrow, and I’ve been here so little that it all brings back the past to-day. You understand?”

”Yes, I do; it seems ages since you were here, except on awfully short visits.”

”Well, in Italy, there was a young man who made me an offer.”

”What impudence!”

”Oh, no, and he didn’t do it to me personally, because he told Crumpet I

never gave him the tiniest chance, but he did it to her instead! Wasn't it funny, and she wept bitterly when she told me, she thought it was her fault."

"And what answer did you give him?" This time his companion smiled.

"I begged Crumpet to tell him Pups had said that he pitied any man who married me, as I was such a dasher—you know—and that Aunt Dove said no one would ever propose to *me* except he wanted my money!"

The man at her side bit his lip and impatiently flipped his horse with his whip, holding him in tightly at the same time.

"Lady Dove said that!"

"Yes, and of course it's true! Aunt Dove does say the truth now and then. Don't you see yourself that it's true? I'm not like your cousin or Silvia Hales, or any of the nice girls about! Aunt Dove says Paris, Rome, Berlin, Dresden, and London, have all failed to make me an English young lady."

"A good thing too!"

"Oh, you say that because we are chums, but I know it's true. I can't *feel* different, though I've tried. Once a month I say 'make me a new heart' in the Psalms, you know, but nothing happens, so I suppose it isn't possible to alter some people, and I'm one of them."

"Nonsense!"

"No, it's true; Madame Lemoine, at Paris, used to say, 'Il faut toujours dire la vérité en famille,' but to other people it didn't matter. I told her it was all wrong, but she never could see it my way, so I gave it up, and she was an old dear in spite of her fibs!"

"She didn't convert you to fibbing, Toney!"

"There you see, I can't alter, but that wasn't what I was going to say. Do you know that last night, dear Uncle Evas—who is really quite cheerful now—and didn't he enjoy his times at Rome with me and Crumpet? for you know that with a lot of trouble and a little bribery I think, he got a month off last year."

They both laughed heartily, and slowly walked their horses on together. If a stranger had seen them he would have paused to look at this picture of the man and the maid.

"Well, what did your uncle say?"

"Oh, it was funny. He wanted to give me good advice about my coming of age! He cleared his throat and said, 'My dear Antonia, to-morrow you will be——' Then I laughed so much that he couldn't help joining in too, so I just gave him a hug till he begged for mercy."

Her companion also bowed his head over his horse's mane in happy laughter.

"I see, Toney, it's true you *are* incorrigible!"

"Yes, but really I don't believe you could have been so cruel as to let Uncle

Dove give you a homily, now, could you? It would only have given him a sore throat for a month."

"I should like to have heard him all the same."

"You know he's just all right deep down in his heart, but he can't preach to save his life. However, when I released him—Aunt Dove had gone to bed, and he was so afraid of her hearing us—he showed me a long list of names, all men's names."

"Good heavens! What for?"

"I was a bit surprised too, and he laughed and said, 'Don't be afraid, they are not suitors,' then I scolded him and said he knew I never thought of such things. Well, then he explained that as I was coming into so much money—and do you know somehow it's a lot more than they expected—I must have a secretary, because it would take all my time and strength to open the letters. There's a lot come already, begging me to buy carpets and boots and smoked bacon, and heaps more things!"

"Never open letters, then you won't want a secretary," said Lewis decidedly.

"And I said, 'Oh, I can find a girl to do it,' but uncle intimated that there was more work than any poor girl could do, and that I must have a trained man—sort of lawyer—Mr. Staines insists on it, because he doesn't trust me with money—they none of them do—and fancy, dear old uncle had been spending hours collecting a lot of right-minded young men for me! Isn't it funny?"

"Very unnecessary; the London lawyers could do it all."

"No, they say they can't be bothered about begging letters, and so on; anyhow, I've got to have a secretary. I looked at the list and their testimonials and oh, do you know, everyone was perfect, and all their friends declared there was not a fault in them, so I told uncle it didn't matter which I took, and I suggested we should put their names on slips of paper and stick them up in his hat and pull one out!"

"Did he consent?"

"No! he was afraid I should tell of him I think, anyhow I had to choose, and there was one with an Australian uncle who recommended him highly. Out there we always recommended our relations, it wasn't neighbourly not to say all the good and leave out all the bad, so I told uncle I'd have him. Plantagenet Russell, that's his name. His father was a black sheep out home, but his uncle says he is most gentlemanly!"

"Toney, how ridiculous! Of course he's a plant too!"

"Gracious stars! what's the matter? I told you Uncle Dove had written about them all, he's all right and he's coming the day after to-morrow to see us, so as to avoid the coming of age party. You've promised to come, haven't you? I've been working so hard to get everything right for it."

”Of course, we are all coming.”

”Heaps of Aunt Dove’s friends are coming. We haven’t had one refusal. Awfully kind of them, though of course I would much rather some of them didn’t come, it’s only to see if I’ve improved.”

”Shall I stay away?”

”Why it would not be coming of age without you and Crumpet and Uncle Dove and Doctor Latham, and a few more—and Jim’s coming to be my coachman and groom all in one, because Aunt Dove doesn’t want to pay anything for me now I’m rich. Jim is just a faithful friend, and he’s still engaged to his second young woman, the first was a bit fast so he gave her the slip one day.”

”How do you know, Toney?”

”Jim and I have corresponded regularly. You see if you just leave go of these young fellows they soon forget their promises, besides I kept all his savings, and he’s a nice little lump now in the Savings Bank. Oh, dear, it’s tea-time and I must scoot! Mr. Staines is coming to explain things to me, and there’s no end to do, but Crumpet is staying with me in our old rooms, top storey, and she’ll help a bit. You should see the rooms, I spent all one quarter’s pocket money on them, and now they’re real palatial, at least Crumpet’s is; I hate a lot of things, but I put in a big tub and—— Oh! gracious stars! I must go, so good-bye, dear old chum!”

Toney Whitburn held out a strong young hand and her companion grasped it.

”Look here, Toney, if you are in trouble or want anything, anything, you know—you’ll ask me to help you—promise?”

”Of course I will. Haven’t I just now asked you about young men and offers, all because I thought you would know and wouldn’t laugh.”

”Yes, thank you—and I’ll come to-morrow in spite of not being sure I shall be welcome.”

”There! you are telling fibs like Madame, but honest truth, I’d rather have you and Jim at my party, than any other men I know.”

”Thanks awfully,” and with a laugh the two separated. Toney galloped across the park, and the Squire was just going to jump the fence when he paused and looked back at her.

”Oh, Toney, Toney,” he said to himself; ”when will you understand, but even if you did I’ll never let that horrid old cat say I wanted your money! Hang it all—and now there’s a beastly young secretary coming to be always in her pocket.

Sir Evas ought to know better!"

CHAPTER II.
FIFTY THOUSAND A YEAR.

Aldersfield House had changed very little outwardly since Antonia Whitburn and Trick had arrived there as lonely orphans. There was the same heavy, handsome, mid-Victorian furniture, the same stately and punctilious servants, or others of the same specie, because the same Lady Dove presided over the establishment. But as every human being changes for better or for worse, there was something even more displeasing than formerly in Lady Dove's face. She was a prey—and had been ever since the memorable day when she heard the news of Toney's good fortune—to the demon of jealousy, who never leaves his victims many peaceful moments, and just now he was her constant visitor. Toney had been very little at Aldersfield, because Sir Evas and Mr. Staines, the lawyer, had insisted on her having foreign advantages, and Lady Dove had eagerly acquiesced. The very sight of Toney increased her malady, but as no one knew this it had been decided that Toney should, for the present, live with her uncle and aunt, for everyone recognised that she had not learnt the use of money, and that it was not safe for her to be left quite unprotected. Strange to say Toney had not rebelled when she was told of this decision; she was very fond of her uncle, and though secretly she called Aunt Dove her "cross," she meant to carry the burden bravely so that Sir Evas should be able to be "off duty" as often as possible. The other plans that had been maturing in the mind of Harum Scarum were for the present kept a secret.

Before Toney could take off her habit she was bidden to come and see Mr. Staines in her uncle's study, so she and Trick hastily ran in, and indeed, Trick, having got jambed between her feet, nearly succeeded in making his mistress tumble—as it was, she lurched into the room in a most undignified manner.

"Gracious stars! I nearly took a header! It's Trick's fault. How do you do, Mr. Staines? I hope you won't be very solemn, as I want everyone to be awfully jolly to-morrow. I've made my own time-table this time," and the remembrance of Aunt Dove's time-table nearly upset Toney's gravity.

Mr. Staines had happily a sense of fun, besides he knew what to expect and merely smiled.

”It is my duty to be solemn, Miss Whitburn, but I fear it is an impossible duty in your presence! To-morrow you will come of age and you will have the sole control of your fortune. I tried to make General Stone insert some restrictions in his will, but he refused. I can still near our dear old friend saying, ’If you knew Toney Whitburn, Staines, you would know restrictions would be of no use!’”

Sir Evas was smiling in his corner. Perhaps Toney’s fortune had brought him more happiness than to anyone else, for being her guardian, he had been fully occupied during her minority, and the work had been a real pleasure and occupation for him. Besides this, once a year he had got a month—not in prison, but with Toney abroad, and what good times those had been, even though he always had to pay handsomely for them on his return home. Now he added,

”The General was a very unwise man, and I do hope, Toney——”

”Yes, I know, uncle!—— Oh dear, I suppose my youth has flown now! I’ve got to do such a lot of thinking—but look here, Mr. Staines, tell me the amount I may spend and I’ll promise I’ll do it.”

”This was what I wished to explain. Sir Evas Dove in accounting for his guardianship has left everything in order, and by a curious piece of luck he bought some land for you with some surplus money, which has turned out to be extremely valuable, as a rich vein of coal has been discovered on it. You will have—— Ehem—at least——”

”Oh, I don’t mind, Mr. Staines, so don’t hesitate at the figure.”

”You will have fifty thousand a year, Miss Whitburn. It is a larger fortune than General Stone anticipated, and I can only hope that you will not long have to bear the burden of the fortune alone. Ehem—I hope that a happy marriage will—ere long——”

Toney shook her head and laughed.

”Oh no, it’s no good hoping. Aunt Dove says no one would marry me except for the money, but I’ll manage all right, and Uncle Evas will help, won’t you!”

”I do not wish to influence you, Toney, my duty ends to-day, but you have never wanted for pluck——”

”No, no, certainly not,” said the lawyer, ”but if I may say so, Miss Whitburn, your ample pocket money seemed to melt in your hands. Several times you wrote to me for more, and in your last letter——”

Toney laughed as she seized Trick in the act of making a dash at Mr. Staines’ heels.

”Yes, I know there was never enough. I’m a bit like Pups in that; our box was always getting empty, but there will be a heap now. Oh dear!” and Toney for a moment heaved a deep sigh.

”I’ve kept the amount of Toney’s fortune a secret, Mr. Staines, from—the neighbourhood,” said Sir Evas, ”it’s better so; of course there are fortune hunters everywhere and—I think, my dear, you had better not mention the actual figures. Everyone knows you will have some money, but even your aunt does not know accurately.” Sir Evas looked a little shame-faced.

”Oh dear, I hate secrets,” sighed Toney, ”I’ll try and say nothing—but gracious stars! I needn’t tell anyone how it goes, need I, for it would be more than I could do?”

”Of course you need not, but it is more business-like to keep accounts,” said the lawyer sternly, ”and to come to details, it would be better to give Lady Dove the same amount as she has had, as long as you live here.”

”Of course. You’ll do that, Mr. Staines, and if you double it, perhaps she’ll not dislike me so much.”

Sir Evas shook his head deprecatingly.

”My dear child, you are welcome to all I can give you without return.”

”You dear old duck of an uncle, of course *you* shan’t have a penny of it, but Aunt Dove won’t mind pickings—for the estate you know! and there’s extra servants to pay and a lot of—— Is that all, Mr. Staines? By the way, uncle and I have chosen a secretary, so that’s a good thing over! Ouf! I do wish it wasn’t such a lot of pelf, sort of stifles one, doesn’t it? The basket of Gwyddnen Garanhir was nothing to it, but I’ll not be crushed by such a silly thing as money, you bet—— Oh, I mustn’t say that, eh, Trick?”

”One thing more, Toney; I am going to give over to you the left wing of the house which we shut up some years ago. Your aunt agrees. (Lady Dove had said, ”Pray do as you like, Evas, you always go against my wishes.”) Come and see if it suits you. I’ve had it all done up.”

”Well, that’s real kind; but indeed, uncle, Crumpet’s room and mine would have done. I’ll keep those, no one wants them, and she can come often and stay with me.”

Sir Evas led the way down a passage, and, opening a swing door, they passed through an old library full of books, with pretty windows looking over the park, and next to it a morning room painted white and furnished with old-fashioned oak things, which Lady Dove had long ago discarded as too much out of date. Beyond that again was a small garden room, opening out into the shrubbery.

”These shall be for you, Toney, where you may receive your own friends, and there are two rooms above for the secretary. Mr. Staines agrees with me that—well, considering your fortune, it is more fitting for you to have some rooms you may call your own.”

”Oh!” exclaimed Toney, ”it is just awfully nice, but—what will Aunt Dove

say?"

Sir Evas was thinking the same to himself. Lady Dove had not once come to see the result of his work, and he knew he would have to pay her bill as well as that of the work-people who had decorated the old rooms. Still, you don't give a coming of age present for nothing, and he hoped he should pay his debts honestly!

"Trick, darling, here's your very own rooms, where you can bark as much as you like," and Toney, catching hold of her uncle, waltzed him round the room, regardless of Trick scampering after them barking and darting at the manly heels, whilst Mr. Staines stood by unable to hide a smile on his smooth lawyer-like face.

"Spare me, Toney! and for goodness' sake remember you are twenty-one to-morrow! I fear Mr. Staines will think all your foreign experience has not made a grown-up young lady of you!"

"Oh yes, it has!" said Toney, releasing him. "A sense of sorrow for my sins has grown awful big lately, and I never used to have it. It feels like indigestion, a lump here; but just this evening, uncle, I'll be young, and I'm so awfully pleased. I'll tell you what: you and I will have a sort of house-warming here next week, and ask just our very particular friends, but my party's coming first."

"There's the Winchley ball," said the lawyer, "I suppose you mean to go to that."

"Of course; I love dancing, and Uncle Dove must just come with me and hop a bit, but, Stars and Stripes, look! there's Crumpet's pony carriage and the fat pony bundling up the drive. I must go and get her out of it, for she's never got over her nervous feelings at driving up to Aldersfield. Uncle, remember it's her first visit here, and you will make her feel at home, won't you?" and Toney made a dash through the garden door and rushed to meet Mrs. Faber, who had come to spend two nights at Aldersfield House to celebrate Toney's coming of age. Mr. Faber was to appear the next day, and in the evening there was to be a great ball for the tenants and retainers, and others who had been invited. Sir Evas had had his way about this, and Lady Dove had grudgingly acquiesced, only saying that of course Antonia must pay all expenses.

This time the tables were reversed, and now Toney received the once humble companion at the big house, instead of being received by her.

"Oh, Crumpet, how nice! it's just perfect your coming like this. Jim! drive Mrs. Faber's carriage round, and take particular care of 'The Squire'" (this was the pony's name); "and oh, dear Chum, don't put on that scared look. Aunt Dove won't eat you; you're Mrs. Faber now, do remember that, and my honoured guest!"

"Oh, Toney!" gasped Mrs. Faber, "I feel as if I ought to be doing the flowers and writing notes and——" and then the little woman with the Fra Angelico face

smiled like a saint; the scars of ancient chains never having quite disappeared.

"How I wish you had brought the piccaninnies; but it wouldn't do."

"Who is here in my place?" asked Mrs. Faber as she entered the hall, keeping close to Toney whilst the butler relieved her of her wraps.

"It's so funny, Crumpet; there's a companion here, Miss Grossman, who actually frightens Aunt Dove a little—she keeps strict hours and will not be put upon, but she knows her duties and is as strong as a horse. I can't help laughing! To be quite honest, she frightens me a little!"

"Oh, no! no one ever frightened you! but, Toney, don't leave me."

The butler opened the door and announced, "Mrs. Faber." The very fact of being announced at all to Lady Dove made Mrs. Faber wish to sink under the floor, but as this was not possible she bravely went forward behind Toney to greet her ancient slave-driver.

"Aunt Dove, here's Mrs. Faber come. Isn't it good of her to leave the pic—the children to come to my birthday party?"

Lady Dove stretched out two fingers without rising.

"Good afternoon, Anne Faber," she said, severely emphasizing the name, and using the word "afternoon" to make Mrs. Faber remember she was still the tradesman's daughter whom for fifteen years she had befriended by letting her act as her companion. In spite of her previous resolutions to remember that she was Henry's wife, and was well received by all her own neighbourhood, Mrs. Faber felt miserable. Why had she come? only for Toney's sake would she have undergone this ordeal.

"I'm quite well, thank you, Lady Dove," she answered, forgetting she had not been asked after her health, "and so are the children."

"Oh, are they? I can't think how you are going to bring them up on, your small income. I always say the clergy should have no children; sooner or later they expect us to bring them up."

"I'm sure Henry will never beg a penny for our children," said Mrs. Faber, the colour flushing her face, which, however, was no longer like ancient pastry, but was now adorned by a pretty delicate pink colour. Mrs. Faber really looked charming, and her dress was as dainty and simple as her face. Toney interposed.

"But, Aunt Dove, I'm godmother to both the children; you'll see what good times they'll have! It's awfully good of my Chum to have children I can play with. Oh dear, I've got to feel grown-up, Mr. Staines says, but just for this evening I'll still be young."

"Tea is coming in; sit down, Anne Faber, and kindly pour it out. That tiresome Grossman will never come in before five, as she insists on taking a walk till then. I really must give her notice, only one is afraid of getting something worse. You should *never* have married, Anne Faber. I got you quite into my ways, and

since you left I've never had anyone who could write and read as you did."

"I'm very sorry you are not suited," murmured Mrs. Faber, beginning to make the tea whilst Toney flew at the kettle; but at that moment a tall angular woman appeared, and gave a terrible look at Lady Dove and at the other two, as she said tartly,

"It is five minutes to five; I am *never* late, Lady Dove, and, as you know, I never allow anyone to do my work. Excuse me——"

"I wish you would not argue, Grossman. Miss Whitburn and Mrs. Faber are quite equal to making tea if I choose to ask them;" but then the door opened, and Sir Evas and the lawyer entered and stopped further bickering between Lady Dove and her companion.

"Oh, Toney," whispered Sir Evas, "it's tartaric acid, I see; that woman's got a devil of a temper, and your Aunt Dove is really learning patience."

CHAPTER III.

BEFORE THE FRAY.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Faber later on, when Toney threw open her old sitting-room door where the poor companion had had such miserable hours. It was as comfortable as modern comfort bought with modern money could make it. Then the little woman fairly sat down and cried.

"Gracious stars! I meant to make you laugh, Crumpet! Oh, gee! you see how hard it is to do right!"

Mrs. Faber quickly dried her tears and smiled.

"I can't help thinking of all my happiness now and comparing it with the past, and it's all owing to you, Toney. Do you remember——"

"Of course I do. What mostest fun we had when I dressed in your grandmother's garments, and then when your dear Henry came!"

"When I compare my past and my present I feel how ungrateful I am!"

"Nonsense, Chum, you *never* were ungrateful! But look here, I got aunt's leave to furbish up this room a bit so that you shouldn't be reminded of the old order. I knew you would prefer our being together up here, and I've got lots to tell you. First, I've had some dresses made for you, so that you shouldn't be put to any expense for *my* party." Toney quickly opened a wooden box and displayed the most lovely dresses imaginable, lovely because suitable and perfectly simple.

One was a dinner dress of pale mauve silk, just suited to Mrs. Faber's delicate complexion, and the other was a white liberty silk dress for the ball. Mrs. Faber gasped.

"Oh no, Toney! it's impossible! They must have cost ever so much money, and I don't want people to say that I—I sponge upon you."

"There you are again, Crumpet! 'People to say,' I did think that you'd rise above that. Remember Henry's pleasure—and mine!"

"Henry may not think it right!"

"Look here, Chum, let's be serious just for one minute and listen. You know I've an awful lot of money, fifty thousand a year!" Mrs. Faber gasped again.

"It's a secret, by the way, but not from you. Well, when I first heard it I did what Pups would have done, I just dedicated it all to other people that wanted it, and I didn't guess it would be such hard work as I see it will be. After to-morrow I shall work like a Kanaka, but just for this week I'm going to please myself and not think if it's wise, or if it's political economy, or all the things I've been trying to learn to fit myself for spending this stuff."

"It will be too much work for you, dear!"

"Yes, it's awful! but I'm going to keep just enough to dress like Pups' daughter, because that's what I am. You know Aunt Dove never thought me fit to live here, and I'm not yet changed, you see! And there shall always be enough to take people abroad who want it every year, you, too, of course among the number, for you'll get so parochial if you don't rub about a little, that you must travel, and then the rest will have to be 'wisely distributed,' as Mr. Hales says. Ouf!"

"Oh, dear, it is too much work," repeated Mrs. Faber, gently feeling the dinner dress between her fingers; she had never had a gown like that before, and how proud Henry would be of her appearance!

"So, Crumpet, don't ever think of me as rich. I shan't be, I'll have to screw sometimes on the allowance I'll make myself, but that's for discipline. Aunt Dove will have a nice slice of cake to make her happy—if she can be—and well, that's all, now remember I'm just the same old Toney with all her faults as of old, and too bad for anyone to love for herself, Aunt Dove says so—except you always, Crumpet. Now I'll ring for Rose to help us to dress."

"Where's your dress, dear Toney?" asked Mrs. Faber, going across to Toney's simple bedroom on which no money had been spent to embellish it.

"It's here. You see, Chum, it's only white muslin, but it's brand new and looks all right."

"Oh, Toney, much too simple, why anyone might wear that!"

"Well, I *am* disappointed in you! Didn't I explain quite straight I'm only Toney, and not rich, if I dressed up smart—which you know I hate any way—people would think I was rich. I believe you would like me to wear a dress of

bank-notes sewed together. I did think you weren't worldly!"

"I'll try, dear, but when you make me wear such a lovely thing, though I'm only a poor clergyman's wife with three hundred a year, it doesn't seem quite——"

"It's to please me! Just for once I must have a fling, and after that I'll be as matter of fact as you like."

At this moment Rose appeared. She had been kitchen-maid, but Toney had hunted her up and turned her into a lady's maid, as Lady Dove insisted on Toney's engaging such a personage, saying her own maid had as much as she could do with her own affairs. Rose was supremely happy, but far more willing than capable, and Toney managed to do all her own toilet whilst she was getting Mrs. Faber into her dream dress. Toney had begged her uncle that they should be by themselves at Aldersfield this evening, just to seem like old times, and he had agreed, though Mr. Staines, the London lawyer, was of course one of the small party. Miss Grossman never appeared after the dinner bell had rung, and firmly refused any summons to the drawing-room after that meal, saying she had her own affairs to see after. Her ladyship had been very angry of course, and relieved her feelings by grumbling to her husband. She was discharging her wrath at him this evening before going up to dress.

"Grossman has very erroneous ideas of her duty, Evas. It's preposterous to refuse to pour out the evening tea and to take out the cards or pick up my stitches. I should never have engaged her if I could have guessed what she would be like."

"Why don't you get rid of her, Melina?"

"How aggravating you can be, Evas, you know quite well the last woman drank, and the one before was deaf and heard all awry. If I sent Grossman away, which I should dearly love to do, her successor would have a worse failing."

"Yes, most likely," he answered.

"That's just like you, Evas, you never try to help me."

"Shall I have a talk with her?"

"*You* have a talk with Grossman! Pray don't joke! she'd tell you to mind your own business; that woman is afraid of no one, positively no one! I wish Faber would die, and then I could have Crump back again, for then she would be penniless."

"And the two children?"

"Yes, it's really wicked of them! I should have to get them into asylums. Most provoking, ever since Antonia stepped into the house everything has gone from bad to worse. However, she is sure to get married soon for her money!"

"Did you ever think Lewis Waycott admired Toney?" said Sir Evas, hoping to please his spouse by this suggestion.

”Lewis Waycott! He’s going to marry his cousin Maud. Mrs. Hamilton arranged all that long ago. But I dare say you are right, and he will throw up that nice girl for Toney’s money bags. After all we have done for her—and it’s entirely through me she has this money, for I told the General the plain truth about her penniless condition—I think Antonia could show her gratitude more by imitating our English manners. What’s bred in the bone, I know, but she might at least pretend to be a lady.”

”Pretend! You might know by this time that Toney can’t pretend.”

”Oh, you men are all taken with a young girl, I know! Duty goes to the wind when——”

But here Sir Evas slipped away to dress; now and then his manners failed entirely, and he did not always wait for the end of his wife’s sentences. This evening, as her ladyship walked upstairs, her familiar demon provided a new torture for her. Suppose what Evas said were true, suppose Lewis Waycott fell in love with Antonia and married her and her fortune, his estate would benefit enormously, and the Waycotts would be a power in the county. ”Antonia shall certainly not marry Lewis Waycott,” she said to herself, ”I can nip that in the bud—and I shall.” Then, with a smile on her face, she rang for Rivett, who was as prim as formerly, but now she could no longer bully the companion, as Miss Grossman was fully able to keep her own position and to exact outward respect from the servants.

That evening in the drawing-room at Aldersfield, Toney’s very presence seemed to shame the selfish stateliness of Lady Dove, for she had more than fulfilled the promise of beauty, though of a special kind. Her face was radiant, and her beautiful hair seemed to crown the perfect outline of her head. Her very simplicity of dress might have been premeditated, so entirely did it harmonize with the girl whose every motion was full of life and the beauty that comes from perfect unconsciousness of self. Certainly three of the people there were secretly speculating what fortunate man would win Toney’s heart. At present her heart was given to humanity, and had never experienced the personal feeling which may make or mar perfect womanhood, but which never passes without leaving its trace.

Mr. Staines made a formal bow to Lady Dove and offered his arm, whilst Toney looked at Sir Evas who hesitated.

”Of course, uncle, married ladies first,” and Sir Evas offered his arm to the blushing Anne Faber, but thinking of Henry she determined to make the most of herself, and Toney would be close by, besides, abroad she and Sir Evas had become most friendly, and this was a wonderful transformation. Mr. Staines was so attentive to Lady Dove that the other three were allowed to enjoy themselves.

”Are the preparations all ready, uncle? Did you see if the big barn was

finally swept out, and if the rose wreaths were finished?"

"I assure you, Toney, I've worked myself to death."

"And did you send out all the invitations I wrote?"

"Every one. I got Barnes and Jones to take them round a week ago. I only hope your scrawls were readable!"

"I thought they would like it best, a personal invitation is much better, isn't it?"

"What did you say, Toney?" asked Mrs. Faber.

"Miss Toney Whitburn will be much delighted if Mrs. Spratt will come and have a dinner and dance on October 28th, at Aldersfield House. Dinner punctually at six o'clock, family included—babies taken care of."

"But you'll have all the village!"

"All uncle's people, of course. Won't it be fun! Uncle and I planned it all weeks ago. Didn't we, dear?"

"You planned it, Toney, and I said yes. I know my duty!"

"But you were as excited as I was. You know you were! I do wish my dear General were here. Do you think he and Pups will look on?"

"Well, I expect—— I shouldn't wonder," said poor Sir Evas, whose ethics of the world beyond were very hazy, "or, perhaps they can see a long way off."

"Pups said that there were no real lines of demarcation in nature, but, of course, you would not want everybody who's dead to crowd in. It's just a puzzle! The cook is excited too. Oh, Chum, I've ordered the dinner as I'm going to pay all expenses, and you'll see. It took a good deal of planning, but I didn't tell uncle all that, I was just a bit afraid he'd split on me."

"I'm as dark as the grave, Toney!" said Sir Evas laughing, "but I must say I shall be glad when it's over. One never knows with you——"

"Are we all to dance together?" asked Mrs. Faber.

"At first, but there's a ball in the big drawing-room for the people who don't care about the tenants, only they won't be half so lively. Mr. Waycott's promised he'll be at the opening of my ball, and Dr. Latham, and, of course, you and uncle. I don't think Aunt Dove will care. She says poor people are not odoriferous. It comes from their clothes being rather old. I wished we lived in the days of Henry IV., when every poor man had a fowl in his cooking-pot."

"A fowl wouldn't go far with Charles Pipkin and his family," said Sir Evas, "it did all very well for the Frenchies."

"It is fortunate girls only come of age once in their lifetime," Lady Dove was saying. "When I was young it meant a young lady was fully formed and educated, and her manners were irreproachable; I fear we can't say that of Antonia, Mr. Staines."

"All in due time, Lady Dove," was Mr. Staines' guarded answer.

”Really how horribly Grossman has arranged these flowers, and taken all my best roses too,” exclaimed her ladyship. ”You were much more successful, Anne Faber. It seems a pity you can no longer use your talents.”

”My husband is passionately fond of flowers, we always have some on the table,” murmured Mrs. Faber.

”Indeed! It’s a pity flowers are not edible. Mr. Staines, how is Captain Stone. He is another eccentric creature, and has not been to see us for a long time, but he asked for a bed to-morrow.”

”He told me of his intention. He was very fond of his brother.”

”The General’s will must have been a bitter pill to him,” said Lady Dove smiling.

Mr. Staines saw clearly that it was Lady Dove who had swallowed the pill, and replied politely,

”I know that the General asked his brother’s consent, and Captain Stone thought all his brother did perfect.”

”Indeed! men are so deluded, I mean the old ones of course. Lewis Waycott, our neighbour, is fast turning into the same kind of man. He has become quite the farmer, don’t you think so, Evas?”

”What, my dear, Lewis Waycott? Yes, certainly, excellent fellow; sees after his cottages now, and is quite a model landlord.”

CHAPTER IV.

VERY EARLY.

Toney was alone in the little bare simple room which had been hers on her first arrival at Aldersfield. She sat down on the window-sill with Trick in her arms, and she looked back with wonder across the five years’ interval since her arrival. She remembered the terrible homesickness that had seized her in the stifling atmosphere of Aldersfield, but God had made her paths smooth for her since then, and now He was going to give her the great responsibility of wealth. She did not feel the burden as much as an older woman might have done, for besides possessing the courage of youth, her mind was not complex. Her great ideas were simple enough after all—to give good times to all the needy people she came in contact with. That had been her father’s creed, and that should be hers. She had yet to find out that even this creed is not nearly as simple as it appears

at first sight. Toney's prayers were never very lengthy, but they came from her heart, and before she got into bed she laughed softly to herself as she examined a sheet of paper on which was written,

"Toney's time-table, on her twenty-first birthday," thinking of the old time-table that had brought her into so much disgrace with Lady Dove.

This one had to begin early, for it was St. Simon and St. Jude's Day, and before anyone but underlings were about, Toney stepped out of the house and began running across the park as if she were running for a wager, Trick panting after her. She had to be in time for the eight o'clock early service, which Mr. Hales, despite small encouragement from his flock, never omitted on Saints' Days. Lady Dove said it was ridiculous of him to have these early services, as she never went to them. Mrs. Hales, Silvia, and an old servant, these formed all his congregation, till just as he was about to begin, Toney entered, panting audibly.

"Where two or three are gathered together there am I in the midst of them," thought the Vicar, and was not discouraged. When the others hurried home, Toney still remained on her knees, till suddenly Trick pattered in to remind her that he was waiting for her, and Toney took the hint.

The Vicar was also waiting for her outside.

"Oh!" exclaimed Toney with her radiant smile, "that is kind of you, I wanted to see you so much."

"Many happy returns of the day, Toney," he said, holding her hand, then very simply he added, "I have been praying for you." The Vicar was not ashamed of mentioning his prayers—had he not been ordained to prayer, and was it not his duty to wear his colours as bravely as did his former pupil?

"Thank you. I know you *mean* it! and you're not thinking of the money, are you? Everybody will be to-day, but I want to tell you that I'm going to have a fling just this week, so don't scold, and after that—I'm going to be as wise as Solomon. Honour bright!"

The Vicar smiled.

"Well, Toney, what's the fling?"

"One thing I'm doing the dinner and the dance as it should be done. Aunt Dove wouldn't hear of—things I wanted, so I begged for a free hand. You are all coming, aren't you? And Dr. Latham will be there, and he's helped me ever so much, and Mr. Waycott is awfully nice, and I've got my Chum. Oh, you don't know how different she is. You'll pay her special attention, won't you, Mr. Hales? She is really quite clever now, it's Mr. Faber's doing, they read together every day a good book and a literary book. I call that a real union, don't you?"

"Some wives wouldn't thank their husbands for educating them."

"You won't talk five minutes with Mr. Faber before he mentions something wonderful about his dearest Anne. It's real sweet!" and Toney laughed for joy.

”Come in to breakfast, Toney, and see mother and Silvia.”

”I can’t, thank you. I must get back; Uncle Evas wants a lot of supporting to-day, because Aunt Dove is not very—happy in her mind.”

”By the way, Toney, has that surprising distribution of letters last night anything to do with you? Silvia said she saw two men going round. She thought at first it was the Insurance people who are always wanting to bury babies, but then she recognised your friend Jim, and an Aldersfield gardener.”

Toney laughed.

”I would have liked to see our friends open their letters! Oh, Trick, be quiet, he thinks you haven’t taken any notice of him. Then, oh please, do tell me if Thomas has been happy with his wife? The children look nicely cared for anyhow.”

”Yes, that marriage turned out very well. I only hope you will——” The Vicar paused.

”I know, ’make a good use of your money.’ Don’t please. Mr. Staines and Uncle Evas have both tried to preach little sermons on that text.”

The Vicar had not thought of the money, but he let it pass with a smile as Toney continued,

”I want to tell you that I put my first cheque in the bag this morning; it’s for the sick and needy, and you know them best, and anyone else who wants it. Pups used to say it’s much better to reform people with happiness than with reproaches. You agree, don’t you? Now good-bye, and come early. Oh, please make friends with Miss Grossman. It’s real difficult.”

Toney was gone like a sudden cyclone, and the Vicar stood and looked after her. A little sigh escaped him, and then he walked home to his breakfast. Before he could reach it, however, he was waylaid by Thomas’ wife.

”Oh, sir, Thomas he sent me to ask you, sir, if it was a mistake. Mrs. Smith, next door to me, she’s had the same, and Culver too.”

”What is it?” asked the Vicar, taking the envelope presented to him.

”It’s in it, sir, if you don’t mind, and do you think it’s a mistake?”

”What mistake? Oh——” He understood as he read the note in Toney’s writing,

”DEAR MR. AND MRS. THOMAS,

”Please spend this little present just as you like. It’s a birthday treat to myself, and come in good time to the dinner and dance.

”**Your sincere friend**, ”TONEY WHITBURN.

”P.S.—Tell the children they shall have a separate room and can make as much noise as they like.”

”The children is so excited, sir, they wouldn’t eat their victuals yesterday, but Thomas says he’s sure it’s a mistake.”

”In what way, Mrs. Thomas?”

”Well, sir, the sovereign I mean, a whole sovereign. And it’s the same to the others. We didn’t want no money from Miss Toney, but it do seem just a nice surprise.”

The Vicar unfolded the silver paper and saw the golden sovereign with his own eyes. He had heard Toney was rich, but this beginning appeared lavish and was it wise?

”I don’t think it’s a mistake, Mrs. Thomas.”

”Thank you, sir. Thomas he wouldn’t hear of spending it till I’d asked you, and he do say how he’ll keep the coin, but I says Miss Toney tells us to spend it and it wouldn’t be honest not to.”

Mrs. Thomas had already mentally spent it, and could not at all agree with wrapping up the gold as a keepsake.

”Certainly, she means you to spend it. You must all come to do her honour to-day. If we could all think of other people instead of ourselves as she does, our village would be none the worse!”

”Thomas thinks no end of her after what she did for him, sir, he wouldn’t go the public now as he used to do if you was to pay him to go, all along of Miss Toney. Thank you, sir, I’ll tell Thomas.”

In another moment the Vicar met his own gardener, who lived in a cottage close by.

”If you please, sir, Miss Toney sent me a sovereign. Is it all right, sir, for me to accept it?”

”She has made no favourite, Turner, every villager on her uncle’s estate has the same, I believe.”

Mr. Hales returned home with a smile on his lips.

”Mother! our madcap heiress has sent a sovereign to each of her uncle’s cottagers. I don’t know what other surprises we shall have this evening.” Mrs. Hales shook her head.

”The old General ought to have secured some controlling power for her.”

”She will pauperize the village,” said Silvia, who was still pretty, but had now a little discontented expression on her face, and the reason was that Captain Nichols, a young penniless officer who admired her, and whom she loved, would not come forward, as he could not make up his mind to give up his own

extravagances. Without owning it to herself, Silvia was jealous of the once despised Harum Scarum. Silvia's younger sister had boldly faced poverty, and gone to be a lady nurse, but was coming for two days at Toney's special request.

"When you get a present of a sovereign, Silvia, are you pauperized?" said the Vicar smiling.

"It isn't often I do!"

"I think we may safely say Toney will not repeat this surprise."

"Of course it is easy to be generous when you have heaps of money! I wonder how much Toney has got," and Silvia heaved a little sigh.

"I rather pity her," said Mr. Hales gently. "Lady Dove never says a kind word about her, at least to me."

"I think Toney likes her inferiors best," added Silvia. "I hear Mrs. Faber has come to stay at Aldersfield. She must remember the time when she was only the poor companion."

"We none of us received her very kindly," remarked the Vicar, cutting some bread, and then Silvia gave a quick glance at her brother's face. Was it possible that he admired Toney? If he married her and her fortune, what great things might he not achieve for himself and his family! Silvia determined to say nothing more against Toney. Vague possibilities which she would have been ashamed to own aloud flitted through her mind.

"Anyhow, she is very, very generous, and I mean to enjoy the ball," she said in quite a cheerful voice.

Mrs. Hales was opening her letters and exclaimed suddenly,

"Really that child! Listen! dear boy."

"MY DEAR MRS. HALES,

"I always remember your kindness to the wild colt you allowed to come to your house. It was awfully nice of you, and I don't want to do anything horrid in return, but it would give me so much pleasure if you would buy your ball dresses out of this cheque. I know you are not rich, because Aunt Dove paid you for teaching me, but I know you and Mr. Hales would have done the same for me for nothing. I don't want to feel to-night that anyone is the poorer for my birthday party. Please accept my little present and don't be proud about it. Just for to-morrow I'm having a fling. There's several little things I've heard you say you wanted, but it's nicer to get what one likes oneself, isn't it? Will you find something Mr. Hales would like. Every now and then Pups bought me something just ridiculously beautiful, so that he might have the pleasure of seeing me wear it, but really these surprise presents were rather a trial to me, as he didn't know what

girls appreciated. Please think of me when you say your prayers to-morrow, as this money will give me a lot of trouble, but I don't mean to funk it.

"YOUR AFFECTIONATE TONEY."

"What is the cheque?" asked Silvia eagerly. She noticed that her name was not mentioned. Toney was too honest to thank those who had disliked her.

"A hundred pounds. I cannot refuse it, it will help us so much; there's a new drawing-room carpet that I was puzzling how to get!" The Vicar laughed.

"Is that a ball dress, mother? Has Silvia a nice dress this evening, we must all look our best!"

"Both the girls will look nice, but this money will make my conscience easy. I had been thinking I was extravagant."

"I'll go and meet Amy at the station," exclaimed Silvia. "We can pay her journey now. Oh dear, money is useful, however much Frank proclaims the blessings of poverty."

The Vicar never argued with Silvia. He had often felt sorry his pretty sister could not have more advantages, and he knew all about Tom Nichols and the hopelessness of the love affair.

"We will give Toney a return of cheerful spirits," he said. "I shall go down early to Aldersfield with Waycott. We have consulted how best to help her. I believe Lady Dove pretends to know nothing about it all. Why can't people recognise their blessings?"

"Lady Dove's present blessing is Miss Crossman. You told me to make friends with her, but I really could not. She told me she preferred her own company when her duties were over, and she did not like to encroach on her walk and rest times," said Silvia.

They all laughed.

"I wonder if Toney will break that crust of ice," said Mrs. Hales thoughtfully.

"Artificial ice is impenetrable!" was the Vicar's answer.

Then they all went their various ways, but there was a warm glow in each of their hearts, though the reasons for it were different.

CHAPTER V.

PREPARATIONS.

The great barn behind Aldersfield House was the scene of much bustle and work on this eventful morning. Foremost among all the workers was Toney herself, dressed in a short serge dress covered with a big apron. She looked the picture of happiness, and even Aunt Dove's cold congratulations at breakfast had not been able to damp her spirits. Mrs. Faber was making "button-holes," whilst Toney was arranging flowers in vases with her deft magic touch to adorn the long tables. Men were putting up festoons among the dark rafters, and the brightest sunshine was pouring in at the door and windows.

"Won't it be lovely! and won't their eyes open! Gracious stars! What's this?"

A large box was being wheeled in, and Lewis Waycott came behind it with an amused smile on his face.

"Many happy returns," he said, as Toney flew to receive him. "I've brought you some flowers. I know you're particular about having the best." Two men were soon unpacking the box, and displayed a wealth of glorious blossoms, mostly exotics.

"Oh!" gasped Toney, "but—where did you get them?"

"I sent Graham for them to London. I thought your friends should see something new in the way of flowers!"

"That is awfully nice. I never thought of that. It will give them something to talk about, and I was just at my wits' end for more flowers; Aunt Dove doesn't like to denude her hot-houses, but oh, Mr. Waycott, just imagine, uncle went out very early and *stole* some! He did really, I saw him, but don't tell! and he sent them in as a present from Aunt Dove for my feast! I'm sure she knew nothing about it, so I mustn't thank her."

The two laughed heartily together, and then Lewis looked round at the transformed barn.

"Have you got my work marked out?"

"I should think so, but come round first and admire! Look at my birthday cake. It's all made of little cottages in sugar. It's my idea!"

"However is it to be cut?"

"You'll help, won't you? I just couldn't have got all ready without you, and your men have taken as deep an interest as our own."

"Of course, the invitation amply rewards them—— By the way, Toney, I've got a personal present for you; will you accept it?"

He dived into a pocket and brought out a small box.

Toney opened it and drew forth a locket surrounded with small diamonds, and within it was a beautifully painted miniature of Toney's father.

The girl looked up suddenly and her eyes filled with tears. "Oh, Pups!" she gasped, "how did you get it?"

”Is it like? Mrs. Faber helped me. I believe she stole an old photograph you possess, and—you see your friends are all expert thieves!”

”I shall never forget this,” she said, brushing the tears away with the back of her somewhat grimy hand, ”and I shall always think of you two together. I think the artist must have been just inspired. If only *he* could come this evening, he’d have gone round to everyone of the guests and said something jolly.”

”I’ll try and take his place,” said Lewis a little shyly, and then he seized a hammer and nails and was soon among the rafters with the other men. Sir Evas presently made his entrance and looked round.

”Why, Toney, this will be a fairy palace! I see you have already put your aunt’s flowers in water.”

”Yes, and look, uncle, at these leaves with them! I used to pick up the gold leaves when I was a tiny and bring them to Pups for his poor people. I really thought they were gold; but just see what Mr. Waycott has brought! Beautiful flowers to remind me of home, and crowds of orchids for your people to talk about. Isn’t it scrumptious of him? He’s done the real thinking.”

”Good heavens, Toney, it must have cost him——”

”Oh, uncle, if you had grand visitors you’d think nothing of it, and poor folk are just as fond of flowers as ’ristocrats, now aren’t they?”

”Well, really, I have never thought about it.”

”And look what he’s given me,” and Toney opened the locket. ”There aren’t many men that would have thought of it, and besides, he’s going to make himself awfully pleasant to our people to-night, and, uncle, you will too, won’t you?”

”In so far as in me lieth, Toney,” said Sir Evas doubtfully.

”Oh, yes, you can. Have you learnt that list of names I gave you? I put them quite plain, a column for the men and women and a column for the children. It took a deal of writing to get all the names of the children, you know, so I hope you’ve learnt them.”

”You don’t write *very* plain, Toney!”

”Oh, that’s an excuse!” laughed Toney, ”let me see, what’s the name of Timothy Grant’s fourth child? He’s your cowman, uncle, so you really *ought* to know *his* children.”

”Polly,” answered Sir Evas, looking grave.

”Oh! why the eldest is Polly, there couldn’t be two Pollys, you know. It’s Marthyann, all in one, Mrs. Grant declares, she says she ’giv it out herself to Mr. ’ales.’”

”Is Marthyann coming, Toney, and shall I be expected to recognise her?”

”They’d just adore you if you were to go up straight to her and call her Marthyann, but it won’t do if you go to the wrong one, so perhaps you’d better ask me first.”

”But I assure you, Toney, your list was longer than my arm; it would want a royal memory to attempt it!”

”I *think* I’ve got them all right, but Jenny Varly’s eldest boy is Tommy Varly, and John Todd’s second boy is Tommy Todd, and they are cousins, and as like as two peas, and I do sometimes mistake them! But, uncle, there are no drones here, as you aren’t very handy with your fingers, can you hold that box of nails for Phil Smith?”

”Well, for a few minutes. I’ve a lot to do this morning, and Mr. Staines is still requiring my services, and your new secretary is coming to-morrow, and your aunt is rather upset because the gardeners are all here, and——”

”I’ve left her Miss Grossman,” answered Toney laughing, ”she’s a host in herself, and she told me she didn’t hold by spoiling *poor* people! Why it’s just the poor we ought to spoil! Don’t you think so, uncle?”

Sir Evas pretended not to hear as he did not want Toney to bring up his remarks against him at some future time. He knew this was an inconvenient habit of hers, so he slipped out of the barn as soon as he could when she wasn’t looking.

The workers went on with all speed. All had to be done by five o’clock when the guests would begin to arrive.

”I suppose you have had to hire the knives and spoons,” said Lewis, coming down for a moment to contemplate his work.

”Yes. Uncle said I could have all the kitchen things, but—I—didn’t want them, and Aunt Dove wouldn’t hear of her plate being unearthed, so I’ve hired it all.”

”Not real plate!”

Toney nodded.

”Yes, just real silver, and everything like lords and ladies, won’t they be pleased? Something to remember!”

”I hope it won’t disappear, Toney!”

”How can you suggest anything so unkind! You see the children have the other barn, and Mrs. Faber undertakes them. A child is always good with her. Isn’t it odd? Do you see that Mr. Faber is hard at work there now with her? I shall want to cut myself in three pieces! Oh, I am so happy!”

Lewis glancing at her face did not doubt her happiness, but he could not echo the speech. Before Toney had become an heiress, Lewis had fallen in love with her, he had made her promise to give him something when he should ask for it, and then suddenly this terrible fortune had dropped down from the skies, and had set up a wall of division between him and the girl he admired as well as loved. No girl in his estimation could approach Toney in all the qualities he so much respected; he knew she was not a highly accomplished English young

lady, she did not move with rhythmic beauty, she did not sing like a syren or play like Chopin, but she was just Toney, with splendid health and beauty of her own, and with a character which influenced nearly everyone that came in contact with her. Lewis knew that it was owing to her that his cottages were now in perfect repair, and that he now deserved better the name of a good landlord than he had done before. It was Toney's influence, Toney's example of doing her best for her neighbours with all her heart, that had awakened his conscience, and yet the Waycotts were very proud of their good name. He could not bear that it should be said he had married the heiress for money—and he knew Lady Dove would say it. Would the world believe that he had loved the wild colt who had first visited him with the poor companion? Toney had said herself people would want to marry her money, how should he be able to prove the contrary? Why had the old General ever taken a fancy to her?

He had not, however, to-day much time for thought, he could not even flatter himself that Toney connected him in the least with that kind of love, she was certainly heart-whole; would the awakening ever come, would blindfolded Cupid by chance let one of his arrows pierce her? Lewis could not answer this question. If only he might woo her, he thought that perhaps he could awaken the sleeping boy, but there lay the difficulty; he could not, he dared not face the bare idea of Toney's thinking and of saying—for she seldom hid her thoughts—

"Oh, it's only my money you care about!" He must wait, and in the meantime what if someone bolder or less scrupulous won her!

As Lewis hurried to the hall to pick up some possessions before going home to lunch, he came face to face with Lady Dove.

"I've been helping to decorate," he said, to account for his presence.

"It is very kind of you, I'm sure, Mr. Waycott, though it was quite unnecessary to trouble you. Antonia is most thoughtless; I can't get a man or a boy to do anything to-day. She has got them all."

"They look uncommonly lively over it."

"I daresay, anything is better than one's plain duty. However, it will be over to-morrow." Lady Dove heaved a sigh.

"It's very kind of you to keep open house," said Lewis, not knowing what to say.

"I don't wish to get credit when it's not deserved. Antonia will pay for it all. The General left her a great deal of money, you know."

"I suppose so," said Lewis, screwing his stick round on the gravel.

"Yes, indeed; I don't quite know how much, because my poor husband has done nothing else these last four years but attend to all this wretched money. I assure you I never could get any of his company, and somehow he was fortunate in some land speculations, which he never was with his own."

”Sir Evas said he would quite miss the occupation.”

”Well, I for one shall be glad for him. He looks ten years older. It’s perfectly ridiculous to wear yourself out; and he never gets a penny by it, of course. He is quite morbidly particular about money. He always says he never would have married me if I had been an heiress. He does so hate that modern habit of heiress hunting.”

”I don’t think anyone would think Sir Evas was paid for his kindness.”

”There are so many evil tongues, Mr. Waycott; one hears such extraordinary things. Already I’ve had two or three names mentioned to me as likely to pay court to Antonia—for her money, of course.”

”It will be certainly a bar to disinterested affection,” answered Lewis. He would like to have used his stick on Lady Dove’s head. She smiled graciously.

”I have seldom met such a thing, Mr. Waycott. I shall be very much interested when I do! Poor Antonia must not expect to meet it, for certainly she has not charm or beauty to attract a man simply for herself.”

”Good morning, Lady Dove. I must hurry off. My aunts will be waiting.”

”Tell dear Mrs. Hamilton that I shall expect her to take pity on me this evening. Good-bye; so kind of you to have come.”

Lewis hurried home in no enviable mood, and he slashed the unoffending hemlock heads with savage fury, wishing he were inflicting punishment ”on that old cat.”

”She meant me to understand her insinuations, of course. Well, she need not be afraid. Of course I saw through her; I’m not a blind ass.”

CHAPTER VI.

REAL SILVER.

When Lewis Waycott entered the dining-room of Waycott Hall the same people were seated at the table as on the memorable day when Toney had rushed in late to luncheon. These were his devoted Aunt Honoria and her widowed sister, Mrs. Hamilton, who was somewhat of a ”soft pussy cat,” as Toney had once described her. Her two daughters, Jeanie and Maud, were still unmarried, much to her disappointment. Jeanie played first violin at amateur concerts, and Maud, with less talent, stepped into the breach when somebody had failed. The sisters belonged to the large army of musical people whose performances are just not

good enough to be valuable, though Jeanie had real talent. Maud was pretty and gentle, but both sisters had imbibed their mother's pride of birth, all the greater because of their poverty. Mrs. Hamilton was a Waycott of Waycott Hall, and her husband belonged to a very old Scotch family. They might be poor, but they were of the bluest blood, and because of this Jeanie had ruined her happiness. Four years ago a musician who was "nobody in particular," except that his genius had raised him to eminence, had fallen in love with Jeanie and had made her an offer, but the Hamilton pride prevented her saying yes. She did not even dare tell her mother she loved him. How could Jeanie Hamilton marry a man whose parents had once kept a shop? It was impossible! The ghost of that shop haunted her, even though Frank Weston had long since pensioned his parents. Certainly the great people idolized Frank Weston, crowds filled any hall where he chose to play his violin, but how could Jeanie Hamilton accept his parents? Mrs. Hamilton gently smiled as she said, "Impossible."

Frank Weston was not poor, for he earned a great deal of money, but he was born a plebeian. Mrs. Hamilton had repeated and dictated Jeanie's refusal for her, and he had not even the satisfaction of seeing again the girl he worshipped. He had, however, guessed the truth, and, deeply wounded, he made no further effort to win her, but he could not forget her. On her part, Jeanie was always arguing the question with herself. Of course her mother had been right, but as time went on the girl began to realise that she had thrown away her happiness. Her heart was breaking and her health was giving way. Maud, too, was as soft wax in her mother's hands, and Mrs. Hamilton meant her to marry her cousin Lewis, and to be the mistress of Waycott Hall. She had taken the girls to Dresden to finish their musical education, but now she had come back intending to marry Maud to Lewis and find a suitable match for Jeanie. When Aunt Delia determined to do something she was seldom known to fail, but she never mentioned it to her sister Honoria, because she was so supremely happy as mistress of Waycott Hall that she did not wish her beloved nephew to marry anyone—at least, not yet, though of course the time for marriage must come some day, in order to carry on the succession of the old family of the Waycotts of Waycott Hall.

"How late you are, dear boy," exclaimed Miss Honoria, who, knowing every expression of her nephew's face, saw he was not in his best mood.

"I am sorry, Lady Dove hindered me a few minutes."

"It's most good-natured of you to go and help at Aldersfield," said Aunt Delia softly. "Maud offered to go, but Antonia Whitburn said she had enough helpers. I expect she prefers masculine help."

"Naturally, for standing on high ladders! The barn will astonish you, Aunt Delia. Already it is like fairyland, and imagine, Aunt Honoria, Toney has hired real plate for the poor people's dinner."

”Lady Dove would not lend hers, I expect,” said Miss Honoria.

”Of course she would not! Imagine the expense though, and it will be all on the same scale. Toney sees no difference between poor and rich.”

”It shows how unfit she is to deal with money,” said Mrs. Hamilton decidedly. ”It is a real misfortune that old man left her his money.”

”Yes, it certainly is,” echoed Lewis firmly.

”She will make a mess of the whole thing, either she will give it foolishly away, or she will be widely extravagant! She will never be like other people,” continued Aunt Delia.

”Never!” echoed Lewis.

”I suppose my pale blue dress will do,” said Maud, turning to her mother.

”You look sweet in it, dear, don’t you think so, Lewis?”

”Why Maud looks well in everything,” said Lewis, cheerfully nodding at his cousin. ”Well, I must soon be off again. Here’s a list of things Toney wants you to lend her, Aunt Honoria.”

”Yes, certainly,” answered Miss Honoria, for she secretly admired Toney, though she dared not let her sister know this. It was a pity Delia was so much prejudiced against this girl.

”How foolish of you, Honoria—if your things get stolen you can’t blame anyone but yourself. Are you willing, Lewis, if so, Maudie will go with you and help to carry the things?”

Lewis did not want Maud, but could not refuse.

”I shall tire Maud for I am walking.”

”Oh no, I shall want some fresh air before the dance. How hot it will be in the barn!”

”You girls must fill up your programmes early,” said Mrs. Hamilton pointedly.

”Oh, Toney won’t have any! She says people must dance as the spirit moves them.”

”How inconvenient. Well, anyhow, Lewis, you’ll see the girls get partners.”

”No fear! Think of all the tenants dying to trip it with such fair damsels!”

”One has to *pretend* one likes it,” said Jeanie languidly; ”but it’s not at all enjoyable.”

”I asked Toney to let me go off with Sally the kitchenmaid, but she wouldn’t agree; she says I must foot it with Mrs. Goodman, the housekeeper. She weighs two tons at least and all the men fight shy of her.” Lewis’ good temper had returned, and he was now ready to make fun of everything. ”But there is dancing in the dining-room, too, isn’t there?” said Jeanie.

”We shall dance everywhere ’till gunpowder comes out of the heels of our boots,’” answered Lewis.

”Now do be sensible, Lewis. There will be, I hear, many of the county folks,” said Mrs. Hamilton, thinking that Jeanie might meet someone eligible.

”I believe so. Lord and Lady Southbourne are coming, I know, and their eldest son, and George Lathom and heaps more. Oh, the Carews, of course; I heard Lady Carew saying the other day that nothing should prevent her coming to Toney’s coming of age.”

”I really think it strange they all flock to a sort of party like this when they come as seldom as possible to the house at other times,” said Miss Honoria.

”Honestly, Aunt Honoria, you wouldn’t miss Toney’s party yourself, would you, and you know you only go very seldom to call on Lady Dove.”

”I declare, Lewis, you are getting as direct as Toney herself,” laughed Miss Honoria.

”I know Lady Dove is shuddering as to what is to happen to-night. She says, ’you never know with Toney,’ and that is a truer word than she often says!”

”I expect all this fuss and this money will turn Antonia Whitburn’s head,” said Mrs. Hamilton, who was jealous, but too ladylike to show it openly.

”Turn Toney’s head, Aunt Delia! You little know her, I really believe she no more thinks of money as bringing her any personal advantage than she would think that—putting a crown on her head would make her a queen.”

”You always were good-natured in defending poor Harum Scarum,” answered his Aunt Delia; ”and I’m sure she needs a few friends to do it. Mrs. Hales told me she saw no change in Toney’s character in spite of all the places they sent her to in order to improve her.”

Lewis laughed heartily, and then rose to go. ”Well, Maud, come along, I’m off. I’ll order the dog-cart to bring us back so as to have time to dress. You will all come later.”

”Seeing poor people stuff doesn’t interest me at all,” said Jeanie; but Maud, who now always took her cue from Lewis, exclaimed,

”I should like to go early if the carriage can go, twice. I’ll bring my violin and play something for them if Toney likes.”

”What a good idea,” said Lewis brightly. ”The carriage can certainly take us early and go back for the lazy ladies.”

”Please don’t kill yourself, my dear boy,” said Miss Waycott with a smile. She was torn between the pleasure of seeing Lewis happy and interested, and the fear of her sister Delia thinking her very foolish. It is never easy to hunt with the hounds and run with the hare.

As the cousins were crossing the Park (having had special though private permission from Sir Evas to come that way whenever they liked) Lewis was smiling to himself.

”Poor Toney,” he said presently, ”I believe she will regret even the terrible

days of her first arrival at Aldersfield. This beastly money will swallow up all her time, and Sir Evas has dug up an Australian secretary for her. I hope he'll not be too much of a cad."

"It will be like a novel, and he'll fall in love with her and marry her," said Maud. "She would like an Australian, and he would understand her strange ways."

"Perhaps; but I haven't heard that the Australians are less self-seeking than other people. I think Toney is a *rara avis*."

"It does seem a little hard on Lady Dove to have fallen on this rare bird!" said Maud, laughing softly. She was so pretty and womanly that Lewis noticed her with pleasure. He liked Maud much better than Jeanie, who always looked discontented, but the idea of marrying either of them had never entered his head.

"It was awfully nice of you, Maud, to think of playing to Toney's people. I'm sure she will be delighted, but don't waste your pity on Lady Dove!"

"The new companion is a tyrant, I hear; I want to see her. Mother thinks it rather silly of Toney to make such a fuss over Mrs. Faber. It will make her very uppish. That class of people, mother says, never can stand much notice."

Lewis laughed aloud.

"Pray, Maud, form your own opinions and don't quote those of other people. Use your eyes to-day, and see what the Fabers are like. Mrs. Faber has developed so wonderfully you would not know her for the same person, though she is still somewhat afraid of Lady Dove, which is not surprising. That woman is simply odious."

Very soon they reached Aldersfield, and Lewis conducted his cousin to the barn where he had worked so hard. The preparations were drawing to a close, and at that moment Toney herself dashed out with a hammer in her hand.

"Why, Toney, you look like Sisera going to do the deed! Is there anything I can get?"

"Oh, you'll do for audience beautifully, I was just going to fetch Mrs. Horner, but she is dreadfully busy. It's to hear Uncle Dove rehearse his speech. We've put up the platform for him and all, and now he declares he can't make a speech—but he must. Now do, Maud, you'll represent the ladylike portion. Poor uncle is so shy, and only says 'Hum, hum!'"

They entered the barn, where Sir Evas was indeed looking supremely unhappy.

"Oh, Waycott, I'm glad you've come. Toney declares I must make a speech and it's quite beyond me!"

"Oh yes you can, dear, ducky uncle. Just say something that you really mean out of your heart."

"That they won't make themselves ill with over-eating!"

”Oh, that’s horrid, you wouldn’t say that at your own table—but look, Mr. Waycott, what do you think of the whole?”

”Oh!” exclaimed Maud, ”why it’s too beautiful for them, and everything silver, and, oh, what lovely silver dishes!”

Lewis gave Maud a little nudge; he knew this speech would be like gunpowder to Toney.

”Too beautiful! Of course not! How can anything be too beautiful? Aren’t these flowers exquisite, Mr. Waycott? That was all your doing.”

”But it’s like a grand dinner party,” urged Maud.

”And so it is, a very grand dinner party. Do you see the little roses, and the napkins folded like lilies? The servants have just been awfully nice over it all, and the button-holes are ready for the men and a little posy for the ladies. I’m just a wee bit afraid about the children, but Chum says I’m to trust her.”

”May I play something for them on the violin?” asked Maud eagerly.

”Oh, how lovely, yes; but—not one of your long fugues, please. Something they’d all like, just a brisk jig or imitation of bagpipes.”

Maud looked upon herself as a good player, but she nobly hid her disgust.

”I see, a good stirring dance.”

”Yes, just at first, something that will unloose their tongues, and that they can talk all through it till the dance begins. Now, Uncle Evas, it’s your turn. You must practise your speech. Mr. Waycott, just sit there to represent the men, and Maud will do the stuck-ups, and I’ll do the women. It must suit us all, uncle. You can just say how awfully glad you are to see them, and that Toney Whitburn is too, and that—no, I’ll make my own, you’d go wrong.”

Happily for Sir Evas a footman entered at the moment, and announced that Lady Dove said would Sir Evas go at once, and see her on business.

CHAPTER VII.

THE VISITORS ARRIVE.

”What is the programme?” asked Maud, catching Toney’s enthusiasm.

”Uncle Evas, and any of us who like, will sit down to dinner here, then, when they are well started, we shall go to dine in the house, and hurry a little to begin the dancing here. Poor people do like having plenty of time to eat, so I think we can manage it all.”

”When is Sir Evas to make his speech?”

”Just between their meat and pudding. It will help them to digest, and they do like to hear speeches, so I’m going to make one, and anybody else who feels moved. Won’t you, Mr. Waycott?”

”But they are not my tenants, Toney.”

”But they are your neighbours, and we ought to love our neighbour as ourself.”

”I expect my people will be very jealous!” answered Lewis laughing.

”Then you can have a party of your own. I’ll come and help you in return.”

”That’s a promise, but I don’t know what Aunt Honoria would say!”

”Oh! My visitors are going to—— No, I won’t tell you as you might let it out to Aunt Dove. Uncle Evas gave leave, but——”

At this moment Sir Evas walked in, followed by Lady Carew.

”Oh! what a fairy palace!” exclaimed her ladyship. ”Where is Miss Whitburn? I’ve come to beg you to let me see all the fun, but I didn’t expect this! My husband is coming later, but I rebelled.”

Lady Carew’s face was all smiles. She had never forgotten Toney’s first tea-party at Aldersfield, besides the story of Toney’s fortune and her coming of age was known to everyone for miles round. Toney gave one of her quick searching looks and settled that Lady Carew meant all she said.

”Well, that is nice of you! You haven’t come because I’ve got such a heap of money! Oh dear! Uncle Evas, I do believe I see somebody arriving in the distance.”

Sir Evas looked too.

”Good heavens, Toney! it’s the *avant garde*. Much too early!”

”But you are glad they should enjoy themselves as long as possible, aren’t you, and you said you wanted them to see your house, and you know—— Did you tell Mr. Diggings!”

”Tell him what, Toney?” whispered Lewis, who was prepared for a surprise.

”That the house is open to *everybody* to-day! Fancy, Lady Carew, ever so many of uncle’s tenants have never been in the house at all! So now Uncle Evas has been awfully kind, and said Aldersfield should be thrown open, only——”

Sir Evas had hurried off.

”Only what?” laughed Lewis, who had jumped to conclusions.

”He wouldn’t tell Aunt Dove, so I want my friends to act as sentinels at her door! and we must all take parties round. No one is to see this fairy palace till six!”

”Doesn’t Lady Dove know?” asked Lady Carew smiling, ”pray let me personally conduct as I have never seen all the house either. I know there are fine pictures.”

”Well, no, Aunt Dove doesn’t know. She would just have squirmed a bit at seeing so many of them all about. I’ve just run round to open all the doors, but I posted a warning near Aunt Dove’s door. Oh, I do hope she is safe for a long time. She said she was going to rest, and Miss Grossman is reading to her.”

Maud and Lady Carew could not help laughing.

”Won’t they do funny things?” asked Maud ”You know, Lewis, your aunts wouldn’t let your tenants roam about the house!”

”I’m afraid Toney will insist, but please let it be in the summer-time.”

”It would be nicer for them, but I couldn’t help my birthday, could I? Just look down the drive, it’s getting black with people. I’ll run round here first. Mr. Waycott, will you see if the children’s room is done, then we must all work and just talk and explain everything, and please, Lady Carew pretend you know them all as there isn’t time to introduce.”

In another moment there was a scuffle and rush round, which Trick seemed to think, judging by his barking, was done specially to amuse him, and then at the open front door and on the top of the stone steps, Toney, Trick, and their special friends might be seen with very smiling faces, standing to receive the first batch of visitors, though looking down the drive the stream seemed continuous and thick. It must be owned that the guests were very quiet and very shy, and the procession resembled a funeral much more than the beginning of a most novel party. Never had half the visitors come so near the big house, but then never had they been invited. They all clutched their invitation cards as if they were talismen. Toney had stationed the young footman at the bottom of the stairs to receive the cards, but there the first hitch occurred.

A very sheepish labourer in his very best clothes shook his head as the footman held out his hand to receive the card.

”’Tis only to show you, young man,” he said in a loud whisper.

”Will you kindly give it to me,” was the answer. ”I have to collect them.”

”No, that you b’aint, I’m a-going to keep it; I’ve promised my lad I’ll frame it for ’im.”

The second guest seeing the difficulty refused even to show his card.

”We be a-going to frame it too. If you can’t a-read it just to get the name in your head, I can’t help you no further.”

”Miss Whitburn said they were to be collected.”

These two rebels had stopped the stream, and Lewis, seeing something was happening, dashed down to the rescue.

”Afternoon, sir; the young man wants my card of invitation from Miss Toney herself. I’d rather not come than give it to ’im.”

Lewis was convulsed but soon set matters right.

”Pray keep them, but just show them as you come up. Miss Whitburn is

waiting up there for you."

"'T'aint likely we'd give it up to *he*," said yet another visitor, casting looks of contempt on the footman who had tried to steal their precious cards.

The children, open-mouthed, clung to their parents, but the Thomas girls had been put first as they knew Miss Toney so well.

Up they came, men, women, and children, all sizes, dressed in varied costumes, and all staring hard at Toney, who, in her simple morning dress, was beaming with pleasure, and her eyes seemed to dance with glee.

"How do you do? How do you? Oh, Mr. Grant, it is good of you to come with your lame foot. Mrs. Chapman, the children are to go to their big room straight, lots of amusements for them, and they'll be well taken care of. Lady Carew and Miss Maud Hamilton have come to entertain you. Oh please, Mrs. Curtis, do shake hands (Mrs. Curtis was curtseying). What a lovely nosegay! How kind of you. Now, Miss Hamilton, will you take the first party round the house. There are about thirty here," and Maud went off.

"How do you do? This is nice of you to come. You're to go round the house anywhere except in Lady Dove's room, she's got a headache or something."

"Shan't we hurt the carpets, miss, with our boots?" said a patient looking woman, "and here's some of our last roses, miss, for your birthday. I'm sure we all wish you a very, very long life."

"Thank you ever so much," and Toney was already holding an arm-full of very tight posies. "Now, Mr. Waycott, will you take the second party. Show them my little room at the top of the house for they can see the tops of their cottages and chimneys from there. Sir Evas is coming soon. He had to see a bit to everything. Dinner's very punctual at six, so please don't stop too long."

Lewis Waycott obeyed. He had come there to obey to-day, and it was no good to think of shyness with Toney there. She was really happy with these people, and could not have been condescending to them had she tried. These poor cottagers, whose dull lives were seldom varied, were to have a real good day, and enjoy themselves, that was the idea that filled Toney's mind. Her one anxiety was the fear that Lady Dove would wake and come forth. At last the stream left off and only a few stragglers appeared. Toney was keeping the last batch for herself, and the children were now safely housed in the barn house, listening spell-bound to a ventriloquist with Mrs. Faber in charge. She was indeed happy, there was a great affinity between herself and children. The tea-tables were spread, and the enjoyment of the little ones was doubled by secret glances at the good things which would soon find their way down their throats.

"Hulloa!" called out the ventriloquist, putting his head up a chimney, "are you there, Bill, why don't you come down? I say, what's to day?" "A coming of old age." "You silly, not old age, a coming of age." "Whose coming?" "Well, it ain't

my coming, for I ain't a-coming for anyone"—and so on till the children clapped and shouted, for suddenly Miss Toney herself appeared like a sudden burst of sunshine, and stayed ten minutes making fun.

"Oh, Chum, aren't they happy?"

"I should think they were," echoed Mrs. Faber.

Yes, the children were happy and tea followed very soon, and after tea a conjurer, and then the children were all fetched home by the neighbours from the other half of the village or by elder girls. After this Mrs. Faber slipped away to get ready for the dinner and the dance.

In the meanwhile the multitude of fathers and mothers were tramping round the great house with wide open eyes and cautious feet. To walk on Turkey carpets and look at the beautiful pictures and china the gentry looked at every day, was a new experience. It must be said that Toney's party had a real treat, because she did showman in a very amusing style.

"It must be nice, miss, to live in such a wonderful house," said a poor woman whose home was not a thing of joy.

"It's a job to keep it clean though," said Toney, "for my part I'd rather have a wee cottage if I had the work to do. I used to keep our cottage nice, and I would rather be you for that, but I guess if we can't keep a cottage nice we should make a poor hand at keeping a big place like this spick and span."

"Don't seem worth while, miss, to spend time on our poor places."

"Oh, but it is. Pups used to say that a cottage was the most healthy place in the world if the doors and windows were always open to let in God's sunshine, and if God's sunshine found no dust when it did get in there. I'll tell you what, Mrs. Smith, we'll start a society for the brightest cottage in uncle's part of the village. I'll give a beautiful prize for the best kept and you must win it."

"Oh, miss!" exclaimed Mrs. Smith of the sorrowful countenance, "the children do dirty things so."

"But they'll want you to win the prize. We'll have a model village, never fear. I'm first-rate at cleaning kettles and can teach you." Mrs. Smith began mentally scrubbing at once. Toney had another question to answer.

"If you please, miss," said a labourer, nodding towards a picture representing nymphs dancing, very scantily clothed, "it must be a warm country where ladies have so little clothing on for dancing. I suppose 'tis the fashion there." Toney laughed.

"Oh, they are not real people, the artist just wanted to think of the spirit of the wood. He means to represent all the happy thoughts one has in a lovely lonely wood."

The man shook his head slowly. He found it difficult to grasp the new idea of making your happy thoughts dance in light clothing.

”They be wonderfully tricky, the painters, miss. There was a gentleman who come to paint in the village last summer, and who took our Ann’s picture without shoes nor stockings. I begged him not to show it to the neighbours as our Ann never do go bare-foot.”

”But it’s very healthy, Mr. Carter. I used to run about without shoes and stockings when I was young. I wish I could now, but you see——”

At this moment there was a cry heard from the end of the passage, where Toney and her party and Mr. Waycott and his party were just converging.

”Antonia! Antonia!”

Toney was in front of a paper on which was written, ”Please walk on tip-toe down this passage.” Now the tip-toes of many persons are not noiseless and in the gathering twilight it had not been observed.

”Gracious stars!” exclaimed Tony darting down the passage, ”it’s Aunt Dove who has done her rest!”

It was indeed Lady Dove and Miss Grossman who were standing in the doorway, looking at the retreating figures with faces full of displeasure.

”Antonia, who are these people?”

”Please, Aunt Dove, don’t be frightened. They are not robbers, it’s your own tenants you know, just taking a peep round. But they are going down now, and it’s just dinner-time. Won’t you come and see the entry?”

”Certainly not. I am quite upset enough. Our dinner is at half-past seven, and I hope you will be ready. As to all those common people tramping on my carpets——”

”Please don’t let them hear you, Aunt Dove,” pleaded Toney, ”they would be so distressed, for, honour bright! they’ve behaved better than princes and princesses.”

”I do not think your education or your bringing up ever brought you in contact with princes, Antonia—Miss Grossman, pray read on again, the maids are all taken from me and I shall not be able to dress till just before dinner.”

Miss Grossman looked most unwilling to accede to the request.

”I do not object for once to reading for twenty minutes longer, Lady Dove, after that I must have my free time.”

Toney did not wait to hear the stormy discussion that followed.

”It is lucky Aunt Dove won’t appear,” thought Toney. ”Oh, Mr. Waycott, follow me on tip-toe, please, or a bomb will explode, but they have enjoyed themselves.”

Lewis literally obeyed, and Toney, smothering her laughter, hurried down-

stairs with him.

CHAPTER VIII.
A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW.

Toney made a dash to her bedroom where Rose was waiting to help her into her white dress. It was very pretty and very simple, with soft lace round the base of the neck showing off the pose of the head and Toney's lovely hair.

"Miss Toney, you do look nice," exclaimed Rose, "what will you wear round your neck?"

"My birthday present of course—Pup's picture. You can't think how I value it."

"Won't you wear this coral bracelet for luck, Miss Toney?"

"Yes, it is Mrs. Faber's present, it belonged to her great aunt, whose dress I once wore when I first came," and Toney laughed at the recollection. "Now, I have not one minute more as uncle is going to walk me in. The people will like it so. They love a show-off. Run, Rose, and get ready for waiting on them. I wish I might do some of the waiting, but uncle wouldn't hear of it, and also it would look too much like a school feast. Oh, give me some of those flowers the dear people brought to-day. Wasn't it sweet of them, because they know I love flowers better than anything."

Toney and Rose each flew down different ways. For one instant Toney was even tempted to slide down the balusters as in old days, but remembered her frock in time.

"I wish I could feel old—I suppose I shall when I'm seventy. Oh dear, where is Uncle Evas, I expect——"

She knocked softly at his dressing-room door and stooping down spoke through the keyhole. "Uncle Evas! Hullo, are you there?"

She heard him cross the room on tip-toe, then he very softly opened the door.

"Yes, Toney, I'm ready. Don't disturb your aunt, she is dressing. I don't think she will be ready for your first dinner."

"But you are, come along, and I say, uncle, you'll really eat, won't you, because they will think you're too proud if you don't."

"I've never dined at six o'clock before, Toney. It's a great trial to one's

digestion, but I'll try. Now, tell me the programme."

"I've got them all in the hall and in the passages waiting to go to the barn. Come on, uncle! You mustn't keep your guests waiting."

Sir Evas wished himself anywhere but among so many guests. He knew that his wife might appear in no enviable mood; but Toney had him well in hand. Escape was impossible. Putting on as good expression of welcome as he could, he followed her obediently. Their appearance at the top of the staircase had a magical effect. All heads were turned towards the vision of their Miss Toney in an evening dress, its very simplicity making the angel idea more perfect to them, for the greater part had never seen a young lady in an evening dress except in illustrated magazines. But this vision was by no means like a novelette heroine, calm, beautiful, and stately, whilst Toney never guessed she was worthy of admiration, her one thought being that it was just six o'clock.

"Here we are! Sir Evas is so glad to welcome you all, and he's so glad you've seen all his house. If you don't mind we'll lead the way to dinner. People generally go two and two, but please don't bother about that, it always seems to me like the animals in the ark." And Toney's merry laugh made everybody feel at home as, taking her uncle's arm she crossed the hall.

At this moment, Lewis, Lady Carew, Maud and the Fabers, and the Hales came out of the small drawing-room. They were not going to miss this part of the entertainment, having nobly done their duty as showmen.

"Oh, how nice—Mr. Hales, you know everybody, will you just go about the middle and Mr. Waycott bring up the rear, and Mr. Tarrant, will you give your arm to Lady Carew and set a good example."

Lady Carew meant to do the whole thing properly, for she knew she would be only one of a crowd at Toney's coming of age party; in spite of this she felt glad her lord and master was not there to see her introduced to the bailiff, who blushed purple and offered her his arm, and held hers very tightly as if he had been specially cautioned to see that she did not run away. Maud, Silvia, and Mrs. Faber took the first-comers, but as the male parts of the procession were quite uncertain as to which arm to give to the ladies, but yet were determined minutely to follow their leader, there were several *chassé croisé* during the short distance to the barn, accompanied by the nervous apology of "Excuse me, miss, but I think we're wrong. Miss Toney said we were to follow her, and I be on her side instead of t'other."

The other ladies and gentlemen, though they had leave to come anyhow, would not be singular, and whispered jokes might have been heard such as, "Now, doey take he," "We ain't quite of the right age, Mr. Jones," "'Tis wonderful how the gentry remembers all these puzzling habits, ain't it? Miss Toney looks like as if she'd just come down from heaven. She be a rare 'un, 'tain't likely there's

another like her in England, now is it? We don't know nothing about furrin countries, but I'll take my oath there's none in England like her."

"Nor Scotland, Ireland, nor Wales," said a young man who was a "mighty scholard." "Well to be sure I was forgetting t'others of the family, but the Scotch are very close-fisted, and the Orish is too cranky, and the Welsh speaks gibberish, 'tain't likely there's any like her in their countries."

But already the middle and tail of the procession silenced by a sudden exclamation from the foremost guests. The doors were flung open and all at once the dazzling lights revealed a scene none had even dreamt of for beauty and gloriousness. Lady Carew was the first to exclaim.

"How lovely! Look at the flowers. How wonderful!"

Mr. Farrant opened his mouth, but what came from it was, "Bless my soul and body!"

And then behind and behind came various "Lors! Me stars! Bless me's! Did you evers!" Of course the helpers were more prepared, but even they had not seen it fully lighted up. On and on they came, the guests, the buzz growing into a blast, the blast into a hurricane of words, but by this time Toney had dragged her uncle on to the platform and was standing by him, seeing from her vantage ground that everybody was seated. This was by no means as easy as it appeared. The partners got mixed at the entrance, and thought it a point of honour to find each other again, and, what with their anxiety and the astonishment they did not know how to express adequately, Toney's guests were in danger of not sitting down at all. Mr. Hales came to the rescue, mounted the platform and called out, "Ladies and gentlemen, will you stand whilst I say grace, and then sit down where you find yourselves."

"Praise God from Whom all blessings flow," began the clerk, not waiting for Mr. Hales, and a great sound of thanksgiving rose among the rafters. These guests at least were thankful even for the sight of their dinner!

"Thank you, Mr. Hales, I believe we should never have sat down but for you! Now, uncle, come and take your place at the head of the table with me, and mind you eat a bit of everything, you know!"

"But indeed I don't know, Toney. What's the menu? Ah! I see, good Lord! Ox-tail soup, pheasant, beef. What else?"

But now another hitch occurred, no one would begin till Toney, in despair, seized a spoon and began herself in earnest. The guests looked at her and looked at each other, then with an evident effort and sigh of content began the work of eating. The rest came naturally, at least there was no longer any effort, and "the rich viands," as the reporter chronicled afterwards, quickly disappeared.

Toney had not reckoned with time, however, and it was seven before the meats were done, and then came the pause to bring on the sweets.

”Uncle, now’s the time, you know; have you got it all right?”

”No, I haven’t, and for goodness sake, let’s have no speeches, there isn’t time, the other guests will be coming soon, and—your aunt——”

”There’s heaps of time, uncle, screw your courage up, you know, and they will be so pleased. Remember to begin about being awfully delighted.”

The many waiters stood to attention, having been duly warned, and a sudden hush fell on the company. Poor Sir Evas felt as if he were being led to execution as he found himself on the platform, this time without Toney. His speech had clean gone out of his head except Toney’s two words, ”awfully delighted,” and that did not sound quite dignified. ”Hum, hum, I’m awfully delighted—hum—to see you here to-night, but I hope, my friends, you all understand that this is my niece’s doing on her coming of age. We men are rather up a tree when our female relations determine to do something, and as people rarely come of age, hum (that is idiotic), I mean only once in their lives, Miss Whitburn has had her way. I hope you’ll all think it a very good way.” (Cheers and thumps.)

”Never was one for speaking wasn’t Sir Evas. There’s folks ’as got oily tongues and some as ’asn’t.” This from a sympathetic old lady.

”Time’s getting on (that’s idiotic too), so I must say no more than I hope you will always remember this dinner, and I wish you all to drink the health of my niece, Toney Whitburn.”

A great cheering and drinking of health, with a perfect clatter of glasses, followed. Toney was deeply disappointed, she had prepared such a lovely speech for her uncle, and he had declared he would say it, or ”words to that effect,” but he hadn’t! She didn’t want him to have mentioned her, but all about the guests themselves.

In another moment Toney had sprung on the platform, and then there was such a noise as never was, and simultaneously they all rose and sang, ”For she’s a jolly good fellow,” the only known equivalent in the English language for great approval.

The words were nothing, as we know, but it was the great feeling of love which upset Toney. All her own lovely speech fled out of her head, and the view became misty. She felt as if she was far away on the Australian land and that her father was close beside her saying, ”Courage, Toney, you know I hate tears.” Then with the back of her hand she brushed away something that was nearly falling and took courage.

”Thank you very much, kind friends, for giving me such a jolly chorus on my birthday. I have given you a dinner such as I wish you had every day, at least, no, not quite, but I want you to remember to-day because if I were to forget it there would be ever so many of you to remind me of my duty. Without Sir Evas you wouldn’t have had this entertainment, because it was he who insisted on

his penniless niece coming over here, and when the dear old General left me his money to spend on other people, because he died and couldn't do it himself, well, then Sir Evas took all the trouble of it—and money is an awful trouble—and he's been helping me for weeks to arrange everything, and he really is a "jolly good fellow"—— Great stamping of feet and great shouting, as if Toney had made a tremendous good joke, and then a wild beginning again of "For he's a jolly good fellow," till Mr. Hales begged for silence, and Toney, convulsed with laughter, beckoned to Lewis Waycott and Mr. Hales to come up to her, which they both did.

"Toney, go on," said Lewis, "they want some more."

"I daren't. Uncle is fidgeting. Time's nearly up. Aren't grandees a bother? Mr. Hales, it's your turn now."

"Just wish them a happy evening," said Mr. Hales smiling.

Then Toney went a step forward, and the hubbub ceased like magic.

"I haven't anything more to say except to wish you a jolly evening and plenty of dancing after the dinner is cleared away, and oh, one thing, I want you to give a chorus for Dr. Latham, who is, as you know, the best doctor in the county. I know it because my father was a doctor, and the very best in the world. He never thought of himself, and I like people to know about Pups, who was a hero, and if you please I should like you to give a chorus for Trick, who came with me, and has been my dear friend ever since, and for his sake I hope you will be kind to all animals, as they do care and understand nearly everything—at least Trick does. That's all, and time is up."

Such a chorus followed, but this time Sir Evas was firm, and left the platform to Mr. Hales and Lewis Waycott, and led Toney forcibly down the centre of the room, though she had to seize and shake many hands on the way, promising right and left to come back and dance when the other dinner was over.

Once outside the barn, it must be told that Sir Evas and Toney raced to the house and ran up the steps just as a carriage and pair of bays pulled up. Happily, they slipped in without being seen, only when Sir Evas joined his wife in the drawing-room, he and Toney panted audibly.

"Evas, you are really too bad to be so late; Lord Southbourne's carriage is at the door."

"Yes, I know, Melina; but we are in time, so where's the harm?"

"I should have had to receive them alone if you hadn't come——"

"Lord and Lady Southbourne and the Honourable Edward Lang," announced the footman, and Lady Dove became affable.

"How do you do? How very kind of you to come. Here is the young lady who has come of age to-day. The neighbourhood has responded so kindly. Do come to this sofa, Lady Southbourne."

Lord Southbourne had never seen Toney before. The family had only lately come to the neighbourhood, but this is what he heard her saying,

"I wish you hadn't come quite so early; we were having such a nice time with the tenants, but you will come and dance presently, won't you?"

"We have all come to do your bidding," said Lord Southbourne, kindly giving Toney a bow; but his son laughed.

"We heard marvellous tales of your entertainment, Miss Whitburn," said he. "My father thinks you'll make our tenants' dinners blush in future."

"Anyhow, the people are happy," said Toney; fanning herself vigorously. "They've given us four 'jolly good fellows' already, and it's hot work, I can tell you."

CHAPTER IX.

A BARN DANCE.

The dinner party which Lady Dove had arranged was very select, with a few exceptions. She meant to reap some social benefits from Toney's coming of age in order to make up for the "most unnecessary fuss over the poor people." This evening she was quite gracious and pleasant to everyone at her own dinner table. It must be owned, too, that Toney was for the moment rather tired and sleepy, and glad to sit still and almost silent between Mr. Hales and Lewis Waycott, so that the aristocratic party were quite surprised to see only a bright-haired young lady in snowy white, behaving very decorously. Strange stories had, of course, gathered round Toney's personality, one of which was that she was a terrible Socialist, a character which, in this part of the country, almost put the owner of it out of the pale of society. But to be kind to the poor was simply a duty, and an entertainment to the tenants was a time-honoured institution which no one could reasonably object to. Of course these aristocratic people had not beheld Toney's dinner table, for they would have been truly shocked to see rare flowers and shining silver set before the lower orders; moreover, they would have felt that pheasants were eternally disgraced by having appeared on that occasion. So all went well. Lady Carew took care to tell no tales to Lord Southbourne or to her own immaculate husband, who was talking county politics with Lady Southbourne whilst the dinner took its accustomed course, now and then urged on by a side remark of Toney's to Mr. Diggings not to be too long, as the ball was

to begin directly dinner was over.

"I am sure, Toney, you will be tired out," said Mr. Hales, "but even if there were no more to come you have given them something to remember."

"A real good time for them, isn't it? But they are much too grateful! It's so easy to give away money."

"But not trouble and thought."

"I'm trying to behave well, but I really can't eat much, and I feel rather sleepy! Oh, Mr. Waycott, just look across and see how beautiful Mr. Faber looks. You can't think what a good clergyman he is; those two live just like the early Christians."

"How did they live? The present time is against the simple life."

"But, you see they can do it, they are not hedged in with parks and money and Society. It's like the life at Little Gidding, when you stay with them, except they have no organ playing during their meals."

"What is the special mark of the early Christian?" asked Lewis with a smile.

"They don't seem ever to complain of being poor, and always share everything they have, it seems to me; and especially, they are so happy. Mr. Faber has a text over his fire-place, 'Rejoice always,' and they really do it. Now, Aunt Dove is never happy. You should have seen me and Uncle Evas racing here from the barn. He really raced, it wasn't make believe—and I was laughing so much when we came into the drawing-room to receive a scolding."

"Have you undertaken Miss Grossman, Toney?" asked Mr. Hales.

"Oh! no! but I do admire her; she isn't one bit afraid of Aunt Dove, and almost enjoys having words with her."

"Will you give me the first dance, Toney?" said Lewis.

"No, not the first; there are ever so many of the men who will be too shy to begin if I don't go and ask them, and they won't dare to say no! but I will have a dance with you after everyone is set going. Aunt Dove is coming to look on a few minutes, she says. Oh dear, somebody's drinking my health; I wish they wouldn't. I can't be any healthier than I am, can I?"

Lord Southbourne had risen to propose the health of the heiress, and Sir Evas seconded it with a few words of thanks.

"Shall I say thanks for you, Toney?" asked Lewis.

"Oh, no, thank you; they'll think I'm dumb," and then the girlish figure in white stood up straight and lithe.

"Thank you, everybody, very much; but I know no one would have made any fuss about me if it hadn't been for the General's money, so it's the money that ought to be returned thanks for, and I do. I know it will be very hard to give it away properly, but I mean to try; and may I ask a favour? will you all come at once to the ball in the barn, and not stop to drink wine, because the people are

longing to dance, and they won't begin without us."

"My dear Antonia!" exclaimed Lady Dove, smiling deprecatingly as the company laughed, "what will our guests think? Of course, we will excuse you, and anyone who likes to follow you—— On her birthday she must be forgiven."

There was a general move, and most of the company followed Toney's white figure as she sped onward. Poor Sir Evas had risen, but dared not follow without his wife. Happily Lord and Lady Southbourne solved the difficulty.

"If Lady Dove does not mind, we should enjoy seeing the beginning of the ball," and of course, Lady Dove was "only too delighted," and now everybody followed Toney's lead.

There was no room for disappointment when the door was thrown open. The whole place had been cleared, the boards polished, one platform erected for the band and another for visitors. The wealth of flowers and wreaths made the place look more like an enchanted palace than a barn on the Dove estate. But it was not money alone that had done this, it was the loving heart of a girl of twenty-one which had planned it all.

The band struck up and the Hon. Edward Lang approached Toney.

"May I have the pleasure?"

"Of course you may; there's the bailiff's wife, she thinks no end of herself, and if you dance with her we shall hear of it for the rest of her life. Mrs. Farrant, Mr. Lang wants to dance with you, and oh, Mr. Waycott, do find someone proper for Lord Carew—unless he's too stiff. Isn't it nice of Lady Carew, she's got hold of Peter Smith herself. Real jolly of her!"

"And you, Toney, they are waiting for you?"

"Oh, anybody will do for me. There's Long Tom, he'll never get round if I don't drag him by main force. Do see that Uncle Evas doesn't forget his partner. Oh, isn't this scrumptious!"

The band began, a really good band from the garrison, and as if by magic there was—we ought to have said a poetry of motion, but to the onlooker the motion was there, though if the poetry was somewhat wanting, however, the seal of happiness was on all faces.

Lady Dove on her platform kept a few guests by her side, but very soon even these were drawn into the whirlpool, and left her alone in company with Miss Grossman, who had elected to come and look on for a short time, though as she sternly said she never danced.

"It's most extraordinary, Miss Grossman, that our guests care to dance with this mixed company."

"One never knows what people will do," said Miss Grossman in a tone of great decision, "I am never carried away."

It would indeed have been a strong, bold man who would have carried Miss

Grossman away—against her wish.

"You show your common sense, because it would want strength to get a bumpkin through this quadrille. When I was young I was a famous dancer, everyone praised my figure and my deportment. Of course *young ladies* were carefully shielded in my youth from anything like familiar intercourse with the lower orders. Good gracious, Antonia is dancing with the cowman! I see her pinning up her dress. It serves her right; but, of course, the poor girl was brought up most strangely in Australia, so all this seems natural to *her*."

"Of course," said Miss Grossman, "that accounts for a good deal. Though my family was in straightened circumstances, *I* was brought up as a gentlewoman." This was more than Lady Dove could stand from a companion.

"It's strange how many people call themselves gentlefolks nowadays. In my youth you were in society or you were not. The Radicals have turned people's heads. We are all gentlemen and ladies *now*."

"I don't think so; there are very marked lines of demarcation even now. Of course, Lady Dove, you have *generally* had people of the class of Mrs. Faber with you, and cannot judge what is due to——"

"How ridiculous, Miss Grossman! We are talking at cross purposes. I meant County people. There is dear Lady Carew looking quite tired out, pray go and ask her to come up here."

Miss Grossman reluctantly obeyed, and presently returned followed by Lady Carew and Toney herself, for both were coming to get pinned up.

"How distressing! Your lovely dress, Lady Carew! I always said no one should come in nice clothes to dance with——"

"Aunt Dove, you don't know how they admired our dresses! I've heard lovely remarks. Lady Carew, they thought you were just like the dove in the ark!"

"How delicious! I don't mind my dress a bit, thank you; you seem to have provided plenty of pins, Miss Whitburn, you have thought of everything!"

"Everyone has danced at least once, I've seen to it, though one man declared 'twas wonderful folks did like whirly-gigging round so much!'"

"He showed his sense," said Miss Grossman.

"I must find enough breath to dance with a few more of our men, but please rest a little, Lady Carew; you have been a real helper!"

"Then I have earned a good character from you, I'm so glad!"

Lady Dove smiled sadly as Toney disappeared, then she remarked,

"It is most good-natured of you, indeed it is. There is even Lady Southbourne talking to one of the men, so very kind of her. Things have changed very much, when I was young——"

"I am sure you never met such another as your niece!" said Lady Carew.

”Never! Miss Grossman, pray go and ask Lady Southbourne to come and rest. I insisted on having easy chairs here. Antonia would not have thought of our comfort. Bush life is not a good beginning for coming out into Society. It was a great mistake for our dear General to leave her his money.”

”I don’t think Lady Southbourne wishes to rest,” said Miss Grossman tartly, ”but I will give her your message as I go out. I dislike altering my hours.”

Lady Dove would have remonstrated had not Lady Carew been close by, and Miss Grossman did not give her time to forbid her retiring. Near the entrance, however, she met Toney and Lady Southbourne together.

”You are not going yet, are you, Miss Crossman? This is ice time. We must all set an example in that line, because some of our friends are looking rather doubtfully at them.”

”Excuse me, Miss Whitburn, I prefer my bed to ruining my digestion. Nothing is more indigestible than an ice at night. Good night. Lady Dove begs you will go and rest, Lady Southbourne,” and Miss Grossman disappeared from this world of folly.

Toney had seized on Lewis Waycott.

”Can you swallow unlimited ices? they really are the very best; Pups always said my digestion was one of the strongest he ever knew, but——”

”Toney, we have never had our dance.”

”Then let’s have one now. I do love dancing, that’s the only accomplishment that ever made friends with me. It’s poetry, isn’t it?”

Lewis thought so as Toney and he waltzed round the big barn.

”I hope you have had a happy birthday,” said Lewis in a pause.

”Just about perfect. Could I have been happier, as you and the Fabers, and Dr. Latham, and uncle, and Trick are all here, and you have all been so good and kind, and then Pups’ picture! All through the evening I have been putting my hand up to stroke it. It was an inspiration on your part and I shall never be grateful enough.”

”I—I don’t want gratitude—I—want——”

”Oh, what? Do let me give it to you,” said Toney eagerly.

”It’s nothing money can buy,” said Lewis, smiling at the eager face. ”Some day, perhaps——”

”Some day, and why not now, to-night, but I’m glad it’s nothing to do with money. I heard Aunt Dove say to Mrs. Hamilton, ’Of course it’s a great misfortune for the poor girl, she has not an idea how to spend money.’”

”What did you think about it?”

”Oh, to myself I just said, ’you bet!’ but of course I know that’s vulgar! Aunt Dove says I was born vulgar—but what do you want?”

”Nothing now, Toney. Lady Dove is—well, she wants converting.”

Mrs. Hamilton interrupted them.

"Oh, Lewis, Maudie is dying for a dance." Toney effaced herself, and at that minute she came face to face with Mr. Hales.

"I've never had time, Toney, to give you my present." He took a little parcel out of his pocket. "I have had these 'Little Flowers of St. Francis' bound in white for you. I could not think of anything more appropriate. I don't think you have ever read it—but I am sure you will like it."

"Of course I shall! Yours is the only book I have had. That is nicer, because it will do instead of Pups' old book of King Arthur. That one has all come true, and it will be like a message from him to help me with this new life."

"There's a message for all of us in it, Toney. The message of love and self-denial, but I think you do understand it already."

Toney shook her head.

"No, Pups did, but I want to."

CHAPTER X.

THE PATH OF PERFECTION.

Toney's coming of age had been the greatest success imaginable, both rich and poor had declared, with perfect truth, that they had never enjoyed themselves more; but some few of them also realised that the result had been attained by weeks of thought and hard work on the part of Toney and Sir Evas. All they had gone through to attain their object was their own secret, and jealously guarded; but it drew them, if possible, closer together, and the master of Aldersfield had his reward.

It was very early in the morning before the girl bade a last good-bye to her rich friends, for the poor ones had gradually melted away about eleven o'clock, the next day's toil having to be thought of. Lady Dove had long before, happily, excused herself, pleading great weariness after such a hard day's work, and the atmosphere cleared in consequence. Toney seized her uncle and made him dance till he called for mercy, and even Mrs. Faber was not let off, partners being provided for her. Mr. Faber never danced, but waited on everybody or discussed clerical questions with Mr. Hales.

Now at last all were gone, and Toney was alone in her simple room. Even Trick was fast asleep as she knelt to say her prayers and returned thanks to the

Giver of all her pleasure. The excitement had taken away her sleepiness, so before putting out her light she opened the little book Mr. Hales had given her, and at the beginning read the story of how Brother Bernard, of Quintavelle, was converted by St. Francis, whilst this latter was still a secular. Bernard wished to find out whether the young and once worldly Francis was really a saint, so he asked him to sup and lodge with him, and prepared a bed in his own room for the young man. Both pretended to sleep. Bernard snoring loudly, and St. Francis hearing this, rose from his bed and began praying very earnestly till morning, saying only, "My God, my God." But Bernard was watching him all the time, and was so much touched that he determined to change his life. In the morning he said to St. Francis that he would leave the world and follow him, but St. Francis said they must first ask counsel how to find the Path of Perfection. So they went to the Bishop's house, and begged him to open the Bible three times and see what text he found. The first was, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast and give to the poor, and follow Me; "and the second was, "Take nothing for your journey, neither staves nor scrip, neither bread, neither money; "and the last was, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me."

Bernard, being very rich, went out and sold all that he had, and with great joy he gave all his possessions to the poor.

At this point Toney's eyes began to blink, so she closed the book and put it under her pillow with a smile on her lips, murmuring, "'The Path of Perfection.' Isn't that beautiful? Why can't we be like that now? I know Pups would have liked this little book, and the 'Path of Perfection,' ever so much."

Then Toney fell asleep and dreamt that St. Francis came to ask her for *all* her money, and that she refused it to him, saying, "You really won't know what to buy for English people, because you have only had to do with the nice, dirty Italian organ-grinders, who can live on almost nothing."

It was quite late when the house party reassembled, and Toney was the only one who showed no signs of fatigue.

She found a big pile of letters on the table. From henceforth her simple, easy life would be a thing of the past; but at present, with the unbounded confidence of youth, she faced the problem bravely.

"Is there anything further I can advise you about, Miss Whitburn?" said Mr. Staines, "for I shall be going back to London very shortly."

"Yes, please, I want some last words with you, I think we had better have a telephone between us. It will save a lot of letters. Aunt Dove, you have forgiven us, haven't you?" asked Toney. "But you are rewarded by the gratitude of the people. They just thought your house a lovely museum."

"It's a great pity to put ideas into poor people's heads," answered Lady Dove.

”I hope this party will last their life-time.”

”Miss Grossman was done up I suppose; it’s very tiresome of her, she sent word she must stay in bed to-day. If it’s influenza of course I don’t want her near me.”

”I do not think the poor envy luxury,” said Mr. Faber thoughtfully, ”they sometimes envy the certainty of our meals.”

”Education creates needs,” said Mr. Staines, ”but I once knew a man who was perfectly happy if he had five shillings in his pocket, though he had no idea where the next would come from.”

”Pups was like that,” exclaimed Toney, ”so it shows money isn’t happiness. Aunt Dove, don’t you think ’Brother Angel’ would be a good name for Mr. Faber? He was one of the followers of St. Francis. He thought nothing at all about money. I read a lovely story in my new book about him when I was brushing my hair.”

”How ridiculous you are, Antonia—I suppose you must go this morning, Mr. Faber, as I often tell Mr. Hales, a clergyman is nothing if he is not among his people.”

Mr. Faber was still smiling over Toney’s last speech and did not even notice the *sous entendu* of her ladyship’s remark.

”I am afraid I must return, but I am sure Anne would stay and take Miss Grossman’s place for a day or two, if it is the least convenience to you, Lady Dove.”

This was just what Lady Dove did want, but she did not wish to show gratitude.

”Oh, I daresay you could not get your meals without her.”

Mrs. Faber did not allow her deep disappointment to be seen. Henry was always sacrificing himself, she must follow his example. Only Toney noted the sad look in her eyes.

”Indeed our old Martha is far more necessary to my husband than I am. She cooks beautifully.”

”She must be rather wasted at your Vicarage. However, of course, Anne Faber, if you like an extra holiday pray stay. Toney will be of no use this week, and if Miss Grossman does not get better she must go home.”

”Certainly I will stay,” and she smiled across to Toney, who nodded her satisfaction.

”You all covered yourselves with glory I can tell you. Bully! wasn’t it?”

”Antonia!” exclaimed Aunt Dove.

”Well, so it was, but when you want to forsake the world and become one of St. Francis’ brethren, uncle, I’m sure he’ll take you. He told one of the rich young men who offered themselves, to ’serve the brethren,’ and I know you did that yesterday, so you were in the path of perfection. Isn’t that an awfully nice

name?"

"I don't think that sort of life would suit me," said Sir Evas smiling. "Well, I shall go and meet your secretary this morning, Toney, whilst you talk to Mr. Staines."

Toney led the way to her new sitting-room which did not feel half so homely to her as the little sitting-room at the top of the house, but she would not let her uncle see this. Mr. Staines sat down, and Toney dropped into a chair and put her elbows on the writing table, after she had thrown down a heap of letters.

"Ouf! Look at those, Mr. Staines; to think they will come every morning."

"The new secretary will sift these for you, Miss Whitburn."

"Poor fellow! Well, what I want to say is this. Have you made it quite right about Aunt Dove's money? Will two thousand a year make a difference to her?"

"Yes, a very handsome gift."

"I can't cost her that in food, can I? though I have a good appetite."

"She does not really need it."

"But I want you to arrange about the capital and give it to her entirely."

"Is that wise? Lady Dove might die and——"

Toney had on her resolute air.

"I am quite sure I want that: Uncle Evas would have it if she died, and it will be off my mind. My General would like it, I think. Ouf! that will be some of it disposed of, won't it?"

Mr. Staines smiled. This was not the usual tone of his rich clients.

"That's all now, Mr. Staines, and I want your firm well paid for all your trouble, so that I shan't mind bothering you."

"About your will, Miss Whitburn, you must send me instructions as soon as possible, you see you have the whole control, and it is not right to leave anything uncertain."

"Of course—— You mean I might have a fit or break my head. My will is soon arranged, I'll leave the whole to Uncle Evas, and tell him what to do with it in case that happens, but it's only in case, for I have other ideas."

"Of course, and you must want time to think it over. I'll draw up this simple will and get it signed before I go."

"Uncle Evas says you are an awfully honourable lawyer. I'm so glad because Pups always said it was best to avoid the man of law. However, Pups' money was so wingy that he never needed a man to tie it up."

"He little guessed his daughter would be so amply provided for," said Mr. Staines beaming with real delight, which the handling of money always gave him, even though it was that of his clients and not his own.

"No, indeed. He was always make believing about King Arthur, and now I

mean to study 'The Little Flowers of St. Francis,' and 'The Path of Perfection.' St. Francis was awfully simple about money, you know. Now we have done, haven't we? Here is my will. 'I give everything I have got to Sir Evas Dove, of Aldersfield House. Antonia Whitburn.' That won't waste the time of your clerks. You quite frightened me when you sent me the General's will The clerks must have racked their brains to find odd and useless words. Thank you a thousand times. I'll call the Fabers to sign it, but it's only in case of accidents. I've got lots more notions, and Uncle Evas doesn't want money. He's really quite nice about it, only he has to give in accounts."

"To give in accounts?"

"Yes, to Aunt Dove. She holds the purse-strings, uncle says, and there's a little breeze if he exceeds."

Mr. Staines thought he had better draw a veil over this part of the conversation, and very soon Toney's temporary will was signed and deposited in Mr. Staines' pocket, who thought as he journeyed back, "I never met such an extraordinary girl in all my life."

But it does not harm even a lawyer to think for a few minutes that money is not the aim of all mankind!

It was wonderful how soon Mrs. Faber reverted to the habits of her long bondage—though now she knew it was only an interlude—for Toney found her writing notes and doing flowers and being bullied by Lady Dove, just as if the beautiful reality of her wedded happiness did not exist. Mr. Faber had jogged off home in his pony carriage, Toney promising to bring back his dearest Anne as soon as Miss Grossman was able to return to public life. Toney watched him disappearing down the park as she stood alone on the steps of Aldersfield House, and as she looked at the lovely trees now turning every shade of gold, orange, and red, the Past and the Future appeared to her as two dream figures; the Past was a small, poorly clad beggar, and the Future a big, rich giant, but the beggar had a smile on his face and looked oh, so very happy, whilst the rich giant knitted his brows and looked down sadly on the ground.

"No, no," cried the girl, "the giant is blind and he doesn't see that he has only to give away all those gold brocaded clothes, and then he would be happy! He shan't be sorrowful, I won't let him!"

A little cold nose at that moment thrust itself into Toney's hand as it hung at her side, and a joyful bark brought her back to reality. She seized her beloved mongrel in her arms, whereupon he licked her face and showed that he understood her mood.

"Oh, Trick! Trick! we won't wear gold braid on our jackets and we won't let it make us feel sad. St. Francis said it was tremendously wrong to be sad, and so you are a real saint, Trick. You never are sad except when you have had

a gnaw at new heels and have to be punished. We're getting old together, Trick; I'm twenty-one and I feel as if I were much, much older, or I should have done so if St. Francis hadn't come and given me such nice talks. He was just awfully fond of animals, Trick, so he must have been a very, very good man, but he loved his fellow-creatures best of all, so now you and I have both to seek and to find the 'Path of Perfection.'"

CHAPTER XI.

THE NEW SECRETARY.

Toney had set apart two of her new rooms for the secretary, and she looked round to see that all was comfortable before his arrival. A big knee-hole writing table was so placed that it could look over the park, and there was an easy chair and even a box of cigars for his comfort.

"He'll feel very strange at first," she thought, "and I expect he'll hate messing about this work all day as much as I should if I had to be a private secretary. Gracious stars! What a heap of writing money brings with it. There's a mountain of letters already for him. I must learn to drive the motor-car and then I'll take out tired workers, that will be nice! if only I can get time for it all. Life is beautiful, isn't it, Trick?" Trick wagged his tail and assented, then hearing the carriage wheels they both flew into the hall to receive the new secretary. Jim was driving the waggonette, and Sir Evas and the young man were inside, and Toney's quick eyes caught sight of her new tall pale secretary. Sir Evas was half smiling as he introduced her.

"Here's Mr. Plantagenet Russell, Toney—— Ehem—— Miss Whitburn. I hope you won't be overwhelmed with the work expected of you."

"There's piles already," exclaimed Toney, holding out her hand, "but you are to do them just when you like. The paper-basket will be the best place for half of them. Uncle Evas has told you all my sins I expect. Mr. Diggings, will you show Mr. Russell to his room. Lady Dove isn't visible till lunch time."

"Thanks," said Mr. Plantagenet Russell slowly; he wore an eye-glass in the right eye, and slightly raised the left eyebrow. So this was the great heiress he had come to work for, he had expected somebody very different. He was not at all pleased with life in general. He had been brought up in the lap of luxury, when suddenly, just when he was half-way through his college career, his fa-

ther, a lawyer, died. Then it was discovered that he had swindled his clients, and that his wife and his only son were penniless. His mother's brother had given shelter to both, and after trying several clerkships, Mr. Plantagenet Russell had by chance heard of this post, and much to his surprise had obtained it. Plantagenet had thought this would be a far easier life than mere clerkships. The heiress was, of course, to be beautiful, and he could take life in the leisurely fashion which he deemed to be consistent with his early bringing up. The disgrace incurred by his father's defalcation weighed heavily on Plantagenet Russell, but he hoped this fact was but little known, and he himself was perfectly trustworthy as far as money was concerned. Here again life had been very unfair to him, and now he felt taken in because the heiress was so unlike his expectations, her very movements denoted a youthful energy which might prove most inconvenient, and which was not at all consistent with riches. In Plantagenet's mind to be poor when you had once been rich, was a disgrace very ill deserved.

Lunch time brought the members of Aldersfield together, and Plantagenet's spirits rose when Sir Evas introduced him to Lady Dove. Here was a lady of high degree who knew her own position. He bowed low and with great deference, and Lady Dove immediately took a liking to him. She saw that this young man recognised that she was Lady Dove, of Aldersfield House, and she had heard he had once been rich.

"I am glad you are coming to assist my niece, Mr. Russell, with the many duties wealth should entail upon her. You will, I hope, help her to carry out these duties as she has had very little experience. Of course those born to wealth know how hardly the duties of it press upon the conscientious mind." She looked sympathetically at him, and Plantagenet Russell was comforted.

"I shall endeavour to follow your wishes in all things, Lady Dove," said the secretary with another bow. Lady Dove smiled upon him. A young man who deferred to her wishes warmed her heart, "so unlike that stuck-up, conceited Lewis Waycott," she mentally said.

"I am sure your presence here will be a real satisfaction to my niece" (since her accession of fortune Toney had been usually spoken of as "my niece"), "and she will benefit greatly by having you here. Do have some of that pheasant, I daresay you will like a little shooting. Sir Evas is so glad of a companion when he goes out with his gun. Our preserves are really most satisfactory this year."

Both the lady and the young man were mightily pleased, one by being able to offer and the other to accept the slaughter of aristocratic birds. Sir Evas listened with an amused smile and Toney exclaimed,

"I wish one could decide if it is right to kill birds and fishes. St. Francis wouldn't have shot a pheasant I'm sure, though there's nothing about pheasants in my new book; but St. Anthony really preached to the fishes at Rimini because

the heretics wouldn't listen to him."

"Salmon?" inquired Sir Evas.

"All sizes and kinds, and they held up their heads above the water and stood to attention, all according to their height, and then he preached an awfully jolly little sermon, and reminded them how nice it was to have fins and to be able to go where they liked."

"It's only a legend, dear," said Mrs. Faber, smiling.

"And how did they take it?" asked Sir Evas, hoping the new secretary was not listening.

"They opened their mouths and bowed their heads and St. Anthony was awfully pleased, and said the fishes were better than the heretics."

"They made less noise evidently. I hope the heretics were impressed."

"Yes, they were, and were converted by it."

Plantagenet Russell at this moment behaved like the fishes, for he opened his mouth as if to remonstrate with Toney but thought better of it. His heart sank within him. This heiress' brain was evidently deranged, and however on earth should he deal with her? Thank heaven he had Lady Dove to fall back upon. She was the real thing. Sir Evas quickly changed the conversation.

"I hear the new motor-car is coming this afternoon, and that you and Jim are both dying to take lessons in driving."

"Yes, I thought we ought. It will save time, but I can't do away with my beloved Colon. It's not half a full stop, Mr. Russell, it's short for Colonist—he'll do for the dog-cart as well as for riding; but you must learn to drive the motor, too, uncle. You mustn't be behind the times! The excitement will keep you young."

"I consider motor-cars are a vulgar ostentation of money. In old days county families did not air their poverty or their wealth," said Lady Dove.

"Wasn't that a sort of pretending anyway?" said Toney meditatively.

"'Noblesse oblige' is a motto only one class can really understand," retorted Lady Dove, looking sympathetically at Plantagenet Russell. She concluded he was of *her* class and would understand.

"No class was ever made that would fit you, Toney," said Sir Evas laughing.

"By the way, if you are going in a horrid machine, Antonia, I wish you would go to the Towers. Lady Southbourne has sent us a note asking us to come to tea to-day, and I am quite too tired. Her son is there."

"All right, Aunt Dove, I'll go! Mr. Russell had better wait and see if I can bring myself home safely before trying the motor. Chum, dear, I think Brother Angel wouldn't like you to go either, but we shall soon be back."

"I can't spare Anne Faber to-day," said Lady Dove decidedly. "You forget I am alone."

When Mr. Russell was established in his room, which to his disgust Toney

called ”his office,” and left to his first pile of letters and the cigars, all went to the hall door to inspect the new motorcar, which was Toney’s first big purchase for herself. It had been ordered some time ago, and was very well planned. It could make a comfortable omnibus as well as an open carriage. A professional chauffeur had come to instruct the mistress and her groom, and off they sped to the Towers, the big county house some eight miles away. But on going through the village Toney found her car turned into a Juggernaut, all the people flew out of the cottages shouting their welcome, Toney stopped the car and let them all examine the monster as it was the first they had seen at such close quarters; then some of the children had to be taken a little drive till the chauffeur objected to it as waste of time, and Toney had to move on.

”When I can drive myself you shall have fine rides,” she said, ”besides it’s an awfully good way of teaching geography,” and amid the shouts of delight the heiress drove off, feeling warm within.

”It’s like champagne, isn’t it, Jim?”

Jim grinned and touched his hat and said, ”Yes, miss,” not knowing the least what was like champagne, but of course it was like champagne if Miss Toney said so.

When they arrived at the Towers, she told Jim and the chauffeur to exercise round the park, and prepared to pay her first call alone. She did not feel shy, that was not in her nature, but she shook her head as she followed the stiff footman.

”It’s all that basket of Gwyddnen Garanhir,” she thought; ”but I think it works too well when it works at all: still, I had less bother when I was only a poor relation. Oh dear, there’s another man-servant; what is the use of being thrown from one to the other like a bale. A good day’s digging with the Kanakas would do these men good.”

But now Toney found herself in a big drawing-room full of pretty things, very unlike Aldersfield where solid comfort reigned supreme. Lady Southbourne was making lace for a bazaar, to save herself giving money. Her son, a very bright young fellow, who had been charming at the ball, was now sunk in the depth of an armchair chatting to his mother. Oddly enough, their talk had been of Toney, and both looked rather guilty when she entered.

”How very kind of you, Miss Whitburn, to come and have an early cup of tea with us. It’s such a long way. Did you drive?”

”I came in the new motor-car, and I only drove a little way as the chauffeur says I give it the jumps, but I shall soon learn. It will be so useful for people who want things in a hurry, and it will save the horses.”

”Of course. Lord Southbourne talks of getting one, but I don’t know when. We must congratulate you on your party very much.”

”It was the best that I ever saw,” said the Hon. Edward Lang; ”I am glad you

have come to talk it over with us. But you will ruin the bumpkins."

"Oh, no, you see they were all our own personal friends. Even uncle, who has a bad memory, has nearly learnt up all the children."

"Good heavens!" said Edward, "you don't mean to say you expect us—to—"

"But you feel ever so much less stupid if you know the names of the piccaninnies of your own people. I think I've got a talent for genealogies. It was much harder to know the Kanakas from each other because of the colour of their faces, but possible too."

"The contrast must be depressing," said Edward, and his mother joined in:

"Lord Southbourne declares you are helping on Socialism; but then we county people are getting poorer, and such windfalls as yours don't happen every day," and Lady Southbourne laughed.

"By Jove, they don't!" echoed Edward.

Then they chatted happily about the various episodes of the party, and Toney had no time to feel out of her element, so that she had really enjoyed herself when she remembered the waiting chauffeurs.

"Oh, there's Jim and the grand gentleman from London waiting. I'm going to make my groom a chauffeur, as he will do all he is told. Those stuck-up reefed-in men are rather tyrants."

"We are all tyrannized over by our servants," said Lady Southbourne with a smile.

"Wouldn't suit me," said Toney emphatically. "Aunt Dove's head gardener is a tyrant, and there are ructions between them. They go out to battle, but he *always* wins!"

"So does mother's head gentleman," said Edward laughing; "but man is the superior creature."

"I think co-operation is best. St. Francis never lauded it over his brothers."

"St. Francis!" said Lady Southbourne interrogatively, not being at all learned in saints.

"Yes; St. Francis of Assisi. It was one of my birthday presents, and I've read a lot of it already, but I can't quite see clearly yet how one is to imitate him!"

"Pray don't try, Miss Whitburn; you are much nicer as you are," said the Hon. Edward as Toney went off.

"She's charming and original, mother!" he said on his return to the drawing-room.

"She has fifty thousand a year; I have it on good authority," said his mother. "I do think, Edward, you couldn't do better!"

"The point is, could she? Money just melts in my hands."

"Yes; so it's most important you should settle down and retrench."

”On fifty thousand a year? I don’t mind trying, Lady Mother.”

”There’s a good boy—and she really is original, and originality is so in the fashion just now.”

CHAPTER XII.

AN UNDIGNIFIED SITUATION.

Lewis Waycott was shooting over a lonely ten-acre field with a copse at the further end of it, when suddenly he heard a fearful noise, and then beheld a huge black snout rise up on the hedge and look over it. On the top of the snout was Toney and a man. Suddenly loud explicatives in most unparliamentary language were heard as the snout disappeared. Lewis threw his gun down and jumped over the hedge, to see the new motor trembling with indignation and Toney laughing inordinately.

”Oh, Mr. Waycott, I turned the wheel the wrong way! and we had a peep over the hedge. Mr. Hughes is very much displeased with me. The creature is not hurt, is it?”

”No, madam; but if it had been a wall instead of a hedge it would have been ruined, and your life would have been in danger.”

Jim had fallen out, but was none the worse, and was grinning broadly as he said:

”Them dratted beasts is so contrary, Miss Toney; better keep to horses.”

”Good gracious, Toney, are you hurt?” exclaimed Lewis.

”Not a bit! I’m awfully elastic, you know. No harm done, Mr. Hughes. Come in with us please, Mr. Waycott, and you’ll see how nice it is.”

Lewis fetched his gun, unloaded it, and accepted. He and Toney got inside, and left the two men on the front seat.

”We have been to the Towers, and they were ever so kind. The Honourable Edward Lang was just as charming as he could be.”

Lewis felt aggrieved.

”Why didn’t you come and see us instead?”

”Aunt Dove wanted to accept the invitation to tea, and yet didn’t want the trouble, whilst I enjoyed it. Isn’t it odd why people ask other people they don’t want to see, and who don’t want to come?” Lewis laughed.

”The ways of Society, Toney. You must learn all that!”

”I never shall. Oh, Mr. Waycott, my new secretary has come, Mr. Plantagenet Russell, and Aunt Dove is fascinated with him! Isn’t that a piece of luck?”

”And what do you think?”

”I haven’t thought yet at all. I’m only sniffing round like Trick, who glared at his heels, but I was firm. It wouldn’t do the first day, would it?”

”If Trick sent him away it would be all right.”

”Oh, but you are cruel! I couldn’t do it all myself!”

”I’d look in and do it for you!”

”You! What would Miss Waycott say? She would look ’Oh—you—dreadful—Toney’ all over!”

Lewis laughed.

”I daresay she would think I was trying to do what I know nothing about, being poor and having no superfluous money to dispense. Anyhow, will you always ask me for help if you are in need of it. It would please me very much to—to help you, Toney.”

Toney looked straight up into Lewis’ face, and for the first time in her life she hesitated. Then she shook her head.

”I wouldn’t bother you or try your patience so much. But I may want help, and you are the only one who would understand. Gracious stars! this animal is snorting and lurching! Is anything the matter, Mr. Hughes?”

”I think there is a nut gone wrong from your having climbed that hedge, madam. I fear it will take a little time to set right.”

”That comes of new locomotives,” said Lewis, rather pleased. ”Anyhow our legs are left to us. I’ll escort you home.”

Toney jumped out with great alacrity.

”One’s legs are the best, aren’t they? Come along and have a race.”

”I prefer leisurely walks, Toney, if you don’t mind. Happily there are only two miles.”

”Happily, because Mr. Plantagenet Russell is chained to my letters. Oh, his name is fine, isn’t it? Just the grand style, and Aunt Dove feels warm and comfortable when she hears it.”

”You chose him because he was born in Australia, didn’t you?”

”Yes, I thought he would be just one of our simple kind of men, but—he isn’t—— A bit of a lord, still I’m glad as Aunt Dove likes him.”

”Who is he?”

”He has lost his money, and seems a bit down in the mouth, so we must deal tenderly with him at first, but oh!—Mr. Waycott, I want to confess.”

”To me!”

”Yes, because you won’t disapprove too much. Did you look at the advertisements in to-day’s papers?”

”No, I don’t generally read them, and in which papers?”

Toney counted on her fingers.

”The *Times*, the *Standard*, the *Morning Post*, and a few more. I told a London agent to do it.”

”To do what, Toney? I expect it is something surprising!” and Lewis laughed.

”Not really, but I think there will be a good many letters for Mr. Russell.”

”Letters about what? But it’s his duty to answer letters, that’s what he has come for. Most likely you are paying him handsomely for it.”

”Oh, yes. I told Uncle Evas it must be enough for him to live on and save. Pups had great ideas about a living wage. So we settled it should be £500 a year as long as he is here. He can save it, and that will help him for many a day.”

”Then I don’t think you need mind giving him some work.”

Toney laughed happily.

”But he didn’t guess what he was in for!”

”You haven’t told me.”

Toney thrust her hand in her pocket and drew out a crumpled paper.

”I haven’t told anyone yet. I knew what uncle would say and Mr. Staines. Listen—’Any broken-down doctor, officer, or clergyman, or orphans of the above, wanting to hear of something to their advantage, may apply to Plantagenet Russell, Esq., Aldersfield House, Winchley.’”

”Good heavens, Toney! You are not——”

”Yes, I want to help doctors because of Pups, and officers because of the dear old General, and clergymen because they are often very hard up, and the orphans of the above because, I’m an orphan.”

Lewis stopped a moment, and laughed inordinately.

”Why, Toney, you’ll have a hornet’s nest about you!”

”Do you think so? I was a little afraid of the result, so I thought I would tell you about it, and you might just talk it over with his Royal Highness.”

”The King?”

”Mr. Plantagenet Russell! He looks so like a descendant of somebody, so I call him ’His Royal Highness’ in my own mind.”

”But what do you mean to do for this riff-raff?”

”They won’t be riff-raff.”

”Not a doubt about it, I assure you! It’s only the ne’er-do-weels that will answer such an advertisement! The decent ones will think it a hoax.”

”Why should they?”

”Well, it’s rather wholesale you know, Toney.”

”And look here, Mr. Waycott, I’ve drawn out a plan. I want you to see it.”

”A plan for what?”

”Why to house my doctors, officers, and orphans.”

”You don’t mean to build?”

”Of course I do, only the difficulty is the land to build on. Aunt Dove will never consent to have a Home on the estate.”

”I expect she won’t.”

”Then I shall be up a tree, because I want it close by. I shall want to see after it, and you promised you would help me, and Uncle Evas will be awfully interested.”

Lewis gave a side glance at Toney. She was perfectly in earnest.

”We must manage it somehow I see. You’ll give me a night to consider it in, won’t you?”

”Of course! I’ve been thinking of it ever since I knew my General had left me his money. I’ve made lovely plans about all sorts of things.”

”You have built castles in Spain?”

”No, only a stone house at Aldersfield. It will be hard work I know, but I love what Mr. Hales calls ’the strenuous life.’”

”You always were active-minded, but I think you will live to repent your palace.”

”But you won’t laugh about it, and you’ll help, won’t you?” Toney was very much in earnest. Lewis paused and took her hand suddenly.

”Of course I will. It is very, very good of you to trust me. It’s a compact.”

Toney looked at him suddenly. A faint blush spread where there was room, then the nervousness passed away.

”I do trust you ever so much. Thank you. What shall we exchange for a compact. It ought to be half a button! But about his Royal Highness, do you think he had better be warned?”

”I really think I would let him enjoy one night more without a nightmare.”

Even Toney, who was terribly in earnest at this moment, could not resist laughing.

”You must come and see him. He really is very nice looking, but I am rather disappointed that he does not care to talk of Australia. You ought to stick to your country through thick and thin.”

”Especially through thick masses of begging letters. You are a brave woman!”

”Come in and call on him. Do you know Aunt Dove is so happy as she can speak her mind to my dear chum, who has taken Miss Grossman’s place for a few days. It does bring back my first arrival to hear her patiently reading a novel. Aunt Dove likes murders, because she can say, ’How very shocking!’ but Chum has the courage to skip now and then. She is free at last!”

They had now reached Aldersfield, having taken a short cut across the park,

and they instinctively made for the garden door nearest the secretary's room. Toney knocked, and there was a sound of moving before the "come in" allowed Toney to enter and find his Royal Highness seated at his writing table looking very secretarial. There was a strong smell of smoke, and the big armchair was close to the fire.

"Mr. Lewis Waycott has come to call on you," said Toney. "He's our next door neighbour; you must be tired of sorting letters."

The introduction was very correct. Plantagenet Russell was much afraid of condescension, so put on the superior and nonchalant tone.

"Will you kindly sit down," he said to his visitor. Toney had already sunk down on a low window sill. Lewis surreptitiously examined the new secretary, and inwardly smiled at the grand manner. He would soon find that he must climb down.

"Ah! fine country about here, but not a part of the world I know at all. Lady Dove has most kindly suggested some shooting, I suppose there is plenty."

"And there is some excellent golf," said Lewis cheerfully.

"Ah! I should have thought the neighbourhood was too scattered for that."

"I think you'll find it a growing neighbourhood," said Lewis, remembering Toney's advertisement and glancing at her, but she turned her head away in terror.

"Ah! I'm surprised at that. I shouldn't have expected it."

"The unexpected is frequently met with here."

"Indeed! As to society I always prefer solitude to second-rate people."

"We used to be very select, but—since——"

Toney looked reproachfully at him.

"England is changing very much in that respect; what with Socialists and Radicals, we are going to the dogs."

Whether Trick thought the remark too derogatory to be passed over, or whether he was bent on mischief, certain it is that at this moment he trotted in from the garden door, and seeing his mistress in company with a strange man, flew at his heels.

"Put your feet up, Mr. Russell, anywhere. Trick will gnaw your heels if you don't. Please forgive him, but I never can break him of the habit. Trick! Trick!"

His Royal Highness had not obeyed, so that he found himself attacked as if his heels were two rats, with sudden darts at one and then the other. It was really a most unpardonable position to put one into. Lewis could not restrain his amusement as Toney made ineffectual dashes. His Royal Highness tried to kick the offender, which, of course, only increased the evil.

"Don't kick him, please; he'll never forgive you." Lewis came to the rescue as he had done once before, and seized Trick by his shaggy coat, whilst Toney

ran to open the door wider.

”How can you, Trick, I am so ashamed of you! I assure you, Mr. Russell, he has not done it for years. I only hope he won’t remember your kicks. He’s terribly sensitive.”

Mr. Russell looked more than annoyed. The grand manner had forsaken him, and Toney plunged into a business talk to help him to recover his calmness.

”I hope you have not found the letters tiresome.”

”They are from various tradesmen, but I mean to put it all down in double entry, a system of my own.”

”I think you’ll find single entry enough,” laughed Lewis, and then to Toney’s delight he suggested the secretary coming for a stroll with him, and both men disappeared, but not through the garden door.

CHAPTER XIII.

A BIG PILE.

Lady Dove came down to breakfast next morning much disturbed in spirit because Miss Grossman had sent word she was still very feverish and should remain in bed. Lady Dove had a horror of catching anything from those about her, but all the same she felt injured at her companion’s message. As she came down the stairs she tried to elicit sympathy from her husband who was in the hall.

”I consider it a most improper message, Evas, and if you were not so callous to my feelings you would think the same.”

”But, my dear Melina, Miss Grossman cannot help being feverish, and it’s very considerate of her to keep out of your way. You have a dread of infection you know.”

”I was not aware of it, Evas, but of course it is much kinder to our fellow-creatures to keep free from ailments. I have always gone on that principle. Men never realise what women put up with in silence. Are there any letters to-day?”

Sir Evas paused in front of the hall table where the letters were always laid in order in rows and heaps according to ownership. To-day his eyes strayed on to two vast piles.

”Good gracious, what’s this? Plan—— Ah! Plantagenet Russell, Esq. Well!” Lady Dove stood aghast

”What does this mean? How can that young man have so many acquain-

tances? All for him!"

"No, not all. One letter for you, dear, some for me, and a good heap for Toney. The postman will rebel if——"

Toney came running down with Trick. She took in the situation at a glance.

"Good morning, Aunt Dove. How did you sleep, Uncle Evas?" and Toney bestowed her kisses all round. "Chum, dear, did you dream of your piccaninnies? Powder me pink! What a little cart-load of letters for Mr. Russell! I think he needn't have them for breakfast, they would swamp his food."

"I can't understand——" said Lady Dove, who had not jumped to conclusions as did Sir Evas.

"Evidently he is a gentleman well known to-day," continued Toney. Then she glanced on her own pile. "He may have mine too, except a few! I never did like letters much, people don't say what they really want to say in letters, do they?"

"I can't imagine what you mean, Antonia," answered Lady Dove, heading the procession to the dining-room and sweeping her rustling skirts with determination. "If people don't want to say what they do say, they don't write. I must say you do make the most illogical remarks of anyone I know."

Prayers followed—at which his Royal Highness did not put in an appearance, and Lady Dove said the responses louder and more impressively than usual, which was her way of letting the household know she was ruffled.

"I say, Toney, is this what we are to expect?" asked Sir Evas in a low tone to his niece, "the revenue will give you a testimonial!"

"I want to keep my name out of it," answered Toney in the same tone, "and isn't that the good of a secretary?"

"Have you offered free meals to the county?"

"Oh no! Uncle, that's bad political economy. Hush!"

"Pray, Evas, what are you remarking? I think conversations in low tones are most unseemly at breakfast. Ah! Mr. Plantagenet Russell, I hope you slept well. We are rather early as Sir Evas always thinks he has so much to do, a remark I notice which often hides idleness."

"Every duty, for *me*, has its appointed time!" said the secretary.

"Your letters are in the hall. I suppose you have a large circle of acquaintances, Mr. Russell?"

Toney was trying to smother her laughter as the secretary bowed low to the hostess.

"Not very large," said Mr. Russell, as if he were trying to be humble. "Rather a bore to answer them."

"I'm afraid it will take you some time, but, of course, one uses a paper-basket largely, even with letters from acquaintances," said Lady Dove politely.

She was won over by the new secretary's deference.

"I hope you will tabulate them," put in Toney meditatively. "One can see at a glance then if—they are worse off or better off than the others."

"I make a list of everything," said Lady Dove. "You remember, don't you, Anne Faber, how well I kept the callers' book? One could see at a glance if people had not done their duty. I can always manage to show people politely what I think of them."

Mr. Russell murmured his approbation.

"It takes a very little time to book up letters, and I never believe those who say their letters were lost in the post."

"I don't think your letters will take very little time to-day, but, of course, I shall help you," said Toney, thinking of the terrible heaps in the hall.

Mr. Russell looked at the heiress with mild condescension.

"Thank you, I prefer doing it alone, and then there can be no mistake. I should not wish to stop your lessons in motor driving, Miss Whitburn."

"I've nearly conquered it; I've stuck up over my dressing table, '*Laborare est orare*,' that means the 'motor-car.'"

"Well, Toney, I hope it won't soon be your epitaph this neat Latin," smiled her uncle.

Happily Lady Dove soon got into most interesting conversation with Mr. Russell on the subject of social duties, so that Toney was then able to escape and to beckon to her uncle and Mrs. Faber to come and help her. Sir Evas could not help laughing heartily when he contemplated the pyramid of letters.

"This beats even you, Toney! Confess what you have been doing. Your aunt thinks the poor young man has such a large circle of friends."

"Oh, Toney, what is the new scheme?" said Mrs. Faber smiling.

Toney pulled her advertisement out of her pocket.

"I was so much afraid you would see it, but really I didn't guess the people would answer so promptly."

"Good heavens! Russell will be tabulating for days!"

"I expect there will be more by next post. Quick, let's carry them into the office. I think you won't complain that the secretary will be idle. You see, uncle, I shall be kept busy going to see them and just looking round."

"Busy! It's the work of Sisyphus or what's his name."

"I'll carry them in my skirt. Shoot them in, uncle. Chum, carry the rest and open the doors for us. Don't drop any, uncle, it may be just the most deserving case."

"It's my belief you have trod on a hornet's nest. Besides, they won't have believed in that advertisement!"

"I think they have," said Toney, emptying her skirt on the secretary's table.

”St. Francis hadn’t a daily post and never advertised,” she continued rather sadly, ”but he would have tackled it somehow.”

Mrs. Faber was busy putting the letters in some kind of order, and could not help smiling.

”What guidance are you going to give Mr. Russell?”

”I’ve thought it all out and it will be awfully interesting work, only I want to do it as much as I can myself like Brother Giles. He believed that work was as good as prayer, and that even if you were talking to an angel and your superior called you, you must leave the angel.”

”They are not very common visitors, Toney. Well, good-bye, I’ll leave you to tackle his Serene Highness.”

”And I must write up Lady Dove’s visiting book,” said Mrs. Faber, so they both escaped as they heard Mr. Russell’s step in the passage.

”I didn’t find the letters in the hall,” he said, seeing Toney. Then his glance fell on the writing table. ”What—are those—letters? Impossible!”

Toney had to confess.

”They have exceeded my greatest expectations I assure you.”

”Hundreds!” murmured the secretary.

”Yes, I haven’t counted them. It’s in answer to this advertisement,” and Toney read it out. ”You know I’ve heaps of money and I’ve got to give it away; but it will take a lot of time, attention, and trouble. Anyhow, I’ve prepared myself for it, and you see how much I want your help.”

”Yes, I see.” He looked hopelessly at the table. ”I thought you wanted an ordinary secretary.”

”Oh, no, I don’t want anything ordinary. It’s a glorious work and you’ll find it so. We must tabulate these first, some will be quite hopeless, but lots will want immediate help till we can house them.”

”House them, where?” said Mr. Russell, roused from his lethargy into positive dread.

”Oh, yes, of course, house them. I’ve got the plans all ready in a rough way, and when I’ve got the land we can go ahead. It will be just beautiful!”

”Beautiful—in what way?”

”Entering into all the lives of people who are down in their luck. I’ll confess I did several times think I’d give it all in a big lump and have done with it, but that was downright cowardice. A people’s palace sounds first-rate, but when you come to look into it it’s very little use. You know money is nothing without labour.”

”Labour is nothing without money, I should say,” said Mr. Russell with a sarcastic smile; ”but as your house is not built, what can you do with these people?” He opened the envelopes at random. ”Yes, I see it’s the usual thing. A

broken-down clergyman—has a large family, struggled many years against bad luck—I dare say a drone. Here's another, a doctor who has lost his health in the discharge of his duties, and——"

"Of course, he must be inquired about. My father was a doctor and—I see now, he died of over-work for other people." Toney clasped her hands, and her eyes looked soft through a thin veil of unshed tears. "I shall never resist a doctor's claim unless you help me! I know you will like the work. You are sort of a countryman of mine, and it's an honour for us, isn't it, that we can pull together."

Mr. Plantagenet Russell looked at his despised heiress a moment to see if she was in earnest. Yes, she certainly was in deadly earnest! He had meant to have an easy time, and on the threshold he was confronted with stupendous work, and then told it was "a great honour." It was the first glimmer of something above mere "do-your-duty-and-have-done-with-it" that had ever entered his head.

"I will think it over if I may," was his cautious answer. "In any case I had better begin at once or I shall not finish booking up before nightfall. As to answering them it is impossible to-day.

"Of course you must keep office hours, I don't want to overwork you, please. Do take care I don't, for I'm awfully strong and love work. I'm going to finish my driving lessons this morning, because we shall soon want to go and hunt up these people, and I don't want to kill anyone nor dogs. Oh, there's Trick creeping in, he's not partial to you," and off she flew and shut the door just in time to prevent a recurrence of yesterday's scene. Left to himself, Plantagenet Russell slowly paced the pleasant room where he had meant to have a good time! His other offers of work would have been child's play to what was now expected of him, and then to be told that the work was "noble." Plantagenet had a dislike to penniless people, because he had known what it was to be penniless himself, and he wanted to think that all poverty was the fault of the people who were poor; that is in the class which Miss Whitburn wished to help. But even Plantagenet Russell was dimly conscious of having been suddenly roused to look out of another window. Was there really something beyond material comfort and an easy-going life? Was there something noble in poverty, something noble in getting rid of your money when you had it—for the sake of others? It was too new an idea to accept at once, indeed this morning he kicked against the pricks, but suddenly he threw away a cigar he had been fingering, and sat down to tackle his heap of letters.

As for Toney, having got through her difficult task of trying to influence her unwilling secretary, she went off to her motor-car lesson, feeling this was a first requisite for her work.

"I don't want the people to have his Royal Highness patronising them, but I

expect when he sees how interesting the work is, he'll be just about nice. There's so much to do, and then the building will want a lot of thought. Brother Giles lived by the labours of his hands, but I'm thinking it's much more difficult to get rid of money properly, than to beg for money you haven't got. Ouf!"

CHAPTER XIV.
THE FIRST-FRUITS.

Toney drove up in her motor with a sudden dash very much like herself, and entered the drawing-room at Waycott Hall a few days after. She looked so radiant and happy as she stood in the doorway, that Miss Waycott, who was sitting alone, could not help smiling at the charming picture.

"How do you do, Miss Waycott? Please forgive me, but I wanted to see Mr. Waycott and tell him——"

"Shall I do instead? Lewis is out about the place somewhere. Sit down if you have time."

"Time! Oh! I just spend my time in making time now! But you will be glad to hear one thing."

"What is it? It is evidently good news by your face."

"I can drive the motor quite well now, and so can Jim! Mr. Waycott saw us going up a hedge so he won't believe it; but I've got my certificate, and Mr. Hughes, the London man, said I took to it like a duck to water. It's lovely, glorious! You have such a go-a-head-and-be-jolly sort of feeling. You will let me drive you somewhere, Miss Waycott, won't you?"

Miss Waycott's keen face was all smiles.

"May I wait till you are quite proficient? I have delicate nerves!"

"Pity! I haven't any. Jim and I can go anywhere now. Of course it's not so nice as driving horses, but it's exciting, and it's quicker if you are in a hurry, and you don't feel sorry for the animals."

Lewis had scented the motor-car and hurried in. Even a sight of Toney did him good.

"I've got my certificate," she exclaimed, shaking hands, "I knew you would be glad, and also"—she lowered her voice—"I wanted to show you the plans."

Miss Waycott rose, saying,

"I know Maud will like to see you, I'll go and fetch her. She is playing her

violin somewhere."

Toney unfolded the roll in her hand.

"Here they are, look, lovely artistic buildings! South aspect, separate front doors, and a nice big garden in front and behind. Now you must help me about the land, you said you would."

"I've thought deeply about it. Do you know Deep Hollow Farm? It's been thrown on my hands, and there is a beautiful upland meadow with nice south aspect. There is a good water supply at the farm, and——"

"How just delightful! May I really buy it? Let me see, the high road cuts across by the farm."

"Yes—but—I want to give it to you, Toney."

"Give it! Of course not. How can I give what costs me nothing. Market price, and—but you know, anyhow, it is a gift, because heaps of those high and mighty landlords wouldn't let me buy anything. Uncle Evas would but he daren't! You know there would be strained relationships, so I won't even ask him."

"We will have it valued then, and being so near I can give an eye to the building. How about your letters, Toney? Mrs. Faber gave me a description of the first post—I laughed!"

"It wasn't a very laughing matter. I thought his Royal Highness would pack up and go, but he's thought better of it, at least he's still considering it. The worst was there were heaps more afterwards, and he can't keep abreast of it so he says."

"Poor Plantagenet! You will be had up for cruelty."

"I think work can't kill people, it is toodling about which is so tiring. I escape every afternoon, for the visitors are numerous, and Aunt Dove has a real good time telling them of her niece's wild doings. Miss Grossman did have influenza, and poor Chum has not been allowed to go home. Aunt Dove says that she only shows common gratitude by staying. Do you really, really mean I may have Deep Hollow Farm and the land belonging to it?"

"The land is not good, the advantage will be on my side."

At that moment Miss Waycott returned, followed by Maud and Mrs. Hamilton. Both were cordial to Toney, but the cordiality from the last lady did not ring quite true. Envy is a subtle poison and it required much Christianity not to envy the girl's splendid health and splendid fortune. Mrs. Hamilton could not imagine why some people were so lucky and why no legacies ever fell to her share—mere nobodies now had all the money. Pride is not altogether a satisfying dish when served up ungarnished.

"You have made all the county-side talk, Miss Whitburn, with your generosity to Sir Evas' tenants."

"I don't see what there is to talk about, everyone could do the same if they liked."

”Alas! everyone has not your means,”

Toney turned the conversation, she did not want to say that very hard work and not means only had made the success.

”Do you know, Miss Waycott, I’ve had to talk very seriously to Trick, for he hates Mr. Russell, who is dreadfully afraid of him.”

Lewis burst out laughing.

”Poor man, I shall never forget your invitation to put his legs on the table!”

”It would have been much simpler if he had done so, and I daresay he does it in private; but what a pity Trick can’t read St. Francis’ sermon to ’Brother Wolf.’”

”Those legends are quite foolish,” said Mrs. Hamilton. ”I never let you and Jeanie read legends when you were young for fear of your believing in them.”

”I believe them all,” exclaimed Toney. ”Why not? The wolf wagged his head and held out his paw to show he promised never to eat anyone again. I wish Brother Trick was as easily converted.”

”My dear Toney!” said Miss Waycott, ”wherever do you get these stories?”

”They are all right; Mr. Hales gave them to me, and of course he meant me to read, mark, and inwardly digest it—only it’s very, very difficult!”

”He was an original saint, anyhow, and so quite suits you,” said Lewis smiling.

”I mustn’t stay and talk so much. I am afraid I shall never be able to copy Brother Juniper who resolved to keep silence for six months! Imagine that!”

”Pray don’t imitate Brother Juniper,” laughed Miss Waycott.

”Mrs. Hamilton, won’t you trust yourself in the new motor? I’ve got my certificate in my pocket.”

”Yes, come along, Aunt Delia; I want to come, too, and go round by Deep Hollow. Miss Whitburn thinks she will like to buy it, and I must get as much as I can out of her,” said Lewis gravely.

”My dear Lewis, you always cheat yourself,” sighed Mrs. Hamilton, who was hopelessly literal.

”I know riches have no attraction for you! Yes, I will come. Is there room for Maud?”

”Of course, I bought a very roomy car; you see it’s got to be very useful, but some of my friends won’t mind being squashed.”

Mrs. Hamilton was not going to let Lewis drive about alone with the heiress.

In a few minutes they were going rather briskly through the park where the trees were turning into gold, then out upon the lonely high road till Deep Hollow was reached.

”Will you wait a few minutes, Aunt Delia, as I must extol my wares,” and

Lewis led Toney towards his unlet farm.

”You might make the farm, too, very useful for a caretaker or your chief constable!” said Lewis.

”I must go and live there myself!”

”What an idea! Look, on that high ground you could build your palace of peace, and there would be good views and good air.”

”Do you really, really mean it? It is perfect, I want it all to be very simple, but comfortable and homely. Mrs. Hamilton won’t like waiting, but we must come again. I’ll write to Mr. Staines and tell him to send somebody to clench our matter. No money could pay you for your generosity, so there’s to be no bargaining.”

Toney flew back and Lewis followed more leisurely, anxious to help her, but wishing he could kick down the golden barrier.

”Maud was wondering if you were lost!” said Mrs. Hamilton.

”It seems so wonderful that I can really buy some land,” said Toney springing into the car. ”Mr. Waycott is going to sell me Deep Hollow Farm.”

”We were bargaining about the price,” said Lewis, stepping in. ”Don’t you think we ought to make hay whilst the sun shines, Aunt Delia?”

”Business is very disagreeable for young ladies,” was Aunt Delia’s answer, ”it rubs off the bloom of youth.”

Toney spun her wheel round and was off. She did not appreciate Aunt Delia very much, and she felt she disliked her, but meant not to show her feelings, first, because she was Lewis Waycott’s aunt, and secondly because she knew humility was to be cultivated, if she was to be like St. Francis, or even like Brother Juniper, who played see-saw with the children so that people might despise him and he might be humbled.

About a mile from the village Toney saw an old woman carrying a heavy basket, and exclaimed,

”It’s old Nancy Poulter. She’s been carrying the washing home.” She pulled up the motor with wonderful precision as the old woman curtseyed and smiled at Miss Tonia.

”How do you do, Mrs. Poulter; won’t you let me give you a ride home? You have still a mile to go, and that basket’s too heavy.”

The old woman looked at Mrs. Hamilton and then at Toney.

”No, no, my dear, when you be alone some day without the quality. ’Tis a bit heavy, but lor’, Miss Toney, I’ll manage.”

”No you shan’t. The quality won’t mind. There, get in behind, and we’ll take the basket in front.” Lewis had learnt his lesson in politeness long ago, and now got out and placed the big basket in front between him and Toney, whilst the old woman was almost lifted in by her, the rug being tucked in round her.

”You mustn’t get a chill after getting hot, Mrs. Poulter. I’ll whisk you home in no time. You know Mrs. and Miss Hamilton, don’t you?”

Toney was off again like lightning, and Mrs. Hamilton felt she was taken in. She was a lady, and always spoke to the poor with kind condescension, but she would never have dreamt of sharing her carriage with a panting and perspiring old woman from the village. Maud was, however, less particular than her mother, and remarked,

”It’s nice to get such a quick carriage, Mrs. Poulter! We have been round by Deep Hollow in no time.”

”These new-fashioned carriages are a sight to see to be sure, ma’am, but Miss Toney, she be that clever a-driving and a-riding, I don’t mind a-trusting of her. My son says he never saw such a one for horses—though, to be sure, there ain’t any in here. It is a long way to Whitfield, and I was beginning to feel done up, that I was, and ’tain’t often one gets a lift. To be sure, to be sure.”

Then Toney pulled up at the cottage door in no time, and helped out the old woman whilst Lewis carried her basket to the door, amidst her profuse apologies of [Transcriber’s note: word(s) missing here]

”Don’t ee, now, sir, be a carrying my basket. ’Tain’t fit for such as you. But ’tain’t no use going agin Miss Toney, she won’t listen to nothing if it’s to save anyone a bit of trouble. Bless her.”

”That’s what a good many people say, Mrs. Poulter. Good afternoon,” and Lewis raised his hat and returned to his place beside Toney.

”You see what a useful machine I have! Poor old Nancy, she works too hard for that selfish son. What luck! the gates are open. Now I’ll just spin you up, Mrs. Hamilton, in style. There are no Bobbies here.”

The car flew, and Mrs. Hamilton and Maud held on tightly with one hand and clutched their hats with the other, whilst Lewis laughed.

”This is quite your style, Toney. You do go a pace, I hope it isn’t kingdom come for us all.”

”No fear; you will go and talk about the farm to his Royal Highness, won’t you, and just interest him.”

They pulled up at the front door safe and sound, but surprises were not over yet.

”If you please, Miss Whitburn,” said Diggings severely, ”there’s five persons come here asking for Mr. Russell, and her ladyship has ’em in the drawing-room as Mr. Russell is out, and she says you were to come at once when you came in.”

Toney turned back to Lewis.

”Oh, come and help me; no, please go and find Mr. Russell, he’s mooning somewhere near by, I expect; for, do you know, I believe it’s the *avant garde* who have got impatient. I did beg Mr. Russell to answer the letters, but he wanted

to tabulate. What will Aunt Dove say! Mrs. Hamilton, will you and Maud go back with Jim, or come in the drawing-room? There's only a few visitors. Who is there, Diggings?"

"Lady Southbourne and the Hon. Mr. Lang is there, miss, and a few more visitors besides the five persons."

Mrs. Hamilton was not partial to Lady Dove and much preferred going home in the motor, so Jim, who was on the spot, went off with alacrity.

Toney hurried towards the drawing-room. The five persons Diggings spoke of so disdainfully must be either a doctor, officer, clergyman, or relation of the above, and enjoying a bad quarter of an hour with Lady Dove.

She was not mistaken; as she entered she caught sight of five shabby genteel individuals, who were now evidently too much alarmed to do anything more than sit dejectedly in the enclosure of a window.

"Antonia!" said Lady Dove in her most severe voice, "I believe there are some persons here wishing to see you. Pray take them to your own room."

CHAPTER XV.

GENTLE AND SIMPLE.

Toney wished with all her heart her *avante garde* had not been shown into Lady Dove's presence, but now that they were here she would not for the world hustle them out. She might hurt their feelings, and they must consider that "something to their advantage" meant only a snubbing. She hid her despair with extra energy. How she hated social distinctions! The Honourable Edward came forward to greet her with great cordiality. His mother, more slowly, did the same. Toney felt a difficulty in introducing the *avante garde*, as she did not know one of their names. However she made a dash at Smith, hoping one of them would respond to the call.

"Oh, Mr. Lang, may I introduce Mr. Smith to you?" She seized on the meekest and saddest individual, who wore large spectacles and looked much depressed.

"My name is Dr. Harris," he said, raising himself to his full height. "The Rev. Smith you may mean," and he indicated an old clergyman wearing a threadbare coat, who also held the advertisement in his hand.

"Oh yes, of course, how do you do, Mr. Smith? You came to see Mr. Russell,

didn't you, but I can do just as well. Mr. Lang, this is Mr. Smith and Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Harris."

"Miss Smith, if you please," corrected a prim lady with remains of faint beauty.

Mrs. Harris, however, looked most disconcerted; Lady Dove's anger had fallen especially upon her, so now she only murmured, holding out a piece of newspaper.

"We only came to see about this advertisement, because we didn't get any answer, and we were so anxious——"

"Of course, yes, it's all right." Then Toney turned to the last individual, a man who looked somewhat superior to the others, and who smiled without intermission.

"Mr.——" Toney paused, she couldn't say Smith again, but she got no answer, only a nod and another smile.

"He's stone deaf," said Miss Smith, who by her manner was trying to show Toney that a clergyman's sister is always a lady, little guessing that Toney cared for none of such things.

"He joined us," said Dr. Harris, "but his infirmity makes it difficult to converse with him, his name is, I believe, Grant—Captain Grant!"

Captain Grant smiled and nodded, and insisted on Toney's reading her own advertisement, by pointing to it line by line with his first finger.

"Yes, of course—Mr. Lang, Captain Grant," she introduced the two, and then hurriedly went to the tea-table, where Mrs. Faber was in her old position of tea-maker.

"Chum, dear, I'm plunging about in a bog; give them some tea quickly; that will be to their advantage anyhow. Mr. Lang will perhaps help me. Aunt Dove is looking awfully churny with the poor dears."

For a few minutes Toney flew about helping her five friends to minute cups of tea and tiny wafers of bread and butter, but the Honourable Edward Lang came nobly to the front, though with an amused smile on his face. The two elder ladies talked together earnestly and discussed the injustice of Radicals and Socialists, for on these topics they were in accord.

Dr. Harris was not however going to be put off with only tiny cups of tea.

"I should be much obliged, madam, if you could tell me when we may expect to see Mr. Plantagenet Russell? We, at all events, must catch the earliest train back."

"There he is!" exclaimed Toney, catching sight of Lewis and Mr. Russell coming hastily to the house. "I really think you had better go and see him in his private room. Let me show you the way, and I'll order a substantial tea there. You must be awfully hungry."

Toney headed the procession out of the drawing-room, Edward Lang, hurrying to open the door for her, and hiding, as best he could, his amused smile as Toney nodded at him, saying, ”I’ll come back soon.”

Lady Dove gave a sigh of relief. She was so much annoyed that she forgot her rôle of kind aunt.

”Antonia is incorrigible. You see how she collects strange people round her. I tried hard to show her what an English lady should be like, but it was trouble wasted.”

”She will soon outgrow all that,” said Lady Southbourne kindly; ”in these days young people are so original, but it does not last!”

Mr. Lang laughed heartily.

”I am sure Miss Whitburn will always be original. She certainly can’t help being kind.”

”She drags Sir Evas into all kinds of queer things. He has really felt the strain of so much work. General Stone was hardly kind to make him the girl’s guardian.”

”He looked as if he enjoyed all the coming of age,” said Edward Lang; to himself he added, ”I don’t mind relieving him of the burden of fifty thousand a year at all! Good heavens! the girl must be allowed to have her head at first, then she’ll soon calm down.”

”Dear Lady Dove,” said Lady Southbourne, gently laying her pale lavender kid gloved hand on her hostess as a mark of sympathy, ”young people will be young people, I daresay when you were young——”

”No indeed, I was brought up by a very particular mother, who knew what a young lady should be like.”

”Ah! yes, those were indeed good old days!”

At this moment Toney rushed in again with breathless speed, and addressed herself to Mr. Lang.

”There! it’s all right, and they have unfrozen, poor dears. It’s strange, isn’t it, how these stately English homes act like cold storage on people.”

”Cold storage brings us excellent things from abroad.”

”I’d rather come over warm! Gracious stars! I had a trouble to thaw them, but now they’re sitting down to a proper meal.”

”Are your friends Salvationists, Antonia, or did they come for begging purposes?” said Lady Dove.

”They came hoping to hear of something to their advantage. You see, Lady Southbourne, I advertised for people in reduced circumstances, and the answers were so many that Mr. Russell couldn’t keep ahead.”

”Something to their advantage, and pray what is that, Antonia? You must have taken leave of your five senses!” exclaimed Lady Dove, turning pink with

vexation.

Here Mrs. Faber threw herself into the breach.

”It’s only one of Toney’s kind schemes, Lady Dove. I will go and see after the visitors, Toney, if you take my place.”

This happily turned the stream of hot lava from poor Toney, and Lady Dove remarked,

”It is most tiresome, my companion has influenza. I generally find, don’t you, Lady Southbourne, that middle-class people always give in if even a little finger aches. Of course, poor things, they do not understand our motto of ’noblesse oblige.’”

The Honourable Edward left the two ladies to their duet over the cowardice of the middle-class, and went to sit by Toney, who was drinking tea in earnest.

”It’s rather warm work when you’re taken by surprise. If I had been here it would have been all right,” she said, smiling once more.

”I think it’s always ’all right’ where you are,” said the young man gallantly. Toney looked up suddenly and gazed at him.

”Gracious stars! how awfully nice of you to say that, but it isn’t true! I always seem to raise the dust when I come into this room! Aunt Dove was made of different paste, so somehow we don’t blend. You see I was just reared anyhow, never knew there were gentlemen and ladies till I came here! Out home we were all men and women, and pretty rough at that—ouf!”

”We are all going to become Socialists, whether we like it or not,” he said softly.

”You’ll exclude Aunt Dove, won’t you?” and Toney’s merry laugh sounded through the room.

”So little self-control,” Lady Dove was heard to murmur.

”That’s me!” said Toney, nodding her head, ”but as you were kind enough just now to overlook my ’bringing up,’ as Aunt Dove calls it, I’ll tell you about my friends. I’m going to buy Deep Hollow Farm and build a sort of a Home for stray folk that can’t swim against the stream.”

”Will these be your first inmates?”

”Perhaps, Mr. Russell will tabulate them all, and we’ll take the worst cases. No favour, but, of course, I must help them because they took such a lot of trouble to come to-day, and because I expect they felt pretty bad before I came!”

”I think it is a noble idea, Miss Whitburn—I hope you will let me help you as much as I can. There may be some cases in which I can prove useful.”

”Of course there will be. Let me see, will you come and help to tabulate? Mr. Russell groans over the work.”

Mr. Lang had no intention of working hard, but he hid this intention.

”I’m at your commands, Miss Whitburn.” He was wondering in what man-

ner and how soon he could make an offer to Toney! Would she be easily won? He began to fear a title would not be a great attraction. He would have to go in for Socialism or Individualism or some 'ism, to have a better chance of getting £50,000 a year. It would be rather fatiguing, but his debts were many, and the money was worth the effort. Miss Whitburn was not likely to be particular about tying up money, and Sir Evas, her guardian, was very easy-going, and would be glad to get her well married. So argued Edward Lang, never doubting but that he would be a welcome suitor. Unfortunately many mothers with marriageable daughters were so very kind to him and had spoilt him. At the bottom he was not a bad fellow, but terribly extravagant.

"Then let me command you to go away," said Toney laughing, "for Aunt Dove won't like me to leave you, and those poor people will find themselves thrown from the frying-pan into the fire. Mr. Russell will want to tabulate them so minutely."

The Honourable Edward rose quite willingly. He was afraid of seeing more of Toney's "friends" arriving, and in any case he could not very conveniently make love to the heiress in this formal drawing-room.

"If I obey you now, tell me when I may come again?"

"Oh, whenever you like, there's sure to be something going on in the tabulating line for some time to come." Toney's laugh was catching.

"But I may be rewarded with a talk with you, apart from the genteel beggars," he said cheerfully.

"It's all very well laughing at beggars, but if one has nothing one does strange things. Do you know when I first came here I was a beggar, and not at all genteel, Aunt Dove would tell you—and I was glad to make a whistle for five shillings!"

"Was it a successful whistle?"

"I rather think it was! I believe it was owing to it that General Stone left me his money. Now do say good-bye, please."

"*Au revoir* then, Miss Whitburn, I prefer saying that—— Mother, I really think——" Lady Southbourne always obeyed her son and rose immediately.

"So delighted to have seen you not looking a bit tired after your delightful party," she said to Toney, keeping her hand affectionately in her lavender kid, "I wish we could stay longer—— Now why not come over and spend a few days at the Towers? Wouldn't that be delightful, Edward?"

"It would indeed!"

Toney shook her head.

"Afraid I can't, thanks; besides, I shouldn't know what to do, and at Aldersfield I've got heaps waiting to be settled."

"Of course we mustn't be selfish," said Lady Southbourne, not taking any

notice of Toney's reason for not going to the Towers!

At last they were off, followed by the most gracious remarks of Lady Dove as Toney flew back to her own room.

There she found not only Dr. and Mrs. Harris, Mr. and Miss Smith, and Captain Grant, but also Lewis and Mrs. Faber assisting the visitors to make a square meal; whilst Mr. Russell was tabulating them, every now and then making a dart at one of the individuals to get special answers.

"This is nice! How kind of you, Mr. Waycott. Lady Southbourne and the Honourable Edward took so long to go I had to give him a hint."

"Oh, Toney! what did you say?" said Mrs. Faber.

"Why I asked him to go and he went. It's better to speak honest, isn't it?—Dr. Harris, have some more veal pie. Our cook is just perfect at veal pies."

Dr. Harris said he didn't mind if he did have some more, but at that moment Mr. Russell made a dart at Miss Smith.

"What is the date of your birth, Miss Smith?"

Now Miss Smith's age was a hid treasure, and to be asked to dig it up in this public way was more than she could bear. She blushed a vivid purple.

"It's of no consequence whatever, Mr. Russell," she said. "I really have forgotten my birthday." Mr. Russell went back and put down "birthday forgotten."

"But the year?" he asked again, feeling his whole *raison d'être* depended on that date.

"Let me see—What year were you born, brother?"

Mr. Smith blinked very often as he answered, wishing to spare his sister.

"I think I had better send you these particulars—if there is—any good to be got by them."

"Oh, never mind," said Toney, seeing the difficulty. "Mr. Russell, please put 'Uncertain.' It isn't easy to remember, if you are asked suddenly how old one is, is it, Mr. Waycott?" Lewis was stifling a smile.

"I am six-and-twenty, I know, because Aunt Honoria keeps my birthdays and announces my age every year."

"Your relative knows that a man does not mind," said Dr. Harris, "but ladies have rooted objections to telling their age." He bowed to Miss Smith, and Miss Smith giggled softly.

Toney saw the motor drive up, and seized the occasion to dash away. She soon returned.

"Now you shall all be driven to the station, when you are ready, and I do hope you won't regret your journey. It's been so very, very nice, seeing you. Just on the day, too, that I have taken the farm."

By the time they were squeezed into the big motor their faces were wreathed with smiles, especially when Toney had thrust an envelope into each of

their hands, murmuring something about ”Just to pay the journey.” The deaf gentleman opened it publicly, and nearly dropped the five pound note, then nearly all tumbled out again to say ”Thank you,” but at a sign from Toney Jim flew off as if pursued by the furies.

CHAPTER XVI.
UNEXPECTED NEWS.

”Oh, Toney, what did you give them?” asked Mrs. Faber, when they all returned to Toney’s sitting-room. ”Wasn’t it a pity to——”

”Now Chum is against me. It was only five pounds each, as they had to pay the journeys—Mr. Waycott, you are the only one who understands.”

”I’m delighted you say so, but—in what way do I show my superior wisdom?” said Lewis smiling.

”You don’t think that money is a little china god that has to be handled carefully.”

”I suppose we all have crooked ideas of money,” he said, conscious that he didn’t care much about these wayfaring beggars; certainly not at all as Toney did.

”They shouldn’t have been so impatient,” said Plantagenet Russell, turning over his big book. ”I had only reached the letter H, but I’ll send a card at once to all the rest, or we shall have daily processions.”

”Well, I’m very glad they came, for now you see with your own eye, Mr. Russell, that my poor clergy, doctors, sailors, and relations of the above, do exist!” They all laughed.

”Of course they exist, Miss Whitburn, but if they had been properly careful and hard-working they wouldn’t now be out of elbows. And Miss Smith was so ridiculous about her age!”

”She was a bit jibby about it, wasn’t she? but I expect she had a lover somewhere, and she doesn’t like to let it out.”

”Oh, Toney, you are too romantic—you always were,” said Mrs. Faber.

”Anyhow, you can’t complain of deaf Captain Grant. He looked so cheerful, and did not want to hide his age.”

Plantagenet turned over to the letter G in his book.

”Here he is; Grant, Charles, Captain. Lost hearing and work. Very small income, age sixty, only poor relations, references.”

”Of course they sound uninteresting as tabulated folk. I’m sure St. Francis never tabulated people! There’s a lovely story of one of the brothers, who was nursing a leper, being told to go fifteen miles off, and not liking to leave his patient, took him up on his back from dawn to sunrise all the way, and no one could believe he could have done it in the time, so everybody was awfully astonished.”

”I’m thankful there are no lepers in England now, Miss Whitburn,” said Mr. Russell in his drawling voice; ”I’m rather afraid you might wish me to carry one of them fifteen miles if you sent me on a message. Couldn’t do it, I assure you!”

The idea made them all laugh.

”I must go back now,” said Lewis, ”and, short of lepers, what can I do to help you?”

”I really think we must all help to answer the letters if you will come to-morrow morning; Mr. Russell has composed a short note asking for all particulars.”

”Age and pedigree! Well, Russell, I’ll turn up and help to-morrow,” said Lewis, nodding towards the secretary.

”There’s the bell,” exclaimed Mrs. Faber. ”I expect Lady Dove will want her novel. Henry says I must come home to-morrow. I do hope Miss Grossman will be well enough to come down.”

”I’ll find time, if she is not, Chum, dear. You are such an angel! You are just like Santa Clara; isn’t she, Mr. Russell?”

”I’m not acquainted with Santa Clara,” he answered, ”but I shall be quite willing to do anything I can for Lady Dove, Mrs. Faber, when my labours are lessened.”

Toney went off with Lewis, she felt she must have a stretch after her anxieties.

”I’m so happy about that land,” she exclaimed, as the two crossed the park in the twilight, ”that I can’t feel upset even! I shall write to my architect to-night. You do seem to make everything straight.”

”Do I?” said Lewis in a low voice. Was it ever going to dawn on Toney why he tried to make everything straight? At present he feared she credited him with pure love of humanity. If only he dared speak; but, no, that money stood in the way. How he hated fifty thousand a year!

”Yes, you do; and that’s why, when I have any plan, I always think first of you. Dear Chum is so afraid of doing wrong, and Uncle Evas is so just—straight-ahead-going, that a secret is really no use at all with him! He blurts it out at the most inconvenient moment! He is a dear old duck all the same! He sits up all night, or did, to write my business letters because Aunt Dove couldn’t bear to see him do it. Well, but that’s not what I wanted to ask you about.”

”Any more stray sheep, Toney? They’re pretty thick on the ground as it

is!"

"I hope they are all in the fold to-night, but I want to talk about Jeanie and Maud Hamilton. I know you would like them to have something nice and so you can best help me."

"My dear Toney, they wouldn't like being tabulated," said Lewis laughing.

"No, of course not. I wish Mr. Russell had not that craze; however, Pups used to say, 'every man knows what crutch suits him best.' I never quite knew what he meant, but I do now: Mr. Russell finds that big book his crutch."

"But what about the Hamiltons? You know Aunt Honoria and I are always delighted to have them with us. My Uncle Hamilton was an easy-going spendthrift, and never thought what would happen when he died, so when he departed this life, they said he had quietly eaten more than half his capital."

"I daresay he helped other people, so that's just the reason why other people should take care of his children. Jeanie loves music and wants to go to Vienna, I heard her say so, and Maud—Maud is nice, isn't she?"

"Yes, she is vastly improved."

"Yes, and she is what Aunt Dove calls a 'real lady.' Of course she looked hard at me when she said it! She meant I wasn't, and I'm not, I know I wasn't born that way—— Well, I want somehow to give Maud a good time and Jeanie too at Vienna. I want to pay all their masters and expenses, and how is it to be managed without letting them know it?"

"Toney, you really mustn't—— Besides, there's no way of doing it."

"Yes, there must be some uncle in Australia or Africa, or Klondike, that would send them three hundred pounds."

"I don't know of any such individual. Yes, by the way, there is an old cousin in the Argentine, from whom they expect a legacy. I believe he is a penniless rascal, but they paint him with a coat of gilding and call him, 'dear Cousin Seaton.'" They laughed together like two good comrades.

"He'll do! Mr. Staines, who is very understanding, will get someone to send it from the Argentine, and that will be true. 'Three hundred pounds from a friend in the Argentine for musical training in Germany,' and they'll jump to conclusions!"

"And you want me to abet you in the falsehood?"

"Of course. You will have to belong to the 'poor little disciples,' as St. Francis liked his brothers to be called, and they had to do all sorts of queer commissions."

"Did the 'poor little disciples' have to swallow bare-faced deceptions?"

"I think so, for they couldn't have liked all they had to do and yet they said they did! It is a farce, isn't it? Oh, good-bye, there's Uncle Evas coming, and I'll just walk back with him. He's a little down to-day. Guess he's had to make head

against a breeze. He's quite ready for a 'poor little disciple.'"

Lewis could not help laughing. Something in Toney carried all before her, because she never let self get into her plans. Sir Evas brightened up as he met his niece.

"Hulloa! where are you two going? I've had a day among the farms. There's a lot of repairs to be done and they think I must see them all myself."

"So you should, uncle! Tell you what, we'll just titivate them all up and you'll have no more trouble for years."

"My dear Toney! It's much better done by degrees, doesn't drain the property so much."

"We'll do it now, uncle, and all at once. You always say, 'make hay while the sun shines,' and that's what I am doing."

"Toney has been making hay with a vengeance to-day, Sir Evas," and Lewis told the history of the *avant garde*.

"My dear girl, the house will be besieged! You see, Lewis, what a mistake the General made," said Sir Evas laughing, "did your aunt—— Ehem—bear it well?"

Toney shook her head.

"It shan't happen again, uncle. We'll tabulate hard to-morrow. It all comes of tabulating! Now pretend you know nothing about it. Where ignorance is bliss. Good-bye, Mr. Waycott, and thank you awfully much. Now, Uncle Evas, we must quick trot home, it's Chum's last evening. Remember to be very nice and grateful to her. She's done a lot of hard work you know."

"So have we all, Toney! However, I'll compose a speech on the way home. Good night, Waycott, hope you don't want speeches."

Lewis surreptitiously watched them going off. It seemed like the last ray of evening sunshine disappearing in the woods. Why should he bother about the money? Why? Then he shook his head. Everyone would say he had married Toney's fifty thousand. His pride rebelled and even a perfectly clear conscience could not conquer it.

"There's a lovely moon so we shan't be benighted," said Toney, taking her uncle's arm.

"I say, Toney, we mustn't be late for dinner," he said walking quicker. He was trying to brace himself to hear the story of the *avant garde*, and this time he knew it would not be accompanied with laughter.

"Isn't dinner a bother? Meals in general too. Brother Juniper, that's the one who didn't speak for six months and played see-saw with the children—well, he once was left alone and he was told to see he cooked some food when the others returned, and he agreed, but when they were gone he thought it was a lot of trouble so much food cooking, so he went begging for food and made a big fire, and borrowed big pots and put all the food he got into it. Fowls with their

feathers on, and eggs with their shells, and the fire was so big that he had to tie a plank on his body to get near the pots. Then at last he rang the bell and all the brothers came, expecting great things, and he said, 'Eat well, for I have cooked enough for a fortnight, and then we can all go to prayer and think no more about food.'"

"I hope they enjoyed it!" said Sir Evas absently. He was thinking of his wife.

"It says so quaintly that, 'there is not a pig in all the land of Rome so famished as to have eaten it!' But he got a wigging from the General!"

This chimed in with Sir Evas' thoughts.

"I daresay he deserved it! Fowls with their feathers on can't be very digestible."

"Anyhow he was right about the time we waste over our meals! Do you know, uncle, you are rather like Brother Amazialbene."

"Good heavens, what a name! Didn't your Brother shorten it ever?"

"No, you see they had time then. Anyhow, he possessed the virtues of patience and obedience, for if he were beaten for the whole day long, he would never murmur nor complain with a single word!"

"I don't think I should take the beating so easily! But I want to say, Toney, that you are giving away your money right and left rather too freely. There's moderation in all things, my dear child."

"Dear old ducky. It's just perfect to hear you! I'm only afraid of not being able to get rid of it all, but I mean to try."

"You must remember—Ehem—if you were to marry, of course your husband would help you to get rid of a good lot!"

Toney turned the conversation and the two who so well understood each other appeared in the Aldersfield drawing-room just as Lady Dove was telling Mrs. Faber to leave off as it was time to dress.

"Oh, there you are! Well, I do think, Evas, that you might have returned to tea. Has Antonia told you of the terrible inroad we have had? If——"

"Yes, yes, it was a mistake—but they didn't do any harm, did they?"

"Lewis Waycott and Edward Lang were here happily, and were very good-natured. By the way, I have had Mrs. Kenward here, and I have heard some news about him, which of course I have been expecting."

"Indeed, what's that?" said Sir Evas, pleasantly relieved that the storm was blowing over, whilst Toney leant against the door and listened.

"Lewis is going to marry his cousin Maud. It is private as yet, but quite understood."

"Good gracious! Strange we have not heard it!"

"Oh, you men have no eyes. At the party I saw them constantly smiling

at each other, and Mrs. Hamilton said very pointedly something about young people fancying no one saw their inclinations. I guessed her meaning. Well, she has been working that way for some years, she means to feather her nest well, but of course it's a pity!"

Without knowing what he was doing, Sir Evas turned towards Toney, and to his surprise he found her gone.

"Well," he said, "I always thought he liked Toney! But it's no use meddling with such things."

Upstairs Toney was sitting on her window-sill with Trick in her arms. She had locked her door, and for the first time in her life there was no smile on her lips at the thought of Lewis Waycott.

"Oh, I am glad, I must be glad that he will be happy," she said to herself, "but I wish he had told me himself, though she is a nice girl and will sort of do all he wishes." Then she laid her head against Trick's face and whispered, "Trick, Trick, you'll not leave your mistress, will you, dear? You're all I've got of my very own."

CHAPTER XVII.

STUCK IN A BOG.

After great events there is always a certain feeling of flatness, and it must have been that which made Toney somewhat silent and plunge at times into the tabulating work with furious energy. Lewis Waycott came every morning and, to everybody's surprise, the Hon. Edward often turned up too. It really was amusing to see the self-made secretaries each in front of a book and a pile of letters, whilst Plantagenet Russell indolently "bossed the show," as Toney remarked. Before he had worked long Edward Lang's labours were transmuted into conversation, and he always found an excellent excuse for luring Toney out into the park or the garden; strange to say, Toney did not seem to object, and left Lewis and Plantagenet at their task without too many apologies. The feeling of needing a good stretch came upon her, and though she would have preferred solitude, Edward Lang's thirst for information served her purpose. When Lewis was gone, however, then she returned to the tabulating work with increased energy, and the Hon. Edward's wishes could not drag her away. She said to herself she missed her chum, and that the world was a bit awry without her sweet sympathy, but she manfully

fought against these feelings, flying to her "Little Flowers" for strength when she felt extra depressed. She liked reading about Brother John, of Alverina, who had entered the Order as a boy, "But seeing that God careth with tender care for His children, giving them at divers times, now consolation, and now tribulation, now prosperity, and now adversity, according as He seeth they have need thereof, for to continue in humility, or for to kindle more in them desire for heavenly things," Brother John remained without the light and love of God, and this so afflicted him that he took to running hither and thither about the woods, till at last he had a vision of Christ and after many entreaties, the gift of divine grace returned to him.

"All work and no play, Toney, will make you dull, a day's hunting will do you a world of good," said Sir Evas one day. "I'll come with you, and Colon wants exercise. The meet is at the Towers."

Toney looked up quickly.

"It's you, uncle, who want to hunt, but of course I'll come. Mr. Waycott will help Mr. Russell to-day, and perhaps a good blow will clear away my cobwebs. We're getting so puzzled as to who's the most needy and deserving, that we seriously think of raffling them."

"I hope Waycott won't give up his hunting for your beggars, Toney. Anyhow, we'll start early to-morrow."

It was a real joy to see Toney hunting; she sat her horse as if she were part and parcel of the steed and certainly there was perfect sympathy between them. The county gentlemen, who now and then spoke hard words about some of the Dianas of the hunting field, were lost in admiration as they saw Toney's seat, and Sir Evas felt immensely proud of the praises bestowed upon his niece. That this young huntress was an heiress added to the admiration, and Toney found herself surrounded with a little court of followers, foremost among them was, of course, Edward Lang. He meant to try his luck to-day, and was therefore delighted at seeing her at the meet, but how was he to find his opportunity?

Toney looked as if cobwebs were swept away judging by her face as she and Sir Evas joined the meet, indeed, she looked a perfect picture as she and Colon impatiently waited to be off though talking to Edward Lang.

"Colon is nearly perfect. Uncle Evas bought him when he became my guardian, and I don't think there is a better judge of horses in all England."

"That is a rare talent. You'll lunch here of course, Miss Whitburn?"

"I think we shall need fortifying. Oh, now they're off! I feel as if we should fly over everything."

And, indeed, it looked like it, for Toney and Colon were soon flying across country in grand style. Sir Evas presently gave up trying to keep up with her, five-barred gates were not for him now, though in his youth he had been a mighty

hunter.

”Look at Miss Whitburn taking that hedge! By jove!” exclaimed one of the young men.

”Did you see her take that wide ditch? It was magnificent, and there’s no show-off; it’s just because she and her thorough-bred forget everything that it’s so splendid.”

Edward Lang even had not been able to keep up with Toney, but you can’t make a proposal flying over a gate, so he comforted himself with thinking,

”Australia ought to be proud of having reared her; anyhow, a girl who rides like that can be trusted not to give way to too many fads.”

No need to describe a hunting morning in that county, it has all been done before, and best by those who have themselves known the full excitement of a splendid run. To Toney it seemed to give new life and happiness, but she never was too much excited to forget that this was only an interlude. She and her father had had many a day’s hard riding, and he had taught her so young that the word or feeling of fear did not even enter into her composition; and, besides this, Colon was a thoroughbred to be proud of. He understood the run as well or better than she did, and seemed endowed with miraculous powers of clearing everything that came in his way, whilst a soft pat from a loving hand was reward enough. It must be owned that though the masculine gender applauded, some of the hunting ladies were somewhat jealous.

”Of course,” said a pretty girl to Edward Lang, ”if you get a thorough-bred like that you can do anything, it depends on the horse.” Her own was evidently a hack of moderate powers.

He shook his head.

”I fear it isn’t all the horse, Miss Symons; Miss Whitburn has a superb seat.”

”They say she was originally a circus rider,” answered Miss Symons; ”that accounts for her splendid seat, doesn’t it?”

The Honble. Edward winced a little. He meant to propose to-day and this remark affected him disagreeably. Would his wife have to live down these queer reports?

”I never heard that report,” he said smiling, ”but if I had been the owner of the circus I would not have let Miss Whitburn leave me. Her father was a doctor in Australia.”

”Oh, Australia! They are queer people there! Descendants of convicts, aren’t they?”

At this moment the dogs were seen in full cry, the fox had been dislodged and part of the hunt came flying back across a field hard by. Toney was close behind, and at that moment Miss Symons and Edward Lang saw her and Colon leap over a gate that would have been avoided by all the ladies and most of the

men.

"By Jove! That was the most beautiful thing I have ever seen," exclaimed Edward Lang, looking towards Toney and leaving the disconsolate Miss Symons to answer her own question. To his amusement Toney drew rein and came to meet him and her uncle.

"Uncle Evas, you look as if you wanted your lunch. Wasn't it splendatious? Colon just flies!"

"Don't stop your Pegasus for me, Toney."

"But I want to. How far is it to the Towers, Mr. Lang? and then we have to get home."

"I quite agree; besides the fox has got into Red Hollow and will escape. They always do in Red Hollow." Toney smiled.

"He deserves it. But it does make one happy, doesn't it?"

The three trotted back to the Towers, Edward Lang was rather silent, wondering how he should propose. He heartily wished Toney were as easily approached as Miss Symons, who was always lifting her sad sweet eyes to his.

The breakfast was a joy to the hungry, and Lady Southbourne all amiability to Toney and Sir Evas. He had nothing to mar his enjoyment, and even managed not to think of Melina at home.

All luncheon time Edward could think of nothing more original than discussing the hunt, but as so many of the male guests would chat with Toney and all were enthusiastic over her riding, he only succeeded in carrying her off to the conservatory when the horses were at the door. It does not help matters if you feel there must be no delay over your proposal.

"You just eclipsed all the girls on the hunting field, Miss Whitburn," he began, as he picked some lovely flowers at random. "I do hope you'll come again soon. Why haven't we seen you oftener—I—I——"

Hunting and love don't dovetail easily, and Toney was sniffing hard at some flowers quite unconscious of what was coming.

"I shan't have much time, but Colon loves it; I love the exercise too, but I'm not sure about the fox!"

"You are too much of a sportswoman to join the squeamish set."

"I'm not a sportswoman but I do love riding. Pups and I had glorious days out in the Bush! I wish England didn't feel so small, but one gets used to being cooped up, and it's very good discipline."

"You are too young and too beautiful to talk of discipline," he murmured. Toney took her face out of a bush of sweet azaleas and looked at him in amazement, so he continued very quickly,

"Of course you must know that *I* think so, and that I—I—want to know if you will let me tell you I love you? Upon my word, I—do hope you'll give me a

chance. Mother is awfully fond of you too, and in fact, will you be my wife?"

Never, never had Edward found it so difficult to compose a speech worthy of the occasion. He had never made love to such a perfectly simple bright-eyed girl, impervious to flattery.

Suddenly Toney realised that she was having an offer made to her:

"Gracious stars! You don't mean you want to marry me? I'm sure you don't, because Aunt Dove says no one can want to marry me except for my money," and Toney laughed happily, "and you are ever so much too nice for that."

If only she had been shy! If only she had not mentioned money in this bald way!

"Of course it isn't for your money—but——" the lie stuck a little in his throat, looking at those wide-opened laughing eyes, "but I think I could make you happy, and you should have your own way." Toney nodded.

"Oh, yes, of course I should! That's why it's no use thinking of it. My way and your way would never be one scrap like twins. Uncle Dove says it's best to give me my head, but he declares no other man but he would put up with it! Ouf! that's over, isn't it? You don't mind one bit, I'm sure! Good-bye. I heard uncle calling. Time's up and Colon hates waiting. Good-bye," and Toney flew off like a sudden gust of wind, leaving Edward Lang to chew the cud of disappointment alone.

Lady Southbourne watched Sir Evas and Toney ride off followed by Jim, who had enjoyed himself immensely in the servants' hall, weaving yarns about his mistress and Colon.

"Well, Toney, you look very fit in spite of your high jumps," said Sir Evas, looking with pleasure at his niece, "It was a very fine run."

"And you look all the sprucer, dear old duck, but I shan't come often if——"

"If—what's the matter?"

"If I have to have an offer at the end! Mr. Lang didn't do it very easily either, got into a bog and sort of stuck there."

"Good heavens, Toney, have you refused the best match of the county?"

"I don't believe he wanted *me*, but the money. Aunt Dove sees some things awfully truly, I can tell you, uncle, so I just repeated what she said about it to him."

"Good heavens! What was that?"

"You know, that it's only my money the men will want."

"You didn't tell him to his face, Toney?"

"Why not? It's much better to be honest about it, and besides I put it gingerly. I told him it couldn't be *that*. But I did bless you when you shouted for me, couldn't have found anything else to say, either of us, not for anything! so I just ran!" Sir Evas laughed till the tears ran down his face.

”Edward Lang won’t forgive you in a hurry, besides, I daresay he does like you, and he’s not half a bad fellow, only rather extravagant, and given to——Ehem——”

”That’s it, he wants to pay his bills, that shows he’s honest, anyhow, doesn’t it? but I haven’t as much liking for him as I have for Jim. That can’t be love, can it, uncle?”

”I should surmise not.”

”But you might know, because you once made love, didn’t you?”

”Ye-es—but it was different. We weren’t romantic in those days.”

They went on in silence for a little while, then Toney remarked,

”Do you know, Uncle Evas, you might have told me about a pretty romance going on near us.”

”Whose, Toney?”

”It’s Mr. Waycott. I guess he’s awfully in love with Maud Hamilton. Don’t you think that that will be a very, very happy romance? He’s so real nice, isn’t he? and you see, she’s very poor, so it isn’t for money only, but just because he loves and admires her. We’ll give them a scrumptious wedding present, won’t we, uncle?”

”As it’s a secret better say nothing; but, as you remark, he can’t be marrying for money!”

”I expect he’ll tell me some day. He always has been so chummy with us, hasn’t he?”

”Well, yes, Lewis Waycott is a first-rate fellow. Now let’s trot home quickly.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

A GENEROUS COUSIN.

Lewis was looking at the newspaper in the dining-room one morning whilst waiting for his aunts and cousins to come down to breakfast. The postman had just left the letters when Maud entered. She looked very bright and pretty, and Lewis thought to himself what a pity it was he could not feel towards her as he did for Toney. Everything would be so easy as Maud was not an heiress. Aunt Delia’s wishes were so carefully hidden that happily Lewis did not recognise them, still he knew his aunts would easily consent. Maud held a letter in her hand.

”Oh, Lewis, imagine what has happened! Mother always said it would!”

”I did not know Aunt Delia had the spirit of prophecy.”

”She has! You know Cousin Seaton Hamilton lives in the Argentine?”

”I thought he found living rather a difficulty.”

”Mother always said he would make a fortune and think of us, and he has! So nice, too, he won’t say it’s him. Just imagine a present of two hundred pounds for each of us, to go and study music in Germany!”

Lewis laughed heartily.

”Oh, Lewis, you don’t believe it! Look for yourself!” She held out her letter which certainly contained a draft for two hundred pounds. Jeanie walked in with a similar letter in her hand.

”Isn’t it lovely? Imagine such a thing happening to us!”

”Seaton Hamilton must have found a gold mine! When was the last time he wrote to you?”

”It was just when—Jeanie was playing with——” Maud left off, she must not mention the discarded lover, but Jeanie blushed as she murmured,

”Mother is always right! She said he would remember us when he was rich, and he has.”

Mrs. Hamilton and Miss Honoria entered together, and there was a chorus from the girls whilst Lewis stood by the fire smiling.

”Really, Delia, this is the first time I have known your prophecy to come true. And he puts it nicely,” said Miss Honoria.

”I wonder he doesn’t sign his name,” said Lewis.

”So full of good feeling. He always admired you two girls so much,” said their mother.

”Poor Seaton, money was always like water in his hands.”

”Nonsense, Lewis, he never had any, so your simile is quite wrong, but I always said he *would* make money some day, and would remember the girls.”

”Let’s eat our breakfast in his honour then,” said Lewis, sitting down. ”Shall you accept it, Jeanie?”

”Of course. Mother, when can we start?”

”We must thank him first; but isn’t it tiresome there is no address except that of the Argentine lawyer?” said Maud.

”You must thank him then,” said Lewis, ”he’ll pass it on.”

”I think Lewis does not half believe,” said Jeanie.

”I believe in the money as the cheque looks good enough; to me the miracle seems to be in Seaton. He never could make money, and wasn’t very generous.”

”How could he be on nothing? Poor Seaton! I always believed in him,” repeated Mrs. Hamilton, ”but I don’t think Maud can go to Germany just now.”

They discussed this some time when suddenly Lewis exclaimed,

”Why there is Toney cantering across the park! You must tell her of your

good fortune." Lewis went to the front door to warn her. She ran up the steps leaving Jim to hold the horses, and Lewis thought he had never seen her looking so happy.

"Will you forgive me coming so early?"

"Forgive you? Why, it's a great pleasure to see you, Toney."

"Is it? Well, that is nice of you. I never know if people care——"

What an opportunity! Lewis nearly said, "I care more for you than for anybody in the world," but the fifty thousand a year popped up before his mental vision like a number on a music hall platform.

"Everybody does," he altered it to, "but I came to tell you that Maud and Jeanie are in the seventh heaven of delight over poor Seaton Hamilton's gift of two hundred pounds each. You are too generous, Toney."

"You are glad, aren't you? You won't scold me? I know you like Maud to have advantages. Keep the secret, won't you?"

"Of course, but what brings you? Has Lady Dove given you notice to quit?"

Toney laughed.

"Oh no, not yet; but she is very angry because—another *avant garde* came yesterday—such a quaint little old maid whose father was at Balaclava, and then finished up all his money before he died, and she has kept her mother for years by working at a little school, and now she is going blind."

"Did one little old maid rouse her anger?"

"Somehow it did, when it really was an honour to shake hands with Miss Phipps; but I want to know if I may have the farm at once and rig it up for interviews. I could put Miss Phipps and her mother there, and she could be sort of interviewing secretary."

"But you say she can't see?"

"Her mother could see for her and they could do it between them. Mr. Staines is so slow about the lease, and he and your lawyer are having *chassé croisé* about everything, and—if you don't mind lending it to me straight off till it's paid for we could send an army of work-people and do it up from top to toe."

Lewis looked at her bright eager face, and he felt it was also an honour to shake hands with her, but he could say nothing but,

"Of course you shall have it, only it's giving in to Lady Dove's selfishness."

"Pups said it was not seeing through other people's eyes that made us selfish. I read last night about Brother Leo's dream, and I did wish Aunt Dove could hear it, but she would think it rubbish. He saw a lot of brothers with loads on their backs trying to cross a river, some got half-way and some nearly to the shore, but in the end all were drowned; and then he saw others with no loads and they got over easily, and St. Francis explained that the loads were the riches which they could not forsake."

”Lady Dove has a pretty good heavy load, I fancy!” said Lewis rather savagely.

”I’m sure Pups hadn’t any. That’s why he got to the other side so easily. Then I may see about the farm this very day, may I?”

”Yes, this very day, I’ll come with you directly after breakfast; but come in and hear about the Argentine cousin.”

”You swear to keep the secret, won’t you, Mr. Waycott?”

”Certainly, by the seven gods if you like.”

As the two entered the dining-room, Miss Honoria thought she had never seen two faces looking so perfectly happy.

Never had Jeanie Hamilton appeared so much excited as she did now as both sisters recounted their good fortune, to which Toney listened with a smile on her lips.

”It will pay for a whole course of Herr Ludowic. Imagine such luck!”

”Jeanie is really worth the lessons, but I’m not,” said Maud humbly. ”I think she had better have it all and then she can become a professional.”

”Cousin Seaton wouldn’t like that,” said Mrs. Hamilton; ”you can keep it and see what you really want. I always said he would make money and that he had a generous heart,” and Toney put in,

”If he has made a lot I expect he finds it just a great pleasure to give it away. Now I’ll go on to the farm and take notes.”

The farm was a most picturesque place with old black woodwork outside, and within panelled rooms with lattice windows, but it all needed repainting and papering. Toney was in her element, as pencil in hand, she planned out something very pretty. She had not done before Lewis appeared, and with his help she put down the names of the tradesmen she should apply to to transform the old farm into something that would be very pretty and attractive, and where some of the future dwellers in Toney’s palace should lodge.

”I am going to call the palace ’Stone House’ after my General,” she said, ”and you must name the farm, as it is really your gift.”

”My gift when I am selling it for a handsome sum! It will be a chapel of ease I think.”

Toney laughed.

”Indeed it won’t. Everybody connected with it will work hard. Pups said hard work was like salt to dried herrings! But I do wish we could get on with the palace. It’s going to be built of stone of course, with mullion windows and airy rooms, and very hygienic and—oh, I must ride home, for Mr. Russell will be wanting me. He takes Aunt Dove’s part, and she is really quite nice to him.”

At that moment Maud made her appearance. Her mother had sent her to invite Toney to lunch, but in the back of her mind it was to report how Lewis

conducted himself with the heiress. Maud found them only busy over the names of many tradesmen.

"I'm glad you came," exclaimed Toney, but not laughing. "I want you to help Mr. Waycott to choose a name for the farm. It will be nice if you both help."

Maud was beginning to admire Toney very much; ever since the birthday party she always took her part when her mother and Jeanie abused her, and now here was Toney saying something so nice. At that moment, however, the Squire's agent came to call him away on business.

"Oh, Toney, it will be lovely to have your palace so near to Lewis, because he does take so much interest in it."

"It is very good of him and you. If you both care it will get on."

Maud wondered why Toney put it like that; happily, Mrs. Hamilton had not let Maud become acquainted with her plans, and as she herself had never seen any attention, other than cousinly, on Lewis' side, the idea of marrying him had not entered her head. In this Mrs. Hamilton had shown her talent. She knew Lewis would resent the idea of having his wife chosen for him, but some day he would fall in with the idea and all would be well, but it did no harm to prepare the matrimonial path by telling other people about it.

"Toney, dear, I want to make a confession to you," said Maud, leaning against the gate whilst Toney sat on the top of it.

"Confession to me! I'm the worst person, for if I were a Roman Catholic priest I would never listen to confessions, but absolve them all. I should feel rather mean to hear people's bad thoughts, wouldn't you?"

"Well, you must listen. I think we were all horrid about you, I don't know why, at least I think when you first came I was rather jealous of you."

"Jealous of me when I first came! Why, I was only a poor relation."

"Yes, but you could ride and play tennis, and you always said things straight out, which I never, never can!"

"It was only Pups' teaching."

"But I want to say I've changed my mind, Toney, and I do like you very much now, and will you let me help you in your work? Jeanie and I do seem to lead such useless lives. Of course now with Cousin Seaton's present it will be better. Jeanie will go and get really good lessons and be a success, and I shall give her my share, as it will be much better for her, and then I thought that perhaps you would let me help with your poor people."

"Well, now that is scrumptious of you, Maud; you're the first woman that ever wanted to help except Crumpet, and she's got her Henry. If you really mean it, you could come and help Miss Phipps here. Mr. Waycott laughs because she's nearly blind—and there'll be so much to do at first about accounts and other things."

”Let’s call it ’The Haven.’”

”Yes, and you shall visit the Haven every day. That will be beautiful, and you won’t mind being a paid official, will you, as I think paid work is more satisfactory. I’ll give you one hundred pounds a year, and it will be a real, real help.”

”Oh, Toney! but—— Yes, I won’t be proud because the money will be so useful to me. It is silly our being afraid of saying we are poor. Since I’ve known you, Toney, I see how foolish we are.”

Toney took her hand and clasped it

”That’s a token of our agreement. The Kanakas did that when I tried to make them promise to leave off a bad habit; but I think they liked clasping hands, as they so often forgot and had to begin again!” They both laughed, and Maud’s eyes began to shine with new hope and pleasure. She was going to be useful.

”And there’s another thing I want to ask you about. You know Jeanie always looks so miserable; well, it’s because she is constantly thinking of Frank Weston. She rejected him because he wasn’t a gentleman born, I used to think she was right, but now—I begin to feel it’s we that were silly and foolish. How can it matter what a man is by birth so that he’s *really nice.* You don’t know what a wonderful musician he is, and what a very, very nice man. I think Jeanie broke his heart, or nearly, and I believe she is breaking hers, as she is so cross if I mention him. Oh, Toney, can you help her? You got Miss Crump married. Lewis says it was all your doing.”

”Gracious stars! but I do love a real, real romance. Of course I’d marry a pig-sticker if he was real nice, but I’m not a Hamilton—I’m only just Toney Whitburn. But, Maud, let’s think out a solution, and thank you very, very much for being so nice to me! I’ll never be jealous of you!”

”Jealous of me!—how could you be, Toney?”

CHAPTER XIX.

A REFUGE.

The transformation of the farm seemed to take place by magic, for Toney spared neither trouble nor money. She wished to have some place where her visitors might be received with kindness and courtesy, two things which were a very uncertain quantity at Aldersfield, that is if Lady Dove was in the vicinity. Besides all this time, Toney was constantly writing to the architect about plans for ”Stone

House," and to Mr. Staines about the purchase of the land. It was in all these ways that the girl's real ability was soon visible; what she did not understand she grappled with till, as she expressed it, daylight came. Even Mr. Russell began to feel that his employer was not only a mere girl with whims and fancies, for that had been his first opinion of her. He was often surprised at the grasp she had of subjects not included in a young lady's education, and a faint spark of enthusiasm began to appear occasionally in his work. Certainly there was a great deal of secretarial work to do, but Toney's masterly scribbles on the letters to be answered were seldom at fault, though expressed in somewhat quaint fashion. She appeared to remember cases in an extraordinary manner without their being tabulated, for she possessed a royal memory, bred of early training and a perfectly healthy life.

Ten days later Toney rode off alone to the farm to see to last touches, for Miss Phipps and her mother were to come that very afternoon. The door was opened by Mrs. Thomas, who had been a cook, and Mary, now a tall girl, was to wait on the ladies, whilst Mr. Thomas was to see after the garden and make himself generally useful. As the whole family adored Toney, there was no fear of the wheels not going round easily. She had made them think they themselves were going to confer great benefits.

"I do think, Miss Tonia, everything is ready!" said Mrs. Thomas.

"And I've put flowers in the sitting-room," added Mary. "I knew you would wish them to have flowers."

"And we shall have a fine dairy, miss," added Thomas, "'twill supply all your big house when it's built."

They all accepted Miss Tonia's big house quite naturally, and they all meant to have a hand in its success.

Toney made a last inspection, her quick eyes seeing everything. Then she returned alone into the parlour to await Maud who had gone to meet Miss Phipps. Toney and Trick sat on the wide window seat looking into the garden, in which beautiful chrysanthemums were to be seen, and curled up here with Trick in her arms she had a good think.

It was very sweet of Maud to want to help her, she loved her for it, and she loved her because Lewis loved her, and the two would perfect as master and mistress of beautiful Waycott Hall with all its art treasures. It was very nice of Lewis never to have thought of money at all, as Lady Dove had formerly said he would, it showed he was what Toney had always thought him, one of King Arthur's knights. She did wish they had told her herself because she could have assured them how perfect she thought it, and she would try to be awfully nice to Maud for his sake. Of course it was his influence that had made her so much nicer, and now so willing to join in Toney's work.

As for herself, her work was marked out quite plainly, and she must think of nothing else; it would be years before it would run on all fours, and till then she must keep a watchful eye over everything and must not think of personal pleasure. Then she would be following in her father's footsteps, and doing her duty to her neighbour as General Stone had expected of her.

The bright face was quite grave as she leant against Trick's shaggy locks. The burden felt just a wee bit heavy this morning, and the future, just like a hill that went up and up a long, long way, and no top visible at this moment. Then suddenly she shook herself and Trick to get rid of these grey thoughts.

"I do wish Pups could appear to me as the Brothers of Poverello did so often to each other. I shouldn't be a bit afraid, as of course he is working hard somewhere, and of course he sees me and does care about my work. But the Brothers of Poverello were so very, very good and always praying, so that they were fit to see the saints, and I'm not."

At this moment, happily for Toney's spirits, a fly drove up and she flew to receive her first visitors. Maud was there looking quite transformed from the discontented girl she had been into a woman with a purpose.

"Here we are, Toney, and Mrs. and Miss Phipps are very cold and tired after their journey."

Then all Toney's sadness flew away like a bird of evil omen, and she was once more the joyous creature that scattered delight about her. Mary Thomas was helping the ladies as if they were princesses, and Thomas was dealing with their boxes, and Mrs. Thomas was saying that tea was ready in the dining-room. Mrs. Phipps was a bustling, kind old lady devoted to her nearly blind daughter and telling her how beautiful everything was, and Miss Phipps was as cheerful as possible, talking and praising everything.

"The work will be quite easy," said Toney, "and Miss Hamilton will look in every day to help you, and there are four spare rooms for anyone who wants to come and have a real good time, and you will make them very happy I know, and Mary is just a treasure."

So the party sat down to tea, and they made Mrs. Phipps take the head of the table because this was her home now, and she was to entertain everybody who came, and she looked quite capable of it, and already vastly proud of her position. And yet a month ago the workhouse had been staring them in the face, because all their little savings had gone. But they did not feel like paupers here, they were to work hard so as to make less fortunate folks as happy as they were.

At last Toney rose and said good-bye, and Mrs. Phipps murmured some very grateful words, but Miss Phipps just took Toney's hand and kissed it, and Toney felt a tear on her hand, so she ran away, quickly followed by Maud.

They were going down by the lane across to Waycott Hall, and for a few

minutes they were silent, then Toney exclaimed,

”Gracious stars! Maud, aren’t my Poverelli just ready-made saints, and it’s so dreadful their thanking me, and I can’t explain to them exactly how it’s really nothing to do with me, but with General Stone, and really also Mr. Waycott, who let me have all this land and this lovely farm, and you too for helping me. Do you know it’s so awfully nice you two being sort of bound up together in a work.”

”We two?”

”Yes, you know, you and—your cousin.”

”Oh, Lewis, you mean. I do think he is so very—I suppose I oughtn’t to say so because he’s my cousin—but he has altered so much, and thinks such a lot about his people now, I can’t understand it.”

”I always think he is one of Arthur’s knights, and not a bit proud or stuck-up, though of course he might be, living as he does at Waycott Hall, which is so beautiful. I like to think of—the future.”

Toney paused, she dared not go on as Maud wouldn’t tell her straight out.

”Well, I am thinking of the present, Toney! You can’t think how the idea of working has done me good. I told mother that Lewis had sold you the farm, and she is quite pleased at my helping you. I didn’t tell her about your giving me a salary for it, as she has old-fashioned ideas, but you know we are poor, and I do want it.”

”Of course I know.” Toney said to herself, ”She wants to save for her trousseau, and it’s quite right of her to work for it.”

”I do mean to be in earnest this time,” continued Maud, ”looking back I never seem to have done anything in downright real earnest as you have, not even my music—Jeanie was the cleverest, and I knew I could never be first-rate as she will be if she works.”

”But now of course you will have a real reason for bucking up. Wanting to be a little like Pups helps me awfully.”

”My father wasn’t like yours, he somehow spent all our money.”

”But you will want to be like your cousin,” said Toney, making an effort, trying to rub this idea well into Maud. Of course she must become worthy to be the mistress of Waycott Hall!

”Yes, seeing Lewis so much in earnest is a real help. By the way, Toney, as I was walking here I met Mr. Lang, and I asked him why he hadn’t been to tabulate lately!”

”Did you? He’s had enough of it,” said Toney, pretending Trick was lost and needed a loud whistle.

”He seemed rather low, and said you didn’t want him any more, and—he really is a nice fellow, Toney. Do you know that someone told mother that he wanted to marry you! I wonder if he does?”

”Not *me*!” said Toney laughing. ”Aunt Dove is quite right, no one would care to marry me, only General Stone’s money. I’m not sweet and pretty like you and Silvia Hales, and I’m not anything of a lady, and your mother sort of sniffs at me I know!” Toney laughed very happily.

”We were brought up to think ladylike ways covered all our sins. I see it differently now, and I don’t mean to be a slave of that idea any longer.”

Toney suddenly pulled a newspaper cutting out of her pocket.

”Look, Maud, I want you to read this. I’ve got an idea.” She handed Maud an account of the splendid reception given to the great musician, Frank Weston, in London.

”How interesting! He is a real genius. I hope Jeanie won’t see it. I believe she loves him all the time, and it’s that which makes her miserable, but—you know—his parents once had a shop.”

”So did Lord Courthouse at home. I used to help him a bit when he was hard put to it.”

”But then he was Lord Courthouse!”

”Now that’s right down silly, isn’t it? Two people do just the same things, and yet because one is born a lord he can do it and people praise him, and the other man whose father was an honest tradesman is sniffed at.”

”Yes, it is foolish. I wish you could see him, Toney. He has a beautiful face and perfect manners, because he is so earnest and straight to the point. But Jeanie refused him. I’m sure he would never, never ask her again, and there are no end of girls who would marry him. I wonder he isn’t married by this time.”

Toney stopped still to laugh.

”I must own up, Maud, I’ve asked him to come and play at Aldersfield. He thinks I’m a great lover of music, as I’ve offered him *carte blanche* as to price! and you know, Maud, I don’t know one note from another! How I shall sit out the concert I don’t know, only it’s going to be one of my romances.”

”What do you mean, Toney?” Maud looked distressed. ”Has he accepted?”

”Yes, to-day. Mr. Russell is sending invitations for a concert at Aldersfield House—supposed to be Aunt Dove’s—all over the place, and you’ll get one. Now, mind, no refusals—and—I’ll do the rest.”

”Whatever did you have to pay? He nearly always refuses private people, he hates to be patronised. But you should see him. When he has his violin under his chin he is just inspired and you feel—lifted up almost to heaven. Oh, why did Jeanie refuse him? I know I never could have!”

Maud laughed and Toney joined her.

”You were destined for something better, but I am scheming how to do it.”

”Toney! was it really all for Jeanie? If she knew he was going to be at the concert she would not come.”

”Well, mums the word. They’ll see each other comfortably at Aldersfield. I haven’t invented any more yet!—— Isn’t it perfect, that little party at the farm and that sweet blind woman who has worked all her life will be very kind to my *avant garde* folk.”

”I wish you had a romance of your own, Toney. If Mr. Lang——”

”Gracious stars! I hope he won’t. Just imagine me as the future Lady Southbourne having to do the civil to the county, besides—he would want my money.”

”But you would like him to have it.”

”No, I shouldn’t! You see, Maud, it’s dedicated.”

”But you could do good with it together.”

”But *I* might be out of it, besides I couldn’t love him. I’m just going to be an old maid and look after the declining years of Aunt Dove and Uncle Evas! By the way, Aunt Dove has had a serious difference with Miss Grossman. I do hope she won’t go. She is her discipline.”

”I don’t think anyone can stand it long,” said Maud smiling.

”My Chum stood it fifteen years; ouf! Good-bye, Maud, and keep my secret. I’m going to have a good think about it,” and Toney disappeared, and Maud was left to grieve over her sister’s dead romance.

CHAPTER XX.

SHAPING A ROMANCE.

Jeanie and Maud Hamilton shared a bedroom at Waycott Hall, and out of this opened a pretty sitting-room where they practised their music and wrote their letters.

The next morning Jeanie was reading an invitation written especially to her by Toney. Maud had brought it up to her. It ran thus:—

”MY DEAR JEANIE,

”Aunt Dove is giving a concert here next week. Will you come as you are so musical? A violinist is coming and perhaps you will like to play too afterwards? Aunt Dove says she is very musical, so she likes the idea of collecting the neighbourhood to hear really good music. I shan’t know if it’s good or bad. Will you

and your sister come and help me, and stop the night here, as I don't know what to say to musical people, and as you are soon going to Germany you might like to discuss your masters with them. Please come. Aunt Dove says she loves Dvorak, but Uncle Evas declares she has never heard anything by him. Anyhow, bring your violin and you can play when the visitors have gone.

"YOUR AFFECTIONATE TONEY."

"What a long letter about this concert," said Jeanie. "Why can't Toney send out proper cards of invitation like other people?"

"She thinks you are a great player and sends you a special note. It will be nice to go and spend the night there, won't it?"

Maud looked out of the window and not at her sister. She felt very nervous over Toney's new idea!

"No, I don't think so. It will be very tiresome. Mr. Russell is musical, but you know, Maud, the others have no music in them. It's dreadful playing to people who only hear a noise, isn't it? Besides, I expect they have got hold of some second-rate fiddler. I would much rather stay at home. You had better go."

"I do think we ought both to go. Toney is so anxious to give you pleasure before you go away."

"I hate Toney's ostentatious lavishness. Mother says she will ruin the neighbourhood." Maud blushed.

"Oh, Jeanie, aren't we very horrid about Toney? I wish—— Well, anyhow, I shall go. Most likely they will have some great man, and you'll be sorry afterwards."

There was only one great man in Jeanie's estimation, and of course he wouldn't come to a private house.

"I want to work hard till I go away, so inferior concerts are waste of time."

"What's the good of all your work if mother hates you earning money. If you played at this concert it would do you good. I don't see why we shouldn't work like other poor people."

"Mother expects us to marry," said Jeanie, "but *I* never shall."

"Oh, Jeanie, I really believe you—still love Frank Weston!" Maud expected something dreadful to happen but only silence followed.

"You were just made for each other and he worshipped you."

"He's forgotten me now," said Jeanie bitterly.

"Of course he can't forget the—the snubbing he got."

"I want to practise," said Jeanie, and seizing her violin she drowned further remarks in wild melody. Her sore heart could find relief only in music. Yes, she

knew well enough now she was fretting her life away in useless regrets.

Maud crept away with a smile on her lips. Would Toney succeed? Frank Weston did not know that the Hamiltons were staying near Aldersfield House, he could never guess he would meet face to face his old love who had used him so ill. If he knew, Maud felt sure he would at once throw up the engagement, for he could afford to please himself.

Maud seized her hat and went off to the Haven as she did every morning now. It seemed the nicest hour of the day, for there it really was a haven of peace. The Phipps were always cheerful, always so happy over every little flower they found in their path.

Most mornings also Toney met her there. She was arranging for three new inmates, the deaf Captain Grant and Mr. and Mrs. Harris, and the Phipps were full of plans for their comfort. Toney had indeed chosen well. To-day, when their business was done, Toney seized on Maud.

"Come along and lunch with us, I want to show you all the arrangements for our romance. I do hope it will succeed, only you must help me, Maud."

Then Maud related what had taken place that morning.

"That is all on the right road. Aunt Dove is delighted because all 'our county friends' are coming. Can't think why lords and ladies please her so much. I never can learn her table of degrees." "There is Lewis," exclaimed Maud. "Oh, Toney, do tell him."

Toney was not surprised. Of course Lewis Waycott knew Maud went every day to the Haven, and of course he sort of happened to be often in the way. He shook hands as he said,

"So, Toney, we are all booked for your concert to-morrow. Who is the star you are preparing for us? Nobody knows!"

"It's Aunt Dove's concert, please; she is so smiling to-day, and she and Mr. Russell have been discussing all the musicians beginning with Tubal Cain. Maud has promised to pinch me at intervals in case I go to sleep. Only 'Sound the loud timbrel' sort of thing keeps me awake, but I guess I'll keep awake to-morrow because——"

"Why, pray?"

"You are safe I know, Mr. Waycott, and I want you both to know."

"Both?" asked Lewis.

"Yes, you and Maud of course, you will both be so pleased—if it succeeds."

"What is this surprise, Toney? I am a little nervous," and Lewis laughed.

"It's a romance—about Jeanie. You know, Mr. Waycott, that she loved someone once, but she chucked him up because his father kept a store somewhere."

"Oh! Jeanie's romance! You don't mean to say, Toney——"

”Yes, I do. I’ve got him, and no one knows but you two.”

”Knows what?

”Don’t laugh please. He’s coming, and all the musical people will be in a seventh heaven, and then Jeanie will come in looking beautiful and sad—and he will see her and she will see him—and——”

”Good heavens! Toney! What do you think will happen then?”

”He’ll speak through his violin. Books always say that, though that language would be of no use to me!”

”I don’t think a musician could make you an offer, Toney,” said Maud laughing, ”you would hurt his tenderest feelings.”

”Anyhow, I wouldn’t chuck him up because his parents kept a store.”

”And what will happen next, Toney?” said Lewis, ”pray tell us.”

”That’s what I can’t quite settle in my own mind. They are both going to stay in the house to-morrow, and I think there must be sort of opportunities——”

”It’s too delicious, but I think they will both send for a carriage and depart.”

”Together?” said Toney laughing. ”Oh, I hope they will do that.”

”No, on opposite sides!” answered Lewis.

”I shall work hard and see. Chum is coming with her Henry as they are both musical, and I want to introduce her to some nice people. Clergy folk want rubbing up.”

”Poor Mrs. Faber, she goes through a good deal for your sake, Toney!”

”But you’ll just both help me, won’t you, and make people talk and introduce anybody to anybody. It takes too much time to remember who may speak to who, according to Aunt Dove, that it’s better to forget it all.”

”Poor county! You are going against its most cherished ideas,” said Lewis, secretly glorying in Toney’s courage.

”I can’t help it. Mr. Russell is studying the Peerage this morning and he’ll cover up my mistakes. Anyhow, I may count on you two? Now I’m off as there are several things to think out for the great romance! First I am going to meet *him* at the station and drive him home alone. Good-bye. You’ll have a nice walk home.”

Toney disappeared swiftly as usual, and Lewis walked a few minutes in silence by his cousin, considering why Toney classed them together so pointedly. Maud had not noticed it, her mind was full of another idea.

”Oh, Lewis, I believe Mr. Lang is in love with Toney! Wouldn’t it be lovely if she became chief lady in the county!”

”Edward Lang! What nonsense! Who said it?” Lewis dug his stick into the ground rather savagely.

”I put two and two together.”

”Do you think Toney would—marry him?”

”If she could be persuaded he cared about her and not her money.”

”But does he?”

”I think you are prejudiced against him. He is rather a nice fellow.”

”I wish you girls wouldn’t use the word nice for everything,” said Lewis somewhat crossly; but Maud’s answer was cut short by the appearance of her mother as they walked up on to the terrace of Waycott Hall.

”I’ve just persuaded Jeanie to accept Antonia’s invitation. I hear the county is coming and they expect something good, but no one knows. Do you, Maud?”

”Toney wants it to be a secret,” said Maud.

”Ah, I see, you two always take Toney’s side. Maud, what a colour you have. Morning walks agree with you, don’t you think so, Lewis?”

Lewis looked up and noticed how pretty Maud was looking.

”Maud is developing into a beauty, aunt!”

”You silly boy! I don’t want my girls to be beauties.”

”Then you must find out some way of stopping it! Jeanie’s pensive air is most becoming, and Maud——”

”Ah! poor Jeanie, I think Germany will cure her low spirits.”

Lewis remarked he had to go to town on business that afternoon but he could be back for the concert. He wanted to get rid of his ill-temper. Maud’s unfortunate remark had been the cause of it. Would someone else seize the prize he was too proud to win—and would that someone else be Edward Lang? Certainly fine feelings would not stop him trying to grasp at wealth.

Maud was dreadfully restless that afternoon and insisted on Jeanie turning out her wardrobe to see what suitable dress she should wear.

”Your pale blue dress is pretty,” remarked Maud. ”Oh, we have both worn those pale blue dresses till people must know them.”

”There is no time to get a new dress, I’m afraid.”

”I shan’t waste a penny of my money on dress and mother says she can’t afford it.”

”Then your white muslin, Jeanie dear.”

”I don’t feel like white muslin. I shall wear my black dress. No one will notice us, Maud.”

The sisters stood rather sadly looking over the beautiful park from the Elizabethan windows. Nothing is more depressing than to be surrounded by wealthy friends and yet to be too poor to take the position you are entitled to. Suddenly the butler entered.

”A gentleman to see you, Miss Hamilton.”

Their Aunt Honoria and their mother had gone out to pay calls; they were alone.

Jeanie flushed. ”A gentleman to see her” made her heart beat, but the gen-

tleman that entered was quite unknown. He bowed very politely and looked at the sisters critically.

"Excuse me, ladies, but five minutes will suffice."

Five minutes! The sisters looked at each other in dismay. Had Miles let in a lunatic?

The stranger looked at a letter he held in his hand.

"Surely I am not mistaken. Two Miss Hamiltons at Waycott Hall. The order to be executed immediately. I shall take the next train back to town and twenty individuals are put on at once on each dress; by to-morrow at ten o'clock you will have two creations. If you will permit me." A yard measure came swiftly out of the gentleman's pocket, and before the astonished girls could speak, their measures were taken and the gentleman bowed low and retired.

"Oh!" exclaimed Jeanie, "it's Aunt Honoria! She heard me say I had nothing to wear! But she might have asked us what colour we wanted."

"As she didn't, we had better say nothing about it. Perhaps she sent the measures and the gentleman wanted to make sure," said Maud. A faint idea had entered her head, but she would not for the world have told Jeanie.

"Yes, you are right—I must say it's nice of her. I should have been ashamed to play in that old blue or white muslin!—Not that it matters much."

When Aunt Honoria came in she found Maud waiting for her.

"Did you—order a dress to be sent to us, Aunt Honoria?"

"A dress? No, dear. Your mother said you had some that would do nicely, as there will be such a crowd, she hears."

"Would you mind if some dresses come not saying anything—I'll tell you why another day. It's a surprise for Jeanie."

"Oh! indeed! But I can't accept the credit—who is the donor?"

"Please, please, accept thanks if—you don't mind just for one day——"

Maud retired to solitude thinking to herself.

"I'm sure it's Toney, it's part of her plan! She's ordered something lovely for Jeanie and couldn't leave me out! It would break her heart if Jeanie refused her gift. Dear Toney's romance must not be spoilt."

CHAPTER XXI.

PLAYING WITH FIRE.

”Uncle Evas, I want you particularly,” said Toney next morning after lunch.

”Your aunt does too. She and Mr. Russell are tabulating guests. I hear some great man sleeps here to-night.”

”I’m just off to meet him, but you will be very nice to him, uncle, at dinner to-night, won’t you, and mind you see he takes in Jeanie Hamilton. They will talk of music all the time and save us a lot of trouble.”

”Very well, but your aunt will pair him off with Lady Southbourne. He seems to be no end of a swell. For my part I never can find a word to say to these geniuses.”

”Dear, ducky uncle, they are none of them so nice as you are, gospel truth, but I wish you were just a wee bit curious.” The heart of Sir Evas felt warmed. He realised now what an immense difference Toney’s love made in his life. To him it seemed as if he had been in a grave till her arrival, and then had slowly crept out of it.

”Curious, eh? Well, so I am.”

”You never asked me why I wanted you particularly.”

”I’m a trifle nervous when you do!” he answered laughing.

”You always were a bit of a coward, weren’t you? Well, I’ll tell you. You must let Maud Hamilton go in with Mr. Waycott, I think it’s all right.”

”Good Lord! what’s all right?”

”Why, they are! I wonder they don’t announce it, but I expect Miss Honoria doesn’t like it.”

”Like what?”

”You know! I think they’re engaged now. He nearly always comes to meet her at the Haven.”

”Toney, your romantic nature should be curbed. I don’t believe a word of it.”

Toney looked up with wide-opened eyes.

”That’s just like a man—awfully opaque. Well, I’m off, I’m going to drive the motor to the station, and come back in the dog-cart.”

”You’ll take Jim?”

”No, I’m going quite alone. I want to make friends with the great musician.”

”I say, Toney, I don’t think that’s quite *comme-il-faut.* Now you’re a lady of property you mustn’t be quite so—so——”

”Oh, Uncle Evas, you do disappoint me! It’s Mr. Russell that is spoiling your natural disposition. You’re downright snobby! What harm can I do to a poor stranger that comes here to give us pleasure? He’s not a wild beast. Good-bye, and wish me luck.”

”You won’t let—your aunt see you, will you, Toney?”

”No, you bet!” and Toney flew off laughing heartily.

”Can’t get the fear of Aunt Dove out of his constitution, poor darling, sort of chronic disease,” she said to herself.

Happily the day turned into a dull drizzle, and the county magnates stayed indoors, or they might have seen a flying machine guided by the heiress, dashing up to the station. Toney timed herself always to be exact, with no time to spare. Her face was radiant. She had settled her plan of campaign, and as she walked up and down well ”reefed in” with a serge coat and skirt of the simplest description, no one would have guessed that she was the envy of all the impoverished aristocrats of the county. She looked more cheerful than she felt, however. ”There’s many a slip between the cup and the lip,” and that tiresome proverb would float about on the surface of Toney’s brain.

The train flustered in with a great show of consequentiality, the slow porters had on the look of ”Take it easy, pray,” as Toney ran up and down looking for the great man, whose father had once kept a shop. For a moment she thought he had failed to appear, then from the other end of the platform a tall man with a very remarkable face came slowly towards her. He carried a violin case, and a man-servant followed him laden with other luggage.

Toney knew at once this was her man, and she seized the porter.

”Mr. Smith, will you please get a fly and put that gentleman and all the luggage in it. I’m driving the other gentleman in the dog-cart.”

The porter touched his hat with a grin, he was not accustomed to being called Mr. Smith, nor to hear a man-servant called a gentleman.

Then Toney began her campaign.

”How do you do? I know you are Mr. Frank Weston, because—there’s no one else, is there—I’ve come to drive you home. I’m Toney Whitburn, so now we’re introduced. Lady Dove’s giving the party, but I take all the trouble. There’s a fly for your man, and if you want the violin with you I’ll put it behind us.”

Frank Weston had been much dissatisfied with himself for accepting the munificent private offer for playing in a private house. The money had tempted him, as he had lately heard of a broken-down violinist who had nothing but the workhouse before him, and he had infinite pity for failure and poverty. For himself—now his parents were well provided for—he cared nothing at all. The one romance of his life had failed. He had loved once and once only. Jeanie Hamilton had touched his heart with her beauty and her talent, and strange to say her pride, but when her mother had told him her daughter refused his love, and had intimated that their social positions were too far removed, the genius had lifted his head more proudly than any aristocrat.

”I offered her my heart and my music,” he had said, ”they are worth more than anything she may possess.”

”Yes, yes—you—and your genius but—your people are not our people,” Mrs.

Hamilton had murmured with the softness of a purring pussy.

Frank Weston's face had turned paler if possible than usual, and he walked away without answering. The iron had entered into his soul. But in spite of this he still loved his first love, though her name had never again passed his lips, and he hated other women because of her. No other should spurn him, and though many had wished to marry him, he had never asked any. His music was the gainer, for after that people said Frank Weston was inspired in his pathetic movements, and now Toney was going to play with fire.

Frank Weston's face was one not to be easily forgotten. His features seemed to be cut in alabaster, his hair reached his coat collar in soft curling fashion, but there was no affectation about him. He was far too true a genius to descend to small advertisements. Music was his only interest in life, but even a dreamy genius stood no chance with Toney. She piloted him out of the station and both stood by the side of the dog-cart. Frank Weston looked round hopelessly. He could not drive, and looking down at the slight girlish figure he doubted if she could, when he saw Jim holding the thorough-bred. Toney answered his look.

"Oh, yes, I'll drive you. There's a dry place for your violin. You can trust me. This is my own horse and we understand each other. It's awfully good of you to come to us. You don't usually, do you, but I did so particularly want you." Frank Weston gradually took in the situation.

"My agent said a Miss Whitburn—wanted——"

Toney jumped in and he had to follow.

"Yes, that's all right, that's me. When your agent said, 'It will only be a big price that will tempt him,' I said, 'Go ahead!'" Toney spoke so simply that Mr. Weston smiled.

"I may as well own it at once," he said. "It was the money that tempted me. There is a poor friend of mine whose career is cut short in a terrible manner. He has creeping paralysis coming on from over-work. He's too young for the charitable societies to come to his help, so——"

"So you are going to do it! Oh, isn't that lovely! I am glad you told me, I'll just double the fee if that will set him up."

Frank stared at this unusually generous girl.

"Oh, but you are already paying a very heavy fee for—a very short time. I expect you are one of the amateurs who have all the fine feelings of the professional—finer often, because unconnected with public recognition." He lifted his head and smiled, then became conscious that Miss Whitburn was flying along the country roads at a furious pace.

"Oh, gracious stars! don't think so for a moment about me! I don't know one note from another, but I've got a friend who feels all that, at least I suppose so. I do want you to be—sort of friendly with her, because I've got it all up for

her."

"All for your friend? How extraordinary!" said the genius, "but, forgive me for asking, is your horse running away? I'm no good with horses." There was a touch of anxiety in his voice. He heard a rippling laugh near him.

"Don't you like it? I'll pull him in, but it's the pace I like! Suppose, Mr. Weston, you were driving with your—say your intended, would you be afraid for her?"

Mr. Weston turned towards Toney with a look of dismayed surprise.

"I—have not—got one—I really can't say."

"I'm awfully glad, I half feared you might be engaged, you know—— People say you are tremendously run after. If you had been, of course I should have asked *her* too. You don't mind my saying this, do you? I'm only an Australian girl, and out there we don't mince matters so much as people do here, and I once heard that—that you were going to marry a girl and that she——" Toney cleared her throat. She glanced at the genius whose marble-cut face was lifted towards the sky with a hard strange look on it. No one had ever dared to speak to him about that episode since it happened, and here was a strange girl introducing the subject! The very boldness of it put him off his guard.

"You heard rightly, Miss Whitburn; the only woman I ever loved jilted me, because I was not as nobly born as she was, and now——"

"I expect she's just mad with herself that she was so silly! A hundred to one it was her mother, sort of old pussy cat I shouldn't wonder. Why didn't you ask her again? I should if I were a man! I would not take no, not for Joe!" Toney was so excited that she flicked Colon with her whip and he, to show his surprise, suddenly reared and then bolted forward. The genius turned towards his terrible driver in mute appeal.

"It's all right, indeed it is, Colon's as gentle as a child, but I was thinking so much about your young—lady, that I touched him with the whip. He's awfully proud and that was his way of remonstrating. Here's the gate—— Will you hold Colon a minute, or——"

"Let me open the gate," said the genius, suiting the action to the words; not for the world would he have held that horse, his precious Stradivarius was behind him. Toney smiled, but indeed Colon stood quite quietly whilst she remarked,

"I told you he's like a lamb—but you will let me help about your friend? It will give me so muck pleasure, and I shan't feel this concert is wasted if you do."

"If I let you pay twice over?" said the genius, now quite under the spell of this extraordinary heiress, whose generosity was as surprising as her driving.

"If you and my friend don't enjoy this concert—"

"I shall do my best for your friend after your great kindness. Is it—a man?" He believed it was Toney's fiancé as her mind ran on that subject, and he felt in

a soft mood, though he could not have told why.

”A man! I should think not! Mr. Russell—he helps me with my letters—he’s musical, but then he doesn’t think much of me!”

”His taste must be bad,” said Frank, actually making a compliment. ”He would have more confidence in you if you drove him back from the station.” Frank Weston had forgiven her and Toney realised it with joy.

”Ouf! Here’s Aldersfield House, I’m glad the drive is over. Will you promise, even if you don’t like my friend, to take her in to dinner and to talk music to her? She’ll love that. The other people wouldn’t understand it—and you won’t try it on me, will you, or on Uncle Evas? He’d want to be polite, but he wouldn’t know what to answer.”

”I think you can trust me, Miss Whitburn, not to bore the unmusical. I shall do my best to please your lady friend, because all the time I shall see Arthur Mullins’ face when he hears of his luck.”

”That’s all right! I’m awfully relieved. You’ll like to go to your room now at once, won’t you, and rest? I’ll send you up some tea, and then you won’t have to answer foolish questions.”

”That would be most kind,” he said gratefully. How very extraordinarily thoughtful this young heiress seemed to be.

Toney was saying to herself, ”Then they won’t meet till dinner-time, and she’ll just be looking so beautiful that——”

”Gollywogs!” she exclaimed as she jumped down and Jim came running up, ”There’s visitors just come. Jim, take Mr. Weston in by the garden door, and tell them to take him to his room and give him tea.”

In this way Toney smuggled in the genius and she herself stepped into the hall to find the two Hamiltons there taking their wraps off.

”I am glad you are come early for tea. I’m sure Aunt Dove will want some help about the Peerage. I’m no use at all. If a man has got all his legs and arms, and he has a nice face and lots of genius, I don’t care how he came into the world.”

Maud laughed, and as Jeanie walked towards the drawing-room Toney seized her.

”Maud, he’s come, he’s in his room, they won’t meet till dinner.”

”Oh, Toney!” gasped Maud, ”but do you know anything about some lovely dresses that came for us this morning?”

Toney laughed.

”Don’t betray me! Pups used to say a general overlooks nothing to win the

victory."

CHAPTER XXII.
FAILURE.

A few select guests were expected at Aldersfield for an early dinner party before the concert. Lady Dove was radiant. She was giving a grand party at which all the honour and none of the expense was going to fall on her. Even Miss Grossman had come in for smiles as she read a novel whilst her ladyship's hair was arranged, and for once punctuality was rewarded, for Lady Southbourne arrived very early with many apologies, which she hoped dear Lady Dove would accept. Her husband and son had gone to town on business and might be a little late, so she had come on first and they would come later in a dog-cart. Lady Dove was charmed.

"It is so kind of you, Lady Southbourne, to come at all this foggy evening. I am always ready early in case a guest does come. My husband and Antonia are usually late, but of course to-day there has been a good deal to arrange. We have turned the barn into a concert-room, and it is really very pretty. I wanted all our friends of North Downshire to come. The country has been a little dull lately."

"Miss Whitburn has told me your party would be a great success. The star's name is a secret, I hear."

"Yes, one of Antonia's little secrets! Of course I never interfere with her plans now she is of age, but I must say I feel rewarded when I look back on the training of the wild colt she was when we first took her, little dreaming of the result."

"It must be an immense pleasure for you—though a girl with money is a responsibility, isn't she?"

"Ah! no one knows how many anxious thoughts I have had on that subject."

"And that was what I really wanted to ask you about, dear Lady Dove. I want your—help and sympathy."

For the great Lady Southbourne to be asking her help and sympathy made Lady Dove happy.

"You can always rely on my help, indeed you can! Mutual help is our greatest duty."

"I need not say that if you have a niece, I have a son to have anxious

thoughts about—and I want you to know a little secret."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, but I don't doubt Miss Whitburn has already confided in you. Edward has proposed to her, but——"

"Oh, what an honour for Antonia, but, indeed, Lady Southbourne, yours is a family any girl might be proud to enter! Of course much above her in rank."

"Edward has no foolish ideas about birth, almost a Republican on that subject, but—I see that you do not know Miss Whitburn refused him and Edward is heart-broken."

"Antonia refused the——" Lady Dove gasped.

"She is young, she was startled, but with your help and advice she might—reconsider it. Edward is more bent on it than ever."

If Lady Southbourne had been sitting in the palace of truth she would have said her dear boy had just lost a large sum on the turf.

"Trust me, Lady Southbourne, you shall have my influence, and Antonia owes us so much. I hardly think she will reject so much happiness."

"Thank you a thousand times."

At this moment other guests began to arrive, but where was Antonia and the great man, and where were the Hamiltons? Happily Sir Evas was working hard and making everybody welcome regardless of their place in the peerage.

Edward Lang and his father came in time, belying the fears of Lady Southbourne, and Lady Carew and her correct husband followed. An Honourable or two, and a Colonel and his wife, made up the party of people worthy of meeting each other. Toney had only begged for the Hamiltons, Mr. Hales and Lewis Waycott, but this latter Lady Dove had refused as "that tiresome Miss Waycott would have to be included." For the concert everybody was coming, and a supper was to end this grand party.

But Toney was too much occupied to give a thought to the county magnates. Rose, who came to help her to put on her white dress, was not allowed to stay long.

"I'm all right, Rose; I want you to go to the Miss Hamiltons' room and beg them to come here before going down. I've got them some lovely flowers."

"There's some come for you too, Miss Toney," said Rose, holding out a lovely bunch of white lilies. "It was left at the back door, and was specially to be given to you."

"Oh!" exclaimed Toney. "How lovely; I wonder who sent them. You see, I haven't a young man, Rose."

"Cook said as how you ought to have one, Miss Toney; specially you being so rich now."

Toney paused as she held the flowers lovingly; she always had reverenced

flowers. Oh, dear! even the servants associated money with love. It was dreadful! Then she resolutely thrust away thoughts of self, and looked at her two bunches of roses. Then, pinning in her lilies, she waited a little anxiously. Time was flying. She had arranged with the footman to call Mr. Weston at the last moment, and she must get the Hamiltons down before he came. There was a knock at the door, and Jeanie Hamilton stood in the doorway, a vision of beauty in a soft cloud of pale blue silk and chiffon, whilst Maud looked nearly as much transformed in rose.

"Oh!" exclaimed Toney, "how just awfully beautiful you look, Jeanie! May I say it? and here are some flowers I got uncle to steal for you! Let me pin them on."

Jeanie could not help admiring herself, and her spirits rose. Never had she had such a dress.

"Wasn't it generous of Aunt Honoria? It's the most beautiful dress I have ever seen; and, look at Maud, isn't hers pretty too? They must have cost a small fortune."

"You both look perfect."

"We must tell you about the gentleman who took our measure," exclaimed Maud, trying to hide her nervousness by talking. "But, oh, Toney, look at the time; we ought to go down."

"Yes. We'll all go together, and if you go in first Aunt Dove's big-wigs will be so struck of a heap with you that they'll forget me. They do seem so very extra civil to me now, all because I've got so much tin. Oh! they don't know the trouble of it; but in any case I don't stick bank-notes on my clothes, so I can't see why I'm more interesting than I was before. Come, let's run! No, you can't with those clo'."

But all the same, the three girls did run, seeing an anxious look on the butler's face as they entered the hall.

The door was thrown open for them, and, as Toney had predicted, the two Hamiltons made a sensation, especially Jeanie, whose face was so full of pathos, and who looked especially beautiful. Toney crept in behind them, but was seen by her aunt.

"Toney, how dreadfully late you are! The musician—what's his name—has not come down yet. Tell Thomas to fetch him at once." Toney nodded.

"It's all right, Aunt Dove; I've done it. You know musical people are not like others."

Sir Evas knew he had to obey orders, and got hold of Jeanie. He held the list of the other pairs in his hand, but several gentlemen came up to talk to this vision of beauty. Maud kept close to Toney; she could not talk, she could hardly see. What would Jeanie do? and what would he do? Why had Toney done this?

How terrible; suppose there was a scene; suppose——

The door flew open and Mr. Frank Weston was announced, but Jeanie was at the other end of the room and did not hear the name.

Toney flew up to the genius and introduced him right and left till dinner was announced; then she paused.

"You remember about—my friend, Mr. Weston?" The genius had bowed right and left in rather a formal manner. He was so often introduced that he barely listened to the names of the people introduced. He was thinking of Miss Whitburn. The big-wigs were pairing off, and solemnly marched away like a regiment of newly-trained recruits, when Sir Evas suddenly introduced him to a lady whose name he did not hear. He held out his arm mechanically; ladies were nothing to him, and he only saw a beautiful dress. A symphony was floating through his brain, he was only acting in a dream, till suddenly he felt the arm he held tremble. He was recalled to earth. They were crossing the hall, and the noise of voices was great Various scraps of conversation about hunting and the weather reached him, and his own name—the great Frank Weston; what a surprise, no one expected him! He looked down and exclaimed—he knew not what.

"Let me go away," she murmured, "you——"

"Impossible! Miss Hamilton, pray remember we are both guests—no one knows. If my presence is so—distasteful to you——"

"I did not know."

"Neither did I—but this chance meeting might have happened anywhere."

"Yes——" Jeanie straightened herself, and they both walked on in silence. They were shown their places, and Frank Weston glanced at the name on his other side; Mrs. Arbuthnot. Jeanie had Colonel Arbuthnot on her other side. They need not speak to each other. How terrible! Jeanie searched for Maud, but she was on the same side and could not be seen. Her heart beat so fast she could hardly speak. She looked for Toney, someone to appeal to. Was she near Frank? Yes, Frank was here, sitting beside her; but of course he hated her. Of course, he was wishing himself miles away; of course, he would *never* forgive her, never, never love her again. Never—never, she repeated to herself.

Toney's eyes, which saw so much, were looking at them; she could see they were silent, and she noticed they each turned to their other neighbours. Oh! her plan was failing, had failed, and she had risked everything on this dinner. Maud was looking deadly pale, but in spite of all this the talk was loud, drowning nearly everything. Mr. Hales at her side broke the spell.

"You are very preoccupied this evening, and yet you have secured the one man everyone wants to hear," he said. "Are you not satisfied?" His voice had a new tone in it, which made Toney look up wonderingly.

"Oh, yes, I am preoccupied; so would you be if you had conspired tremen-

dously and your conspiracy was no good."

"Indeed!"

"Mr. Hales, help me! Mr. Frank Weston isn't talking one scrap to Jeanie Hamilton."

"He has come to play the violin, and I daresay he is not a good conversationalist."

"It's not that, you don't know her story; he was in love with Jeanie once, and she loved him really, but she sent him away because his father had a shop and sold something, and now she's just frightfully sorry she did it, and—but he doesn't look as if he was forgiving her. What would you do?"

Mr. Hales smiled.

"I should never have hazarded the meeting—never."

"Was I wrong? Oh, but of course she *is* sorry, and—but I wish they would notice each other. If I were her I should just say I knew I was a born fool when I said no." Mr. Hales laughed.

"I don't think *you* would ever have said no for that reason!"

"I couldn't, because my father sort of kept a shop; we were always selling drugs. Oh look, Mr. Hales, just out of the corner of your eye, I see Jeanie looking up into his face, and she has just refused oyster patties."

"But do I understand you did all this to—bring them together?"

"Yes. I did so want them to be happy, besides it would make Maud and Mr. Waycott happy."

Mr. Hales was silent. He was considering whether Toney would ever consent herself to say yes to somebody. A dream of a larger sphere of work floated before his mental vision, a dream of a young wife who would devote her money to their work, for in every mission-field money was needed, money and workers. But love seemed very far removed from Toney's ideas at this moment, and so he was silent. Then he asked after the work at the Haven.

"Miss Phipps is doing wonders, and some of my first friends come tomorrow. Two of the *avant garde* and the deaf man. He has no one to take care of him."

"You will indeed have the blind and the deaf," said Mr. Hales smiling.

"Yes, but I do wish we lived in the days of St. Clare and Sister Ortolana. For when St. Francis sent them to sick people they made the sign of the Cross, and immediately restored them all to health."

"And by their prayers, Toney, I think."

"Yes," answered Toney, "I suppose that's where we fail; but oh, Mr. Hales, I did pray ever so hard about Jeanie and the genius! Do you think—they will make it up? We have come to the cheese and they have said nothing!" Mr. Hales hid a smile.

”Perhaps the music will work the miracle. Don’t despair.”

”Perhaps it will, though that is a mystery to me. Mr. Hales, you will keep near me, won’t you, as I see the Honourable Edward looking at me sideways. I’m so afraid he’ll want to talk to me privately.”

”But perhaps——”

”Oh no! I couldn’t possibly think of it! Besides, I’m afraid it’s true what Aunt Dove said. He wants the—money, and you see it would be a dreadful disappointment to hear that it—was not to be had. I thought money might make two people happy, and here are the ices and they haven’t yet melted!”

Everyone soon rose to proceed to the barn, and in that interval Toney flew to find the genius.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TEN MINUTES.

The carriages rolled up to the barn door in quick succession, and Lady Dove did indeed feel proud as she received her guests at the entrance of the fairy bower, now styled the concert-room. Never had such an entertainment been given there by her before, and now a wireless message went round the guests that Frank Weston was the star they had come to hear. Such a treat had not been imagined, for crowned heads had to petition him, not to command. How had he been persuaded to come and give a private concert at Aldersfield House? Words of gratitude were heard on every side.

”How kind of you, Lady Dove! This is an unexpected treat; Lord Dashwood tried in vain to get him! He is very proud and very original. I heard the Emperor of Germany could not get him to play last year. The Germans say we have never had such a genius. Quite a poor man was he? Genius plays strange freaks. They say he can make as much money as he likes—Lady Gwen Steward was dying to marry him they say—but he wouldn’t look at her. They say he was once jilted and that turned him into a misogamist.”

Lady Dove tried to answer appropriately and was all smiles. She kept Mr. Russell near her, he was so clever and so useful, and Sir Evas was neither!

”How kind of you to come this wet evening. Yes, Mr. Frank Weston is really here, he dined with us—such a charming fellow—genius written all over him”—and so on whilst the crowd rustled into seats. Where was Toney?

Directly dinner was over, Toney flew to find Jim, who was always ready to do her bidding. She interviewed him in the housekeeper's room.

"Jim, I want you to see after Mr. Frank Weston. Show him to the waiting-room we have rigged up, and stay at the door, and don't let anyone come in or out unless I tell you. I haven't any ring, that would be the right thing, but look at this glove, Jim, you see it has one green finger, I was getting a nosegay in a hurry—if someone brings this glove, let them in! The people won't be seated for a quarter of an hour yet, and Jim—is your young woman still faithful to you?"

"Yes, miss," said Jim quite gravely, touching his cap.

"But if she wasn't what would you say?"

"Knock 'im over, miss."

"But if there wasn't a him, only she just thought you not good enough?"

"Get another, miss."

"Oh, Jim, that isn't at all having fine feeling. You'd have to be true to her, and wait till she thought better of it, and then you'd not be proud, would you?"

"Can't say, miss."

"You'd just forgive and forget, wouldn't you? I want you to say so—if you really think it."

"Yes, miss. If you was to tell me I'd forgive and forget."

Toney laughed and then hurried Jim off.

"Remember my glove with the green finger!"

"Yes, miss," and Jim flew off to obey. If Toney had told him to run twenty miles he would have gone. Next, Toney went to find the Hamiltons; she did not think they would go to the barn at once and she was right. In the little second drawing-room where the lights had been lowered, she was conscious of soft murmuring tones, and rushing in she heard Maud's voice.

"Oh, Jeanie darling, don't, don't cry like that! What shall we do?"

The beautiful vision in blue was hiding her face in the sofa cushions and sobbing.

"It's only me," exclaimed Toney coughing. "Is anything the matter?" Jeanie jumped up.

"No, no, thank you, I did not feel very well. I think I would prefer going up to my room."

"Oh! and miss Mr. Weston's playing! Please come and hear him, and after that you can go—and—and——" Poor Toney was non-plussed.

"Forgive me," said Jeanie, her pride giving way, "I was upset; I once knew Mr. Weston and—we were great friends, but we quarrelled, and—he—won't forgive me."

"Is that all? Did you say you were sorry, Jeanie? It's best to be quite straight out, isn't it? No use beating about the bush, and let me see—— Oh! he's in the

little waiting-room now, I'll go and ask him—won't you give me one of your flowers or something?"

"Oh no, no, I can't—he would—throw them away—and I should deserve it."

"He looks awfully nice, Jeanie, such a good strong face; no nonsense at all. I expect he did feel a bit hipped, but—look here, if he sends you your flowers back again, you'll know he can't forgive, but if he sends you the white camellia I gave him, then you'll know it's all right, and go at once to the room. I'll send Jim, he's awfully safe. Will you wait here? There's crowds coming, and Aunt Dove and Mr. Russell are saying a lot of nothings which people like, so there's time yet."

Maud unpinned her sister's flowers with trembling fingers as Jeanie sat up, clasping her hands.

"Toney, you are kind, but you don't understand. I behaved so horridly to him. I let mother insult him, and he must have hated me. I deserve it all and now—now—it's horrid to say so but I would not be so unhappy if only he could forgive me, but he never will; he is proud too—as proud of his people as I am about mine, and I threw it at him. Would you ever forgive that, Toney? He never spoke to me, only once—just to ask me to have something. I nearly died."

Toney seized the flowers, there was so little time.

"Look here, Jeanie, I'll just go and reconnoitre. Here's my glove with a green finger, if you get the camellia take my glove and Jim will let you in. All those old sillies would want to get at him, and one of his conditions was a quarter of an hour alone before the concert."

Toney flew off leaving the sisters alone. Jeanie again hid her face, but she no longer sobbed, and Maud knelt by her holding her hand.

"Oh, Jim, is he in there? I've only ten minutes," said Toney. Jim nodded.

"He said no one was to come in, Miss Tonia."

"But I *must* go, I'm just like Queen Esther. I do hope he'll hold out his sceptre."

Jim opened the door, and Toney stood face to face with the genius, who was pacing the narrow limits of the small waiting-room.

"Oh, please forgive me! I've come to tell you that Jim, who's a great friend of mine, says he could forgive and forget if I told him to do so—I thought I'd better tell you to—forgive and forget."

No one could have resisted a smile at this speech, even Frank Weston, who was smarting from the opening of the old wound, smiled, then sternly he said, "I—did not want to see anybody."

"I'm not anybody, indeed I'm not. Just a poor relation of Sir Evas, till I got a lot of money left to me by the dearest old General. He was good, you bet, and *he* would have forgiven anyone, especially if—they sent these flowers."

There seemed to be no need of an explanation between these two. Frank

Weston had now realised Toney's conspiracy.

Toney held out the lovely bunch of roses she had herself tied up for Jeanie.

"Look, please take them—exchange them—if you forgive her. She is just sobbing her heart out and calling herself no end of names, I believe she is heart-broken, and says she only wants your forgiveness."

The genius turned away and there was silence.

"There is so little time, Mr. Weston, can't you make up your mind?"

"You hardly understand, Miss Whitburn," he said turning suddenly towards Toney, who held the flowers in her hand. "I loved Miss Hamilton with all my heart. She made me believe she loved me, and then she threw me over because my father had honestly earned his living in trade, because he had nobly scraped every penny from his hard-earned money to give me a musical education. I can never make you rich people understand what I owe to my father, and when Miss Hamilton——"

"Oh yes, don't dwell on it, I told you it was the old pussy cat, her mother—Aunt Dove would be just the same—but you must not think Jeanie is like that now—Pups—(that's my father)—did everything for me and I quite understand, but then he would have been the first to tell me to make it up. Wouldn't your father?"

"He often has told me to try again, but he did not understand."

"Then that's easy—— Oh, please, there's awfully little time—and just to please me, will you play one of the pieces you used to play together at the end of the concert. I've got her fiddle here and she would be so awfully happy, and she has a lovely dress, and——"

Toney's words were as if the Dam of Assouan had given way and had let through the waters of the Nile, and then all at once she stood on tip-toe, for the precious minutes were flying and with deft fingers she unpinned his camellia.

"You needn't say anything, the camellia will speak; there! I must fly, you've got eight minutes and then you'll have to come. There's a chair left for Jeanie in front, it will sort of inspire you, won't it? Oh, thank you a thousand times."

She opened the door and flew past Jim with the reminder, "and, Jim, when time's up, don't go in, only knock loud," and ran in the dim darkness towards the house—but at that moment she ran against someone.

"Oh!—why it's you! How very, very nice."

"I was coming to look for you, Toney. Lady Dove is getting rather——"

"Yes, of course. Will you, please, go and give this camellia to Jeanie. Maud is there, and will you tell Jeanie to go to Mr. Weston. He wants to see her about some music—and then will you take Maud into the concert-room. Oh, that's all, but please run."

"All right, Toney," said Lewis laughing.

In another moment, Toney herself was entering the concert-room looking very red and hot, but smiling graciously and shaking hands with everybody who came in her way, in spite of Lady Dove's loud whisper,

"Antonia, how very rude to come in so late. What will people think of you!"

"So sorry—I had to see about Mr. Weston's duet. It will be just the best thing of all! How do you do? Isn't this lovely? He is a great genius and I don't even feel a bit sleepy!"

Five minutes to the time, Jeanie, like a cloud of blue, appeared at the waiting-room door, holding a lovely camellia, and a discoloured white glove. She held it out to Jim but could not speak.

"All right, miss, but there's only five minutes."

Jim then opened the door and closed it quickly. Jeanie looked like a beautiful ghost in the half-lighted room. Her heart beat so fast that for a moment she could not speak. With one hand she grasped the back of a chair, and with the other she held out the camellia.

"Frank—forgive me—I—can't forgive myself, Miss Whitburn *made* me come—I—— Oh, Frank, I'm so miserable, I'm not proud any more." Her head drooped and Frank Weston only saw a beautiful head of soft golden brown hair; then the greatness of his character triumphed over his pride, for suddenly he put his strong arms round her.

"Jeanie," he said; "Jeanie——" He only heard a sob, and his answer was a passionate kiss imprinted on her golden hair, for her face was hidden; then a minute of exquisite silence and then a loud knock which made them fly apart.

"If you please, sir, time's up."

"Jeanie, *she*, Miss Whitburn, asked us—will you play that last duet we played together, do you remember it?"

"Remember it! Oh, Frank, I can't, I've no violin."

"Yes. Here it is, she brought it here."

"It's all Toney."

"Miss Whitburn is a very wonderful person. Come, she said a chair was ready for you. Oh, my love, my love!"

Jeanie fled to the side door, then she sank into a chair that was close by. The next moment Frank Weston appeared on the platform amidst a storm of welcome. He did not smile or bow, but at once took his violin, nodded to the accompanist who had come by a later train, and began to play. All those who had a soul for music seemed to be lifted to another sphere, and even those who had not, watched with breathless wonder the face of the great musician. He saw only, sitting before him, Jeanie Hamilton, and she never took her eyes from him, for her there was no one else in the room.

Right at the other end of the barn Lewis Waycott sat next to Maud, who

was still trembling with excitement.

"Oh, Lewis, it's too, too wonderful. The camellia you brought was his. It's all Toney's doing. I think she is the most wonderful person I have ever known——*You* always appreciated her, you have nothing to be sorry for."

"Yes, I always did. How did she manage this?"

"I can't think how. He was so proud—I think Jeanie would soon have died—of a broken heart."

"There are no such things, Maud."

"Hush!" she said. "Listen!"

That concert was talked of for many a long day. Those who knew said that Frank Weston excelled himself, but something else wonderful happened. There was still ten minutes of the allotted time when he had finished his last piece. He put down his violin, walked down the steps and offered his arm to Jeanie Hamilton.

There was another storm of applause. Miss Hamilton, whom so many present knew was considered worthy to play with the genius—and how beautiful she looked! How was it no one had sooner recognised her beauty and her talent, and what a lovely dress! Jeanie was still in a dream. This was happening all long ago, when she and Frank had played together, of course it was for the last time—but she must play her best, she must not disgrace him in public, though it was the hardest thing she had ever done.

"Now," he said softly, looking at her, and then they began. How kindly he moderated his pace to hers, how thrilling were the tender notes. It was a little bit of heaven, and then it was over!

What a storm of applause followed, but Jeanie fled and Frank Weston followed her after simply saying "Thank you" to his audience.

Jim was keeping the door as they passed in, and when Toney arrived Jim had seized the situation.

"I think, Miss Tonia," he said, touching his cap, "I think Miss Hamilton must be *his* young lady."

"Yes, she is, but in ten minutes tell them to come to supper at the House. Mind, only ten minutes, Jim, for I'm just dying to congratulate them."

CHAPTER XXIV.

LEWIS' DECISION.

How did the secret come out? It was whispered, then murmured, then everybody seemed to say at once, ”Isn’t it romantic! The great Frank Weston is just engaged to Miss Hamilton. Didn’t they look a perfect pair as they played. What a sensation it will make—an old romance. Quite charming”—and so on.

And among these buzzing remarks Toney flitted about at the stand-up supper, where everything was of the best, and where everybody seemed to enjoy themselves, but none so much as Toney herself. She had not dreamt of reward, but she certainly had it this evening. First came Maud with dewy eyes, she had not yet got over her fears.

”Oh, Toney, is it true? I have not seen her. It is all your doing. Tell me everything.”

”Ouf!” said Toney, ”I thought it was all white of egg at first, but—oh, Maud, it’s just the most perfect romance there ever was, that is only second to my dear Chum, who is here, and I haven’t had a moment to talk to her, but of course you’ll both sleep here to-night and see him off to-morrow. Hasn’t he a face of—iron, will sort of prop her up all her life. He hasn’t a mean idea in his brain. I say, Maud, you’ll be true to me and not let it out, won’t you?”

At this moment Mrs. Hamilton and Miss Honoria came up looking much flustered.

”Antonia, there you are! My dear child, do you know anything about this—report? Where is Jeanie? Maud, do you know? Toney, what is happening?”

Toney shook her head.

”They are in the waiting-room; looks true, doesn’t it, Mrs. Hamilton? Jim is keeping guard so I expect he let it out. Jim’s got a young woman himself, so he’s rather cute over the subject.”

”My dear, you are so amusing!” (she meant vulgar) ”but of course Frank Weston is quite the rage, and Jeanie will help him so much—socially I mean.”

Toney lifted her head and shook her curling hair in a sort of indignant manner.

”Mr. Weston is a real genius, Mrs. Hamilton, and he doesn’t care two pins for society, so I guess that word would just make him rage. It’s a great honour to—to know him, and a tremendous honour to be engaged to him.”

”Of course. I must find dear Jeanie, it’s in everybody’s mouth. Such a surprise, so clever of them, I knew nothing about it.” She passed on none too pleased with that terrible Antonia, but Miss Honoria thought differently.

”I am wondering, Toney, if this surprise hasn’t something to do with you?” she said, taking Toney’s hand. ”I’ve just seen Lewis and he smiled when I suggested it.”

”I couldn’t have done it alone, they were both deeply in love, and wouldn’t have married anyone else. But didn’t she look lovely playing, I expect ever so

many men wanted to ask her. There's Chum, she'll be awfully interested," and Toney flew off and Miss Honoria turned to Maud.

"It's true, Maud, isn't it, it is Toney's doing? But these dresses—I hear a London man came down to measure you?"

"Aunt Honoria, don't say anything, it's Toney again, but she doesn't want Jeanie to know, she's so proud. I think it's a lesson against such odious pride about our ancestors, you know how nearly they both missed this happiness."

"Of course *now* he could marry anyone, but your mother thinks so much of birth."

"If I fall in love with a grocer I shall not wait for mother's leave," exclaimed Maud; the lesson had been burnt into her nature too deeply by knowing what her sister had gone through. Then suddenly there was a little stir at the door as Frank Weston entered with Jeanie, who looked very shy and frightened, but also very happy. Maud flew to her.

"Jeanie, tell me, is it true?" Jeanie nodded and Frank answered for her,

"We are so glad now for the waiting time," he said with suppressed joy, "we understand each other much better than we could ever have done without it."

Like all people of big natures, when he gave in he gave in entirely. There was no looking back on time wasted, no more reproaches. "But where is Miss Whitburn?" He lowered his voice, "We owe it all to her."

"Jeanie, you do look so beautiful! I am glad it was this evening. Toney says we are to sleep here, and mother is all right, and——" The Honble. Edward interrupted her sentence.

"Miss Whitburn is asking for you, Miss Hamilton; she is at the top of the room."

Jeanie went off with Frank, but she reflected sadly there was no need now of courage to follow him. She would never forgive herself the pain she had given him, whatever he might say.

Maud looked up at Edward Lang with a radiant face.

"You have heard, haven't you? It was an old romance gone wrong, which Toney set her mind to right, and she has succeeded. I wish *her*—romance could end as happily!"

The two remained talking together whilst Jeanie enjoyed a triumphal procession. When they reached her Toney held out both her hands and whispered,

"Mr. Weston, isn't she beautiful? You do look as if you had forgiven me!"

"Forgiven you! But for you we should have——"

There was no time to finish the sentence for Mrs. Hamilton had glided up to them.

"Jeanie, my darling! Oh—Mr. Weston—this is indeed delightful, but this is too public a place to say more."

Jeanie kissed her mother in silence, then she had to move about in a dream and answer questions and smile, and see that Frank had some supper, repeating to herself, "But for Toney I think I should have died." Remembering her little darts at Toney she was still more humbled, and humility is good for such souls.

Toney was giving Lewis some supper and wondering why Maud left him alone.

"You are glad, aren't you?"

"Glad—yes—I think I'm even curious."

"Why! You couldn't be curious! I knew you could be so happy about it because of Maud."

"Yes, indeed, she has been so unselfish about her sister, and you have done good to both."

"Good to myself. I do get pleasure out of it, and if it hadn't been for the dear General I couldn't have bribed Mr. Weston to come."

"He gets huge sums I hear."

"But this concert money is all going to a poor musician whose music is mute—— Isn't that just noble? How could Jeanie have ever doubted him?"

"But the way is plain now—and I—I am thinking of going abroad, Toney."

"Going abroad, oh, why? What will—your aunt and Maud say?"

"I shall leave them in possession—I don't think——" He paused.

"Well, that is queer, I am sorry, I thought you——" Toney did not often flounder, but she found herself in a bog. How *could* he leave Maud and go abroad?

"Not for long?"

"Oh, I don't know—till things get clearer."

"Is there a hitch, Mr. Waycott? Can't I make it straight, is the old pussy cat—— Oh, I beg your pardon, she is your aunt!" Lewis laughed.

"You mean my aunt won't want to turn out because of this wedding coming on." Toney didn't mean that, but she nodded.

"I really can't stand a wedding—but they are welcome to use my house."

"But what about the Stone House? It will want you awfully." Toney clasped her hands and looked really distressed.

"I think you will find another—many other helpers."

Toney was called for, but she felt a little lump in her chest; then with a great effort she said to herself, "The old pussy thinks Mr. Waycott isn't rich enough for Maud, or that he must be tested like poor Frank Weston! If it's only money, perhaps I could square it—but oh, I don't think Aldersfield would be anything without him!"

Now the rest of the acts of the lovers can be easily imagined this evening, and how, when the last guests were gone, they retired to the small drawing-room, and Toney, as she passed the door with Mrs. Faber, heard some wondrous soft

music coming out of it.

”Listen, Chum, he’s talking to her, I wish I was a musician; words are poor things for telling people you love them tremendously.”

”I wish it were *your* romance, dear Toney!”

”That’s a vain wish, I’m going to be a real match-making old maid. Do you know, Chum, Mr. Waycott is in love with Maud, and something has gone wrong, I can tell by his face, he’s bothered about it, I wish I could make it smooth, for he and Uncle Evas are, and always have been, my two props, and I should feel halt and blind without them. But he says he’s going to travel. Maud will sort of go to nothing like Jeanie if he does; it’s Mrs. Hamilton’s fault—I’m sure. She is a pussy.” Mrs. Faber laughed.

”As to Mr. Waycott, it does seem strange. Are you sure, Toney?”

”Oh, yes, quite sure. He so often comes and meets her on her way home from the Haven and—— But things must have gone very wrong with him; he looks so glum. Never mind, I’ll have a good think, and see if I can’t make things come right. There is Maud. Doesn’t she look like a china shepherdess, and won’t he have a sweet wife at Waycott Hall? She’ll fit in exactly when she leaves her mother. I never could cotton to her. Isn’t it funny, Chum, Miss Grossman won’t be bullied, and Aunt Dove says she has no sympathy.”

Mrs. Faber was puzzled, so she waylaid Maud on her way to bed, for Toney had declared she was too sleepy to wait another minute, and only Sir Evas and Mr. Russell were left to look after the genius. Maud gathered up her rose creation and waited for Mrs. Faber.

”Forgive me for stopping you, but—I do want to say how glad I am about your sister’s engagement, though I don’t quite understand what Toney did!”

”Nor anyone else quite! She went to meet him at the station and prepared the way, but they were both taken by surprise, and then—— Oh! Toney did it!”

”I wish one of Arthur’s knights could come and claim Toney!”

”Indeed, so do I! She hasn’t told you, but Mr. Edward Lang wants to marry her, and she—won’t hear of it. I had a long talk to-night with him, and he is really a good fellow, only rather extravagant. He was so open, and told me about it.”

”Mr. Lang! Oh! Toney would seem very far away if she married him.”

”But Lady Dove wants it, she told me so to-night—— I wish I could help it on.” Mrs. Faber shook her head.

”Toney would never be happy as a grand lady—and her money——”

”Of course he knows people will think he wants the money.”

”I suppose that is true,” said Mrs. Faber simply. ”Good night, Miss Hamilton. Toney is so glad about the success of her plot.”

Maud went on to her sister’s room.

”We have talked it all over,” said the radiant Jeanie. ”He won’t stop my going

to Germany, but he will be there too, and—in fact he wants us to be married at once. He says he has waited long enough, and of course it must be just as he likes."

"Mother won't like it at once," said Maud.

Jeanie raised her head defiantly, she belonged to Frank now.

"Mother is my mother, so I won't say anything except to you, Maud, but she was the cause of all my great misery, and nothing will make me go against Frank again. Is there another man on earth who would have forgiven me as he has done? The least I can do is to——"

"Let him have his own way entirely," laughed Maud. "Edward Lang says his wife shall do exactly as she likes! How I wish Toney would say yes!"

"Toney!—Edward Lang!" said Jeanie astonished. "Oh, that would be odd, almost ridiculous, besides, he's so extravagant everybody says."

"Everybody says it and that helps him on. I told him he could marry nobody if he went on as he is doing."

"*You* told him that, Maud?"

"Yes; I do want to help Toney, and of course she has too much sense to marry a man like that, though I believe he *could* make a woman happy!"

"No, not Toney, they have nothing in common."

"Except riding."

"But you can't ride all the time when you are married! Just look at us, music will always be a link, we couldn't ever get bored with each other! Oh, Maud, to-night he played me one of his own compositions which no one else has heard——"

"I'm tired and sleepy, Jeanie darling, so don't go off again on Frank!—but all the same Toney has worked a miracle!"

"Yes, a miracle. Frank told me how angry he was at a stranger daring to talk to him about—me, and then, somehow, she got over him and he felt he simply couldn't say *no* to her!"

"Or to you!" and then at last the happy girls fell asleep from sheer weariness.

CHAPTER XXV.

SHORT NOTICE.

When Toney woke the next morning she remembered first, that she was very happy about Jeanie and the genius; secondly, that she was very unhappy about—oh, it was that Lewis Waycott was going away and she should lose all his help and—— Then she called herself horridly selfish, and lastly she felt very sorry for poor Maud, who would lose both her sister and her lover. Toney hugged Trick and told him she couldn't understand some things, and that sometimes life was all askew! Trick licked her hands vigorously as if to agree with her. But Toney had to speed the parting guests, and had little time to think of herself.

Jeanie came down to breakfast with a changed expression on her face. Frank Weston had no eyes but for her, with now and then a side glance at Toney. Happily, Lady Dove was tired, so did not appear. She particularly disliked lovers.

"We want to be married as soon as possible," said the genius after breakfast to Toney, "will you help us? Jeanie says you can work miracles, and then I will take her to Germany."

"That's just what I should like; I hate grand weddings. I'll tell you what, Maud, if you will give me leave I'll manage it all: will a week be short enough?"

They looked at each other and laughed,

"Would it be possible? Mother——"

"Oh, I know she'll say she can't afford it! Aunt Dove always does when she doesn't want anything. I'll order your trousseau from the man who—from a very quick and ready firm, and then Mr. Hales will marry you in the early morning. We'll have a record wedding, but I must have my poor friends there."

Maud laughed, and the lovers smiled as Mr. Weston answered,

"It sounds delightfully original, but indeed we could not give you all this trouble. Jeanie has some money from her cousin abroad and——"

"The money was given for music. It isn't fair, is it, to use it for anything else? Do let me do as I like, Mr. Weston, to show you forgive me! Maud will help me."

"Frank has engagements this week he cannot put off now. It is impossible," said Jeanie, looking at her lover.

"Of course, that's why you'll let me do everything. Come back to-day week, Mr. Weston, and then you'll find everything ready. It's just what Pups would have done. Once he got a couple married straight off, because he was afraid the man would change his mind—I don't mean it as an example."

Everyone laughed, and the farewell seemed quite cheerful, especially as Toney sent the pair in her motor to the station, and then she and Maud went off to the Haven. Toney was so happy in planning everything and getting Maud's advice on the subject of clothes, that for the moment she forgot her own little load of sorrow.

"That nice man must come down and take orders! I'll give him *carte*

blanche, Maud, but I must choose colours and style. I'll telegraph to-day. It's wonderful what money can do in hurrying people up. How shall we break it to Mrs. Hamilton?"

"I don't know—but oh, Toney, I don't think we ought to accept all this from you. I—don't believe now that Cousin George was in the business at all and—mother ought not to accept. However, she really has no ready money so she would like to linger a long time over this—engagement, and Jeanie might——"

"Fall ill or something might happen, and she would never forgive us, would she? But I do want to say one thing, Maud—I'm so sorry that—Mr. Waycott's——"

"About Lewis, what about him?" asked Maud, leaning on the gate of the Haven.

"About his going away! I know it will be hard for you, but he *must* stay for Jeanie's wedding if it's so soon."

"Lewis going away! How odd, he has said nothing about it."

"Gracious stars! I ought not to have told you!" Poor Toney blushed. "But of course I thought you would know."

"It's quite right he should," added Maud quickly. "he has worked so hard over the estate lately, and he really wants a change, he is rather down."

"You are jolly over it. Forgive me for letting it out. When you are married I'll do the same for you, Maud, as for Jeanie, if you'll let me."

Then the two girls went in, and Toney had to interview the Harrises and Captain Grant till it was time to go home. No Lewis met them to-day. Toney felt still more uncomfortable at having let the cat out of the bag, but admired the way Maud took it. So noble not to be the least jealous that Lewis had told her first, she thought, but very heavy-hearted herself she went to her study to work with Mr. Russell.

However, even business was exciting to-day, the plans for the new Home having come, and everything had to be looked into. Each inmate or couple were to have a bedroom and sitting-room, besides the joint dining-room and drawing-room, and though everything was to be simple, nothing was to be mean. Even Plantagenet Russell warmed up, but to herself she said, "I want Mr. Waycott's opinion, he always has good ideas, I must go and ask him—perhaps he wants to give all his time to Maud. Why is he going? I expect I've taken too much of his time." Mr. Russell interrupted her thoughts.

"Here is a letter from Mr. Staines, Miss Whitburn. He says you have been spending too much lately. Your parties and the Haven, and——"

Toney laughed.

"Isn't that like a lawyer, they never can bear your spending all your income; but it's better he should ruffle up a bit now, he'll have more provocation soon when the house begins. Now, Mr. Russell, telephone to the firm of Woods. Can

they make a trousseau in four days?"

Mr. Russell gasped.

"A trousseau in four days?"

"Yes, perhaps I'd better hitch on myself. Hulloa, hulloa, hitch on to 4004. Miss Whitburn is on and is in a hurry."

When communication was established, Toney began,

"Send off same gentleman as before at once. Want first-class trousseau in four days."

"Quite impossible, madam. Very busy."

"Oh, then hitch me on to someone who can. Why not multiply workers?" A pause and then the firm gave in.

"Very well, madam. Have things in stock which will help. Mr. Woods will be with you this evening."

"Thank you, very much. Must hurry up at times; couple can't wait."

Then Toney decided she must go to Waycott Hall to prepare Jeanie and Mrs. Hamilton, and the plans must be seen by Mr. Waycott. She called Trick, and not waiting for motor or horse dashed off across the park.

"One must stretch oneself when there is a sort of lump on one's chest," she said to herself. Even the plans seemed to have lost some of their delight—Toney did love to feel happy. She gave a run when she came to the gap, and she and Trick bounded over together, and to her dismay she nearly fell upon Lewis Waycott, who had just turned a corner. Both of them laughed and Trick danced round his heels but only looked at them.

"I'm awfully sorry! I was coming to see Jeanie, and—to see if you and Maud would look at the last plans? How strange you should be here. It's all right, to-day week: you *must* stay for it, won't you?"

"Stay for what?" asked Lewis.

"Didn't Maud tell you? Haven't you seen her?"

"No, I've been out all the morning miles away. The cottages in the Stanmore Lane must be rebuilt."

"Oh—I want to make an awful confession."

"You, Toney!—— Are you—no—what is it?" He looked so grave that Toney laughed.

"Don't be frightened! it's bad, but might be worse! I let the cat out of the bag and told Maud you were going away! Of course you ought to tell her first."

"She'll know soon enough——"

"Oh—but wouldn't it be nicer if you told her?"

"Told Maud? I suppose I ought to tell Aunt Honoria first. She'll be rather cut up, and—Toney, is it true that Jeanie is really going to marry Frank Weston at once?"

”Yes, that’s the other thing. I’ve undertaken it—in a week!”

”You are not an undertaker, Toney.”

They both laughed like old times.

”You see Mrs. Hamilton will say this and that and the other. I expect she isn’t overpleased. Aunt Dove would be the same, so I’ve promised to see it through—in a week, clo’ and all! I’m just delighted—you see it would never do to fail after one’s hard work.”

”Will they be happy?”

”Happy! you should have seen Jeanie’s face, it was like—— Oh, I don’t know what it was like! All the troubles fled away and just nothing but love in her eyes.”

The path was narrow and Lewis fell back. He clenched his right hand. Why couldn’t he just say, ”Toney, let me see love in your eyes,” but all the county would declare——

”You’ve done it all,” was all he said.

”It’s a great privilege—isn’t it? but I was thinking of Maud and you too. The clo’ is ordered. It was fun! But you will stay for it, won’t you?”

”I don’t know—I think I’ve taken my passage.”

”Passage! where to?”

”To Somaliland.”

”Maud said you wanted change.”

”Did she? She is so taken up with her sister, she sees nothing else.”

”I’m sure she does, but she is very noble-minded. But why not wait for a week—and here are my plans finished and you must look them over.”

”Oh, I can do that, Toney, before I go.”

”You are always good and kind. When will you come back?”

”I’ve no plans, it depends.”

”On what?—on Maud, of course.”

”Of course, if Aunt Delia and Maud go away I can’t stay away too long.”

”Why should they go?”

”No reason, so I expect they’ll stay.”

”Maud is very unselfish.”

”Yes—but unselfish women are not always easy to deal with.”

They turned into a path leading to the front of Waycott Hall, and Toney remarked,

”I think this is the most beautiful house I have ever seen. How can you leave it! Your people will miss you—and—” she wanted to say, ”and Maud will be lonely,” but he evidently would not discuss Maud with her, so she stopped.

”Oh, it will be all right—— There are some things one can’t stand too long.”

”Of course, repairs of gates and tenants’ grumbles and—I know I always wonder at Uncle Evas’ patience over it all. Now I will go and find Mrs. Hamilton.

Will she churn a bit?" Lewis smiled.

"I expect she'll be not too pleased because she—was looking out for a good match."

Toney flew into the drawing-room, where in the pleasant room full of old treasures, the two ladies sat working. Maud and Jeanie were not there.

"How do you do, Mrs. Hamilton, it's all beautiful and I want to tell you that——"

"That you are a deep conspirator," said Miss Honoria.

"It was so beautiful, wasn't it, all music—— I couldn't hear it, but people said he played out of his heart, anyhow, it's fixed up and I'm going to help them with the trousseau. You don't mind, do you? It's such a pleasure for me to manage. I think some ancestor of mine must have been a store manager."

"But really, Antonia, I can't allow it, I can't accept—they must wait till——"

"Till they lose sight of each other again! Oh, it's not possible. He just worships her."

"Jeanie was very much admired last night," sighed Mrs. Hamilton.

"If you give leave you needn't trouble one bit. It's to be quite quiet and simple, and you'll just drive to church and half an hour will do it."

Mrs. Hamilton was torn by conflicting thoughts. Toney's generosity was splendid, but Jeanie might do better by waiting.

"Please say 'yes,' or I must telegraph to stop Wood."

"You must have your way, silly child. You always do! Oh, here's Lewis. Have you heard of Antonia's generous offer? I really doubt but——"

"Toney's quite right. They've waited long enough. By the way, I'm sorry, Aunt Delia, but I have settled to travel a little and I shan't be here. I'll give the wedding breakfast anyhow, and my blessing."

"Lewis, what do you mean?" exclaimed Miss Honoria. "Impossible!"

"You must stay," said Aunt Delia.

"Impossible!" echoed Lewis and turned away but added, "I'll look over these plans, Toney, and let you have them back."

CHAPTER XXVI.

ANOTHER OFFER.

Toney could not make it out at all. Lewis Waycott had not come near her for two

days, though he was still at home. The world seemed out of tune. He had returned the plans with one or two remarks, and with her usual precipitation Toney had given orders that the building was to be begun at once. But he might have brought them himself! Maud was naturally his first thought; she was claiming all his spare time, but, oddly enough, Maud did not miss her daily visits to the Haven. Toney decided that Maud was tremendously honourable.

In the meanwhile she had the wedding to plan for, and Toney loved planning. She had given private orders to Mr. Wood, who had ascertained Mrs. Hamilton's ideas of colours, £c. Miss Honoria was going to pay for the wedding dress, and Lewis had ordered the wedding breakfast, but it was all kept private. Mrs. Hamilton was silently aggrieved. Everything had been done without her, and she defended herself by saying she could not interfere any more, with the result that both her daughters looked supremely happy.

On the third day Toney drove up to the Haven in her motor-car, for she had to go on to the Vicarage afterwards to see that all was "real fixed up." The wedding was to be next Thursday, and to-day was Monday. Maud came out to greet her. Toney wanted to say, "Why hasn't Mr. Waycott come to see me?" but the words stuck in her throat. Toney wondered why she should be afraid of saying anything? This was another puzzle. Maud was smiling and very cheerful; that was odd too.

"I'm off to Mr. Hales to see it's all right! I'll be back as soon as I can, Maud," said Toney.

"I have the week's accounts to add up, so don't hurry! Dear Toney, it's no good trying to say 'Thank you,' but Jeanie's face ought to repay you."

"You'll see, Maud, it will be perfect! It's my pet romance.

"Jeanie says you are much more worthy of Frank than she is."

"Ouf! the music would be a penance! But I expect Mr. Waycott appreciates your music."

"Yes, he does—in his way. He's very busy; we hardly see him. He's so much with his bailiff, draining and repairing cottages, and you don't know what heaps of kind things he does and lets nobody know."

"I guess he does!"

"He's quite changed, somehow; just now he's rather silent. He says he will stay in London to buy all sorts of things for the wild places in Somaliland he means to go to."

"He might stay for the wedding to please you," said Toney thoughtfully; "I never knew he liked lions before."

"And mother and Aunt Honoria are both a little offended. Jeanie doesn't mind, because she doesn't heed anything now. Frank writes every day. Last night the letter didn't come, and she was so miserable." Maud laughed happily.

”Mr. Waycott won’t write every day, will he?”

”Lewis! I should think not! He hates writing letters, so I told him we shouldn’t worry if he promised to write when he is ill.”

”That’s fine—you are not like Jeanie.”

”Not a bit!”

Toney spun the wheel round and flew off. She wanted to go fast, very fast, so as not to think too much. Evidently Lewis and Maud had perfect trust in each other! Yes, that was fine!

She found that Mr. Hales was visiting some cottages at the other end of his parish, so she sent Jim to Wynchley for some purchases and walked on alone, fast, very fast. She felt in a mighty hurry to-day. At the edge of a fir wood she saw the Vicar coming out of a cottage.

”So glad to see you,” she exclaimed; ”may I stop you a minute?”

”Of course, Toney, as many minutes as you like.” His voice was kind and soft, and Toney felt comforted. Anyhow, Mr. Hales could not go hunting lions.

”It’s all right about Thursday, isn’t it? Special licence is all right. Mr. Weston’s seen to it. Vastly convenient if one is in a hurry.”

”You like things done quickly!” said Mr. Hales smiling.

”They want no fuss and no one in church, but I begged for my poor friends. They love a wedding, I’ll send my motor to bring the pair at nine o’clock. You’ll fix it up sharp, and they will go back to a real breakfast and off by twelve. I’ve ordered flowers and music.”

”You think of everything, as usual,” said the Vicar musingly. ”Toney, have you ever thought of your own future?”

”Of course! The Stone House will take all my time and mind!”

”But have you ever thought of—wider work for the Church, or of helping another with your love and energy?”

Toney opened her eyes. Mr. Hales looked so odd.

”It’s no use thinking, Mr. Hales; I’ve been walking like mad to stop my thinking to-day.”

”Why shouldn’t you think?—Toney, I want to ask you a question. Will you let me take care of you, and together we should do a great work for the Master. Your money, I need not say, should be for the Master’s cause. Will you be my wife, dear Toney?”

Toney stood transfixed. This idea had never entered her head in connection with Mr. Hales. He was her embodiment of all that was good, but far out of her sphere, poor Harum Scarum Toney.

”Gracious stars! You don’t mean it?”

”Yes, I do.”

Toney shook her head.

”I wish I could, I do wish I could say ’Yes.’ You are so good and just a holy man, but—I’m going to be an old maid—I saw Jeanie’s face when Mr. Weston was near her and—then I knew—I could say love, honour, and obey, but even that wouldn’t be the real thing!”

”Thank you, Toney—” he said, taking her hand; ”you’re honest, as always; but we shall be friends still?”

”I should think so!”

”Forget the rest. I had had a vision of missionary work and the great harvest waiting for workers, but I am content to wait here.”

”You saw a vision?” repeated Toney, ”and I’m just ordinary flesh and blood, and not at all like a vision—Good-bye! I’m going to ’The Haven’—you won’t tell anyone, will you, not Silvia or Mrs. Hales? They wouldn’t understand how much I love my dear old master.”

Without waiting for an answer, Toney jumped over a low stile, and took a short cut back towards the Haven.

”It was only a vision, just like St. Francis had visions; I don’t think the real Toney was in it!” she thought, laughing happily. Somehow she felt happier. Someone had made her an offer who did not care for money—then she stopped—after all, the money had formed part of the vision. That was it, it would *always* come in the way! That was part of the price she had to pay for having the means of helping other people! The hard part was that her Path of Perfection was paved with gold. She loved Mr. Hales, but she could never, never love him like that.

Toney was just emerging from the wood when she was conscious of hearing voices, and looking down a path at right angles she saw Maud talking to—yes, how strange, talking to Edward Lang; but Toney, feeling it was not honourable to spy, turned the other way and got back to the Haven by a longer detour. Maud appeared soon after.

”Did you see Mr. Hales? and is it all right?” Toney nodded.

”Yes; it will be just as they like it, with some music.”

”Music! That never entered my head!”

”It wouldn’t do for two musicians to be married without music, so I telegraphed to the great Dr. Mayo, who is a friend of Mr. Weston, and I said he should be motored down here in a jiffy if he would come, but it was strictly private, and he says ’yes.’ Mr. Russell has been so helpful over all this. He’s getting quite understanding and no longer argues!”

”Toney, I want to ask you a question, may I?”

”Of course, why not?”

”If—Mr. Lang asked you again, could you——”

”Oh!” thought Toney to herself, ”she was hatching that! It was for me!” Then she laughed.

”Never, Maud, so don’t conspire! I’m going to be a real old maid. The jolliest old maid that ever was. Remember the Stone House.”

”You are quite, quite sure?”

”Just about sure! Golly! I wouldn’t be the Honourable Mrs. Edward Lang at any price.”

As she walked home Toney was in a very meditative mood. She blamed herself for this sadness, for her romance had succeeded beyond her greatest hopes. What was the matter with her? She looked up and in the near distance she saw Lewis walking with his bailiff. Her heart beat faster. Would he see her? She wanted to talk to him very badly, but his back was turned to her. She might have called to him, but she wouldn’t or couldn’t. Well, she was a silly, a downright silly!

But fate interfered. The bailiff saw Miss Whitburn and touched his hat, and Lewis turned. He half hesitated, but as Toney stood still, he was obliged to come forward.

”Are you going home?” was all he said.

”Yes,” answered Toney. How stupid they both were, she thought.

”I’ve had a hard morning with Selby. He’s not been here long, so I have a great deal to explain before going away.”

”Do stay till after Thursday!” said Toney. ”It’s quite a quiet wedding, only just flowers and music, and Jeanie would be so pleased, and especially Maud.”

”Sorry, Toney, but I really can’t! All my plans are made. I go Wednesday evening, and I shall be at Charing Cross Hotel for a week more, and that is a very short time for all my preparations.”

”To prepare for the lions?” asked Toney seriously.

Lewis laughed.

”Yes, if you put it like that.”

”It’s a pity there are not lions in England.”

”There are lions in my path——”

”Guess you, mean a pussy cat—sort of relation to tigers anyway. You know I will help you—if I can.”

”You can’t, Toney, thank you.”

”Anyhow, I’ll take care of Maud.”

”You’ve done wonders for her as it is. I don’t know how you manage it.”

”I’ve done nothing except—of course I cared—because of—because I did.”

Why couldn’t she say straight out because you are going to marry her, but she couldn’t.

”That is the secret, I suppose that caring doesn’t always answer—anyhow, Toney, I hope by the time I come back the Stone House will be built.”

”Oh! it will take a year, a long year,” sighed Toney. Everything looked grey

and dull.

”Yes, I shall be away as long as that, and when I return there will be changes I expect. Most likely you will be——”

”Oh, I shan’t go and kill anything,” interrupted Toney laughing, and determined she would be natural. ”Of course Maud and your aunt and Mrs. Hamilton will be very dull without you—and there are your poor people.”

”Honour bright, Toney, I have thought of them. Selby has *carte blanche* to do anything he can. But there are some farms unlet, and the estate is not improving.”

”When you have shot enough lions you will come back?”

”I must—of course—— Now, good-bye, I mustn’t stay here talking.”

”Only two days and three-quarters more. How strange! I wish we lived in the Middle Ages, and you were going to the Holy Land to shoot the Turks,” said Toney thoughtfully.

”Lions are more troublesome. I shall have time to think anyhow.”

”Will you write sometimes?” said Toney slowly.

”I’m afraid I shan’t have time—and there might be——”

”Oh, I see, jealousies at Waycott Hall. Of course. Maud says you don’t like writing letters, but of course you’ll write to her.”

”She’ll write to me! and I shall hear all the news. Good-bye, Toney.”

”Oh, we shall meet again.” Toney’s heart went thump, thump!

”Perhaps, but I have so little time that perhaps—we shan’t.”

They shook hands quite solemnly, and parted without another word.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A TERRIBLE SECRET.

To Toney the next two days passed as if the hours were leaden-footed, for no Lewis appeared again. She was very restless and immensely busy. Her energy was appalling, and Mr. Russell showed signs of rebellion. His young mistress heaped work upon him, for the Stone House was really begun, and the parish was invaded by workmen. Toney realised at once that there was not enough accommodation for them, and had ready-made Norwegian cottages sent down by return from a firm who kept them in sections on the premises. The contractor thought the heiress was mad to bother about the men, but he found it vastly

convenient and so did the men!

Sir Evas too was kept occupied. Toney would not let him go out of her sight, and he was really in his element. Only Lady Dove complained. Energy was most displeasing to her—except her own—but just now she and Miss Grossman were in accord, and this lady agreed to her strong assertions concerning the iniquity of young people possessing money that should by right have belonged to others.

"I nourished a serpent in my bosom, Miss Grossman, when I invited Antonia to come and live here—— We are beggars, whilst she throws money to the winds."

"Miss Whitburn never thinks of a rainy day," said Miss Grossman; "I always do, I never give anything away. Charity begins at home, and if I did otherwise, doubtless I should be helping the undeserving."

"Quite right, I often say so to Sir Evas, but he is weak, very weak, and I must say weaker since Antonia's arrival. She is not a girl, she is a whirlwind. Just look at her now tearing down the drive."

It was true Toney was tearing down to meet Maud. It was Wednesday afternoon. This evening Lewis Waycott was going to town, and Toney had not seen him!

"Oh, Toney, I've come to tell you all is ready. Jeanie's dress is lovely, and her other things—— She wants to thank you."

"When?" said Toney; her face was flushed, and there was no smile on it.

"Lewis won't have any visitors to-day. He said so, but he goes this evening."

Toney felt a big lump in her throat. Surely *she* was not a visitor!

"But I'm not a stranger."

"I said so, and Lewis said he didn't want *anybody*. So unlike him!"

"I understand—— He wants you all to himself. What train does he go by?"

"The seven o'clock express."

Toney nodded.

"I shall meet Mr. Weston at 7.10, so I'll come early."

"Do. We shan't go to the station, Lewis doesn't want any fuss. Aunt Honoria is very much upset by this sudden determination, but I quite understand it."

"Of course—— You are brave."

"Oh, no. Indeed I shan't miss Lewis till later. We have had such hard work unpacking your lovely things and packing up again. Toney, I have never seen Jeanie look as she does now! She walks about the house with a smile on her face, and sings softly to herself all the time."

Trick came trotting out to look for his mistress. Toney snatched him up.

"Dumb friends are very comforting, aren't they? Sort of understand. Is Jeanie coming to Winchley Station?"

"No, I think it is rather hard on Jeanie Lewis going like that. You'll stay for

the breakfast to-morrow of course, Toney, and we'll give them a good send off."

Toney shook herself and hugged Trick closer.

"Yes, we'll finish up the romance properly. I've got heaps to do so I shan't have a minute till I go off to Winchley. I think to-morrow I shall go to London to see Mr. Staines on business."

"Poor Toney! you are hard worked. I hear the Stone House has been begun. You will let me help you still more, won't you? I am so happy."

Maud went off singing an air out of *Il Trovatore*.

"Well, gracious stars, she is one in a thousand," murmured Toney, "and I'm a horrid wretch to mind his going when she takes it so grandly!"

She stumbled over Sir Evas.

"Oh, Uncle Evas, it is nice to have you. We are good comrades, aren't we, always have been?"

"Yes, of course, but I'm afraid that means you want something more of this poor, overworked man." He looked supremely contented however.

"Yes, ever so much more."

"To be your good comrade, Toney, isn't a sinecure, you know!"

"If you really took up 'the Path of Perfection' you'd have to beg your daily bread, uncle! I can't see you doing it at all!" and Toney actually laughed in spite of her sore heart.

"You're not good enough yet, uncle, but listen, have you ever shot lions?"

"Nothing bigger than a pheasant—not my line, I'm sure the lions would make a meal of me before I had time to aim at the right place."

"You know Mr. Waycott is going to shoot lions in Somaliland. Maud thinks it all right, and is very unselfish about it."

"Are you sure about Maud?" said Sir Evas scraping his muddy boots, a custom he feared to forget, as Lady Dove might be looking out of the window.

"Of course! I've promised to look after her, but, uncle, I want him to have awfully good rifles and all the right things for shooting wild beasts. The kit is tremendously expensive. Couldn't you run up and order it for him and pretend it's *your* present? You know he's done a lot for my affairs and it's difficult to——"

"Oh, I see; well, I was going to town. I'll go after the wedding and spend a night there."

"He's at Charing Cross Hotel. You might stay there too——"

"So I might."

"And you'll manage, won't you, ducky, and not hurt his feelings. He's rather proud. Sort of in the blood I suppose."

"All the Waycotts always were as proud as Lucifer."

"But you are so understanding. Ouf! I shall feel less under an obligation too if you get a first-rate rig-out for killing lions and tigers."

”Can’t think why he has taken that idea into his head.”

”I think I know. Lions are next door to tigers, and tigers are same family as wild cats, and wild cats turn into pussies, and, I bet, he has not hit it off with the old pussy at Waycott.”

”Good heavens, Toney! What reasoning powers you are developing, but the old pussy, as you call that worthy lady, can only be too delighted about the engagement. Rather foolish to keep it so quiet! I expect Honoria Waycott objects to cousins marrying. Always was a sensible woman. I’ve great regard for Honoria Waycott.”

”I’m sorry for her, she just adores her nephew. Now I must run. You won’t make a mistake will you, uncle? Say—you must compose anything you like.”

”Not much of an author, Toney, but I’ll do my best—— Call it a wedding present?”

”Oh, no! He’s determined not to let it out yet, so it wouldn’t do. It’s a great pity to be proud, isn’t it? ’by that sin fell the Angels,’ but Lewis Waycott is awfully nice otherwise.”

”Very much altered of late. First-rate fellow, but—yes, certainly devilish proud. Beg pardon, Toney, my language is not quite choice enough for an heiress.”

”There you are at it! Heiress! Uncle, I shall go up with you to town and see Mr. Staines on business, and come back in the evening. I shall want a rest after the wedding.”

”And come back alone! Not quite the thing!”

”The thing!” repeated Toney scornfully, and ran away.

Everybody was kept going that day. Toney’s untiring energy made Mr. Russell think seriously of resigning his post, and he was glad to see her starting off alone in the motor at half-past six. She was going to meet the bridegroom, and in her heart Toney hoped to say a real good-bye to Lewis Waycott, but the fates were all against her, for the express came panting in before the dog-cart dashed up, and Lewis only had time to jump in, leaving his luggage to follow. Toney caught sight of a flying vision of him, and he did not even see her—— She stood quite still as the train rushed out of the station. A feeling as if the sun had gone out of the sky, and as if life were not worth living came upon her, then a great contraction in her throat—a feeling of numbness all over her.

She had to wait for the 7.10. She must pull herself together. What did this mean? Why had Lewis been so—unkind? He might have just come to say ”Goodbye, Toney, I’ll not forget you among the lions”—or words to that effect. He might have just given her one of his kind, jolly looks, which made one trust him with everything, he might even have smiled a little scoffingly as he did over some of her plans!—— He had done none of these things, simply, he had gone away as

any stranger might have departed.

”Lewis, Lewis, Lewis,” she repeated to herself though to his face she always said ”Mr. Waycott.” Then something strange happened. She walked into the first-class waiting-room which was deserted and looked at herself in the glass. ”Toney,” she said, ”Toney I—do believe—you are a downright—horrid girl—I do believe—gracious stars! I believe you are—no.” She shook herself like a Newfoundland dog just come out of the water. ”I won’t be—so horrid. What would Pups have said? To care so awfully for someone else’s lover! Oh, Pups! I never guessed it till now.” A tearless sob shook her, but at that moment the 7.10 steamed in and Toney had to dart out to meet the genius. Never in all her life had she made such an effort to call up a smile, but of course Frank Weston must be received properly!

”Oh, Mr. Weston, there you are! I’ve told Jim to call for the luggage. Come into the motor at once. So sorry it’s only me, but Jeanie isn’t here. I think the puss—I mean Mrs. Hamilton—didn’t like her coming. Sort of not proper to be seen in public. Odd, isn’t it? But she knows I’m looking after you.”

Frank Weston was smiling all over his face.

”I told her not to come,” he said. ”She might catch cold, and besides she says she is very busy, and Maud is overworked.”

”Everything’s ready as I promised, you know.”

Frank looked at the heiress and he thought her face was changed.

”You look tired, you have done too much for us—but I’ll just say it once, Miss Whitburn.”

”No, say Toney; I shall be sort of sister now, shan’t I?”

He laughed.

”Well, Toney, I’ll just say it once, that we owe all our great happiness to you, and that we can never forget it. Jeanie isn’t demonstrative, but she never forgets.”

”She never forgot you, did she? But you needn’t say ’thank you’ because I’m grateful to you. If it hadn’t been for what I saw in your faces I might have made a great mistake.”

”Is there——?”

”No—but I may as well confess. Sort of relieves me. I might have said ’yes’ to the wrong man.”

”The right man will come,” said Frank softly. ”You deserve the best.”

”No, he never will come—he—oh, it doesn’t matter, but I shall never, never marry—only I’ll try and make it awfully nice for lovers because—I—I think I know, and you’ll not say anything about it, even to Jeanie?”

”You may trust me, but if ever you want me—you may claim my help at any time—and I will come.”

Toney looked up at the strong face and knew he meant every word. How could Jeanie have ever doubted or hurt such a man? How glad she felt she had cleared the brambles out of his path. It was not the music that was so wonderful, it was the man himself.

That evening Toney instead of being restless was very quiet, and in her face there was a new look of suffering such as had never been there before. She had learnt a terrible secret. She loved a man who belonged to another—and only now she realised that she had *always* loved him.

"Oh! Lewis, Lewis!" she cried out alone in her room; "You shall be happy if I can do anything—and you shall never, never know my secret—— It's no good blaming myself because—I never knew what it meant till now. The path of perfection is awfully stoney and rutty."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LILIES AND A WEDDING.

"There's no peace or harmony in the presence of some people," said Lady Dove after dinner to the famous genius. Her eyes involuntarily turned towards Toney, who was talking in low tones to Sir Evas. "Now, with Jeanie Hamilton you are sure of proper dignity."

Frank bowed and smiled, nothing could ruffle him now. He had sent off a letter to Jeanie, and a second diamond ring and a few other tokens, as he did not wish to go to Waycott Hall himself. Mrs. Hamilton's company recalled his past suffering too much. Toney, on the other hand, was associated only with his joy and gratitude.

As if to prove Lady Dove right, a hooting, tooting motor was heard approaching, and Toney started up.

"It's Dr. Mayo," she said, looking at Mr. Weston.

"Dr. Mayo!" he exclaimed, "coming here?"

"Yes, for your wedding! He plays to-morrow morning. It's only fitting."

Frank Weston's eyes beamed.

"You are a magician!" he said, "he wouldn't do it for royalty!" and he hurried out to greet his friend.

"Oh, I wish I could hear all they hear in music," sighed Toney.

"Your ears are sharp enough, anyhow, Toney," said Sir Evas. "By the way,

what's the matter with you this evening? You are pale—most unusual!"

"Nothing—but a bit anxious about this wedding. There's many a slip, isn't there, uncle?"

"Humph, you've got the man and the woman; not much chance of slipping. You're going too fast, Toney, that's what it is."

Toney laughed.

"Gracious stars! Fast! I'd like to go faster. Stone House will keep us busy, uncle, won't it, and—have you thought about the lions and what you'll say? You mean biz, don't you?"

"I shall have to deviate a bit from the path of truth, Toney, but I'll manage it. Melina, I must go to town to-morrow and—sleep there, on business."

"On Antonia's business, I suppose?" said Lady Cove tartly.

"No, oh no—forgot a few things I had to say to Lewis Waycott, who's off after lions. I'll return early on Friday."

"I hope you will, there are plenty of neglected things on your *own* estate, Evas, but of course——="

Happily the two great musicians came in together, and Lady Dove recognising that she would be envied by the musical portion of the county, turned on a smile of welcome, whilst Mr. Russell hastened to make himself agreeable, but in reality Lady Dove felt angry because Toney was the centre of attraction this evening.

"I should never have dared to suggest it," murmured Frank Weston to his friend.

"Nonsense! Why didn't you? Miss Whitburn said it was my duty, and of course my pleasure, and that your wedding could not take place without me——"

Everybody laughed.

"In a sort of way it was Jeanie who suggested it to me," said Toney. "I thought our organist would do, but she looked so reproachfully at me, and said, 'I don't want any music, thank you—short of Dr. Mayo—Frank would run away if he heard our organist!'"

"Do you always get what you want, Miss Whitburn?" said Dr. Mayo.

Poor Toney turned pale but no one noticed this.

"I like other people to have what they like, and I sort of try to get it for them, that's all."

"Ask Weston to sing, Miss Whitburn, and I will accompany him. Weston's voice is something out of the common, but he has refused to sing for some years."

"Do," said Toney, "I think I like singing best, especially when you can hear the words."

Then followed a rare musical treat, till Toney, saying she was very sleepy, excused herself and went to bed.

She paced her small room like a lion in a cage; she felt she must rush up to town to-morrow and call at the hotel, so as just to see him once more, but then she argued this would be wrong knowing what she did know! Perhaps—such things did happen—she might meet him in the streets. That wouldn't be wrong, because she could not help that. Was it wrong to wish it? Anyhow, she couldn't help it. She must turn for comfort to work, work and prayer; and yet neither of these two words seemed to be able to stop the pain. But they must; she, too, would fight with a lion.

She opened her "Little Flowers of St. Francis" to try and find some balm, and her eyes lighted on these words:—

"There came unto him (St. Francis) a youth, noble and tender, and said unto him, 'Father, right willingly would I become one of your brothers.' Replied St. Francis, 'My son, thou art a youth, tender and noble, it may well be that thou couldest not endure our hardships and our poverty.' And quoth he, 'Father, are ye not men even as I? Wherefore, as ye endure, even so shall I be able with the grace of Jesus Christ.'"

And Toney seemed to be comforted by these words, "As ye endure." That was it, to endure nobly, that meant she must not be beaten by her pain. Ah, she too would endure as did that young noble. Of course, endurance was easy when everything went right, but the only thing worth a rag was to endure when everything went wrong! And Toney looked this great sorrow in the face and made up her mind, oh, if it were possible—and it was possible—to endure *cheerfully*. Then, knowing she must be up early, she went to bed and fell asleep.

She awoke to the sound of marriage bells through the open windows; for one moment her face was all joy, then suddenly the pain returned. She dressed very quickly in a plain white serge dress, and then ran out to find the motor. Jim was ready with it. He looked beaming.

"I want to see if the church is properly beautiful. When you get married, Jim, I'll do the same for you. When is it to be?"

"We're in no hurry, Miss Tonia, there's time enough."

Toney laughed, Jim did not feel as did Frank Weston evidently.

At the church there were busy helpers, and several men from London. Large hampers of lilies were being unpacked.

Next, Toney motored to Waycott Hall and interviewed Maud, and then went home to early breakfast. Jim and the motor were to be kept busy.

The actual wedding was simple in the extreme. Only the Waycott Hall party, Miss Waycott, Mrs. Hamilton and Maud; and from Aldersfield, Sir Evas, Toney, the bridegroom, and Dr. Mayo. As the party entered he was already playing divine music, but the church was full of poor people and of white lilies. Never had the little old building looked so beautiful; Jeanie paused at the entrance.

”Oh! This is the most beautiful sight I have ever seen!” she whispered to Frank.

Mrs. Hamilton looked at Toney and then at her sister.

”Honoria, what extravagance, but how beautiful!”

”It’s Toney all over,” said Miss Honoria.

As to Frank Weston, he thought, ”This is as it should be, no fuss, only poor people and flowers and heavenly music.”

There were no jovial young men fussing and talking, no hustling, no disgraceful pushing, no whispered conversations. To the poor it was nearly as good as a funeral as they listened to Mr. Hales’ strong manly voice, and saw his face full of mystic joy.

If Jeanie Hamilton had wanted any more reforming she had it then. How could pride exist in this sanctuary of beauty? She looked like a lily herself in a white afternoon dress, not a ball dress to be minutely described in the newspapers, Jeanie, belonging to one of the oldest families in the county, was marrying a self-made man, but as she looked up at his strong face, full of manly joy, she knew that she, not he, had the best of the bargain! She was only proud now of belonging to him.

Mrs. Hamilton was touched by the beauty and the originality. There was no vulgarity to hurt her pride, and she forgave Maud’s first words in the vestry,

”Oh dearest Jeanie, you are a lucky woman. Toney, it was quite, quite perfect.”

”You shall have the same, Maud, when you marry,” answered Toney smiling.

Maud laughed and looked guilty. How pretty she appeared in her white dress, looking not unlike a bride herself.

The poor people remained seated till the pair came out together, but Toney stayed behind with a little army of helpers. All the lilies were to be tied in bunches, and each poor person in the church was to take home a bunch. Toney therefore missed seeing an uninvited guest at the church door, who shook hands cordially with the wedding party.

”Forgive me, Mrs. Weston, I was not invited, but I heard a whisper of your original wedding and——”

Jeanie smiled.

”It’s Miss Whitburn’s idea. Could anything be more beautiful?”

He was by Maud’s side now and he said quite gravely,

”I took note of everything, Miss Hamilton.”

”Oh,” said Maud smiling, ”it would not do for *your* tastes. Hanover Square and a rowdy audience!”

”Indeed you are unjust. This is the first wedding I have enjoyed——”

Mrs. Hamilton was smiling, but, thinking Edward Lang wanted to make up

to Toney, she did not invite him to the breakfast. Only Maud lingered a minute to say something, and then the poor people came trooping out, and when Toney reappeared she was too busy talking to them to see anything else.

The breakfast at Waycott Hall was a great trial to Toney, but she fought against this lion and no one found out she was in a battle. Dr. Mayo acted as best man, and his speech was short but to the point.

"The bridegroom being a friend of long standing, I rise to drink his health. The bride I have only seen to-day, but I congratulate her from the bottom of my heart. To be the wife of Frank Weston means to be the wife of a genius—that is nothing, he was born a genius, he couldn't help himself—but it also means to be the wife of a man who, having a grand profession, has always ennobled it, and who has never, by thought, word, or deed, lowered the high standard he set before himself, and I think Mr. and Mrs. Weston are wise to go at once to Germany, so as to avoid such demonstration from the musical world here as might be overpowering."

The bridegroom's speech was also very short.

"I thank my friend for his words, because I think he believes them!—but I rise to drink the health of Miss Whitburn. I believe she does not like titles, so when we think of all she has accomplished, we mentally say 'Toney'—— Round this word centres the gratitude of two persons who can never forget her. I am further asked by Mr. Lewis Waycott, to say how much he regrets not being amongst us, but his plans could not be altered. He has ordered that all the cottagers on his estate are to have a good dinner—he wishes us to accept that as his wedding present. For my part he could not have offered me anything I appreciate more."

Toney felt her throat tighten again. Lewis had thought of the nicest thing possible—if only he had been there himself! Maud was looking so happy, but then she, of course, knew he was happy, and knew he could not change.

Now Miss Honoria had something to say.

"I am very sorry that my nephew is not here in person, but he thought of everybody before his departure, and he begged me to say that as all the wedding arrangements were due to Miss Whitburn, he had asked all his tenants to remember her when they enjoyed their dinner."

Toney actually blushed, and Sir Evas, who was sitting beside her, nudged her.

"Come, Toney, say something. Don't say you're shy! Nobody would believe that!"

Toney laughed and stood up.

"It's all a mistake. I'm just doing nothing but please myself awfully when I plan a romance, so there is no credit at all but—— Gracious stars! I can't spout any more."

There was a burst of laughter and the wedding ended in merriment. Toney's one comfort was, "He did think of me anyhow." As they prepared to get ready for going away, she went up to Maud, his Maud.

"Maud, you do look sweet! I want to kiss you. It will do me good."

It was so unlike Toney that Maud laughed.

"I want to hug you, dear Toney, it will do me good! I am so happy."

Jeanie's thanks were simple.

"Toney, Frank says he'll always come when you want him—for a private concert or anything, and so will I."

"How charming of you both, but I don't think there is another romance for me to undertake except Maud's."

"Oh, Maud—must wait," said her sister.

"Yes, of course. Well, now we're going to see you off in grand style."

CHAPTER XXIX.

AN ANGRY LAWYER.

Sir Evas and Toney travelled up to London directly after the wedding pair had left in a private carriage ordered by Toney. In the train the heiress was very quiet. Sir Evas put it down to weariness, and no wonder after all she had accomplished this morning; so the "Good Comrade" respected her silence and read his paper. He was very understanding as Toney always expressed it. At Waterloo, Sir Evas called a hansom for Toney.

"Toney, you'll only go to Mr. Staines. Eh? Why not come on to Charing Cross Hotel later, and have tea or something?"

Toney turned away to find her umbrella. The temptation was very great.

"I shan't have much time, uncle, and I'll get back by the first train possible; Aunt Dove will feel dull and will want to hear all about the wedding. She doesn't quite approve of it, so she had a headache; but she is dying to hear particulars I know!"

"You see, musicians are—well, I mean marrying out of your set wasn't the fashion in her day."

"I wish I knew a nice sweep!" said Toney laughing, "but I don't; or I might, perhaps, fall in love with him; anyhow, I'm booked for a wallflower, so I shan't shock her!"

”Humph!” said Sir Evas. ”Well, good-bye, I’ll do your commission for you, Toney, in fact I’m going straight to Lawn and Alders now, to order a 450-bore high velocity cordite rifle for Lewis’ lions. Make your mind easy and I’ll be back to-morrow. Any message to Waycott?”

”No, nothing in particular. Tell him it was mean to miss the wedding, and tell him that Maud looked very pretty as well as the bride. Good-bye, Ducky Uncle.”

The cab drove off and Sir Evas was left on the platform looking after it.

”There’s something on the child’s mind,” he said to himself. ”It’s not Lewis Waycott, she could have come to hunt me up if it had been. I laid that trap nicely.”

Chuckling at his own deep artfulness, Sir Evas went off to see about the necessary kit for killing lions and tigers!

The clerks at Mr. Staines’ office paid the heiress great attention. It annoyed Toney, and indeed she looked so young and so simple it was difficult to treat her as a great lady, but they all knew she was worth £50,000 a year! You cannot be treated in an ordinary way if you are worth that amount. Toney was shown into the private room at once.

”How are you, Miss Whitburn? Delighted to see you! This is nicer than the telephone.”

”Yes. Never quite sure who’s hulloing,” laughed Toney. ”I shan’t be long. Do you know Stone House has been begun this week?”

Mr. Staines shook his head.

”It will swallow a large sum of—but you can afford it.”

”I’ve given *carte blanche* for everything about it The firm is honest and I won’t have scamped work. Pups said it never paid. I don’t want to ruin the building either, and I want a margin for improvements.”

”You have a very good head for business, Miss Whitburn. Now, how can I help you?”

Toney rose from the chair, she felt less cramped standing up.

”Why, ever so much!” She took a paper out of her pocket which was covered with figures. ”First, tell me how much I could live on suppose I left Aldersfield House? Not yet; but suppose Aunt and uncle died suddenly, the place goes to a distant cousin who is a Judge in New Zealand, and he has a large family?”

”You would then make a home of your own.”

”Yes; but I wouldn’t have a big place in a park. They sort of stifle me. I want just necessities, because I haven’t screwed up my courage to beg yet.”

”To beg!” Mr. Staines thought his client had gone off her head.

”Yes. St. Francis did, you know—but then at that time you weren’t taken up for begging as I should be now.”

They both laughed.

”I think you would be put in a lunatic asylum begging with £50,000 a year.”

”That’s just it. Well, it’s no good beating about the bush. Stone House will cost a heap to build, but now I want to make sure it’s endowed.”

”Endowed! Good heavens!”

”Why, of course, you can’t live on nice rooms, can you? It may take in about forty persons double and single—then——. Yes, I want all my money to go to endow it, except just what will prevent my being a beggar.”

”When you die you mean,” said the lawyer turning a little pink. It was like someone suggesting throwing a priceless picture into the Thames.

”No, now, at once—— You know, Mr. Staines, my will was only temporary. I told you so. If I build and endow Stone House it will be a real monument to the memory of the General and Pups.”

”What madness! You are so young, you will marry, and your husband has a right to expect a large proportion of your fortune.”

”There it is again,” cried Toney. ”I won’t marry; but if I did, why should he expect my money? If I’m not worth loving without, then—oh, I’m glad I shall never, never marry—and if I give this away it will save a lot of people the trouble of asking me for it.”

”It’s madness, utter foolishness,” cried the lawyer, rising and pacing about the room; ”sheer, downright madness! I won’t be a party to it.”

Toney turned pale. Would no one help her? Would no one understand that to give this away was real happiness, that she could never bear the burden alone, and that by keeping it she was a temptation to every man who required money?

”I think the General would understand, Mr. Staines, and so would Uncle Evas.”

”Though you are your own mistress, I must consult your uncle.”

Toney shook her head.

”It’s no use—— He wouldn’t like to go slap against you! Old family lawyers are such tyrants.”

Mr. Staines looked furious.

”Tyrants, indeed! But for us half the owners of money would commit endless follies such as you wish to do, Miss Whitburn!”

”You can’t keep all that pile and remain on the ’Path of Perfection,’” said Toney decidedly, ”it can’t be done. I wish you would read ’The Little Flowers.’”

”This is pure drivelling——”

”Look here, Mr. Staines, I’ve a real regard for you. You wouldn’t run away with anyone’s money, but—you don’t understand. Anyhow, I’ve told you I mean to keep some, because there are always needy people, and then I think I shall keep the Haven to retire to myself, and I could live then on—there I do want help. I’ve always lived on nothing before I had this pile.”

”Are you decided?”

”Quite, quite, quite—if you can’t do it, hitch me on to a man that will.”

Toney stood now firm and strong. The colour returned to her cheeks.

Mr. Staines could not possibly lose the handling of the money, so he bowed to necessity.

”I must reserve enough for your private needs and casual charity,” he said.

”That’s it. I thought you’d come round to see it, Mr. Staines. Only I want it done awfully soon, and then I shall breathe again! In fact draw up something now, to make it quite secure. One never knows. I might have a smash in the train to-day. You see I couldn’t be sure about Aunt Dove, she does love the coin. Sort of madness, I guess.”

”Cannot I first see Sir Evas Dove?” groaned Mr. Staines.

”It would make no difference; still, when it’s done you can tell him. I like everything above board, don’t you?”

”Above board” was the last thing suitable for his position. The lawyer did not answer.

”I’ll go and get a mouthful to eat, Mr. Staines, arguing with you has made me so hungry, and then I’ll come back and sign.”

”Give me discretion to keep a sufficiency for——”

”Yes—and if it’s too much I can come again, but, gracious stars! it’s enough to stifle a poor girl having to decide all these questions. Half an hour will do for a preliminary canter, won’t it, and make it sure.”

Toney departed and took a cab to Lyons’ Restaurant, Piccadilly. All the time she looked out at the passers-by. By a bare chance she might see Lewis Waycott walking about, and she would just nod a last good-bye. What would he say to her action? She didn’t know, but she believed he would say ”Quite right, Toney, much better secure it for these people.”

Of course he was the only man who would not reproach her! Her heart felt lighter.

The Lyons made her think still more of Lewis’ lions! She ordered some tea and hot toast to try and get him out of her thoughts, but she felt terribly lonely in the big place so full of people going and coming. It was like a miniature world full of persons thinking of their own concerns or their own comfort. For the first time she began to appreciate the lonely park at Aldersfield. It was this busy world that oppressed her now. Was she changing? She who had jostled against so many persons, and who had been afraid of nothing.

She felt better after her tea and jumped into a hansom again, to return to Mr. Staines. How glad she would be when the deed of gift was done and signed.

Once more she stood in the private room. Mr. Staines looked really distressed.

”You have forced me to go against my conscience,” he said, unfolding a big paper.

Toney could not help laughing as she sat down with alacrity to sign.

”I’ve kept a sufficiency,” he said; ”don’t try me too much.”

”You are really nice,” she answered, signing her full name with a flourish whilst two clerks came to witness the signature and retired, little guessing what they had helped to do.

”I’ve endowed Stone House with £30,000 a year. That will be ample for a whole colony. The money you gave to Lady Dove has taken a slice of the capital, and you have lived in fine style since then! Then the building will take another large slice.”

”When Aunt Dove dies I want you to settle the £2,000 on Miss Maud Hamilton,” said Toney. ”She is a great friend of mine and poor. Oh, I’ve had a glorious time, Mr. Staines, but I knew it was only for a time. St. Francis never kept things with the excuse of giving them away again.”

”Hang St. Francis!”

Toney laughed, and Mr. Staines could not help smiling.

”Well, good-bye, I’ve got to catch a train, and please, Mr. Staines, will you accept a little personal present? Not the firm—— Just to show you forgive me, and *I* won’t say how *you* are to spend it! Oh, it’s from me and the General.”

Then like a strange gleam of unearthly sunshine Toney was gone. Mr. Staines opened the envelope and discovered a cheque for a thousand pounds. From another client it is doubtful if he would have accepted it, but a strange smile passed over his face.

”They are going to shut up a wing of the Children’s Hospital at Margate,” he said; ”this will just save it; that girl sets a shocking example, but I did my best——”

He was not yet happy, but, strange to say, he was somewhat comforted.

Toney walked into the Aldersfield drawing-room half an hour before the dressing bell. Lady Dove was listening to Miss Grossman’s rather loud voice. The novel was dull, and she was glad to stop her. Usually Miss Grossman insisted on reading the whole hour before dinner without stopping or allowing her employer to talk.

”Oh, Aunt Dove, I’ve had a nice afternoon. I saw Mr. Staines and had a jolly tea at the Lyons’ Restaurant. Uncle is coming back early to-morrow, but I knew you’d be dying to hear about our wedding.”

”Mrs. Hamilton has been here and told me all. I’m sure, Toney, you must have wasted a great deal on flowers out of season.”

”They did good all round, and Jeanie and Mr. Weston just seemed lifted up by them. So would you have been if you’d seen them.”

”I never countenance useless waste,” was the answer.

”Sentimentality is not sentiment,” interposed Miss Grossman.

To herself Toney said, ”Consider the lilies of the field how they grow;” aloud, she added, ”Anyhow Miss Honoria agreed that Jeanie and Maud looked lovely!”

”Mrs. Hamilton really bored me about her daughters’ perfections. I said I was sorry her son-in-law’s escutcheon was a blank, but, of course, she is going to keep Maud in her own set. Lewis Waycott has as many quarterings as the Hamiltons.”

Toney’s heart went thump, thump, again. How horrid she was!

”Quarterings are no use at all to the Westons. They will be just perfect without them,” said Toney.

”But of course,” continued Lady Dove, ”I do wonder at her countenancing the marriage of cousins.”

”The future owner of Waycott will be an idiot,” said Miss Grossman decidedly. Then Toney rushed away; the atmosphere of the drawing-room without Uncle Evas suffocated her. ”If it weren’t for him,” she thought, ”I would fly to the Haven at once, but I can’t forsake him, no, I can’t, he’s so awfully good to me.”

Happily everybody was tired that evening (Miss Grossman condescended to dine with them as Lady Dove was alone, for Toney’s companionship did not count), and Toney did her best to rattle on about all sorts of things till the early bedtime when all three were glad to retire to bed, little guessing what the night would bring forth, but as Toney said her prayers her heart seemed suddenly to feel light again.

”It will be easier to get to the other side,” she thought, ”without that load, anyway!”

CHAPTER XXX.

A FIERY ORDEAL.

Toney was usually an excellent sleeper and it took a good deal to wake her before morning, and she had gone through much in the last twenty-four hours. The brain, however, can be powerfully impressed by smell, and this must have been the reason why at two o’clock she heard a soft whine close to her ear, then a short, sharp bark, and then Toney started up in bed, fully awake. Next she gave

a sniff and then the strong clear mind went straight to the mark.

”Powder me pink!” she exclaimed, then she jumped out of bed and dressed quicker than she had ever done in her life before. Her garments were few and substantial, and she drew on a skirt and a flannel blouse. Next she seized a big bath towel and soaked it in her hip bath.

”It’s shorter in the long run,” she thought, then she cautiously opened the door of her small room at the top of the house. The passage had smoke in it too, thicker smoke than in her room. For half a second she paused to think as she snatched up Trick in her arms. ”Maids up here—the men in the other wing—bother, the telephone is down in my room—worse luck!” Then she dashed along the passage to the maids’ rooms, opening each door as she passed, and shouting, ”Get up! Fire! Quick!” At the end of the passage the cook opened the door, she was dressed, having also been awakened by the smell of smoke.

”Oh, Miss Tonia! It’s fire—God have mercy on us!”

”All right, ring a bell out of the window, the men in the other wing will hear it. Shout Fire!—and, look here, tell the maids to dress first, it’s safer in the end.”

The elderly cook felt that Miss Tonia was right, her words acted like a strong restorative and brought back her presence of mind as the half-dressed maids crowded into the passage.

”Dress all of you girls, thick jackets, it’s cold; we are safe at present.” Toney paused.

”Yes, all safe at present, take wet towels with you. I’m afraid it’s on the first floor, and these stairs don’t look inviting!”

A volume of smoke rolled up now, and for a moment hid them from each other. Toney wrapped her wet towel round her head and shoulders and once more called out,

”Keep together—shout loud—try the other stairs, not these. I’ll go and explore, but you had better not. Try the leads, you’ll be safer there. Good-bye!”

”Miss Tonia! for God’s sake don’t go down those stairs, it’s madness, stay here,” cried the cook.

”I can’t, Aunt Dove and Miss Grossman, but look here, Rose, take Trick and hold him tight, he will want to follow me and I must have my two hands,” then suddenly Toney disappeared in another volume of smoke. The maids shrieked and wrung their hands, but the cook had happily regained her senses.

”Girls! follow me, the other stairs may be safe.”

Clinging to each other they ran down the long passage, but at the other end they found quite as much smoke, for the narrow stairs seemed to act like two funnels.

”Let’s go down, oh, let’s go down!” cried the maids, ”we must go before it’s

too late!"

"Miss Tonia said, 'the leads'—I think, girls, she's right. We can call for help from there. We might be suffocated in this smoke. Make for the trap-door on to the leads," and soon they were breathing pure air and exercising their lungs with screams. To their delight they saw that men were already running about below and were signalling to them that help was coming.

We must follow Toney on her dangerous exploration. She had one idea in her mind. The fire must have begun in her Aunt Dove's room or else in Miss Grossman's, a few doors off, or else in some flue close by. The dense smoke pointed unmistakably to this. Had they escaped? Their rooms were at the end of a passage, and they must go down it to reach the central staircase. The stairs down which she now forced her way were rather steep, and ended at the opposite end of the Hall to where was her aunt's passage, but Toney knew every step by heart. It was impossible to see even if there had been any light, the smoke was too thick. Should she meet the fire face to face and be driven back? Even here she felt the stairs were hot and the smoke was terrible. When she reached the bottom, however, she paused; by some strange freak for a few moments the smoke cleared, and she could breathe again! Oh, the relief! but this was only for a moment. She had to keep her mind clear; wrapping her wet towel still closer to her head, she made a dash along the central passage. Toney realised that this was passable, but dense smoke came rolling towards her from her aunt's passage. Oh, how could she pass it? She must, she must go on, for no one answered her smothered cry of "Aunt Dove! Aunt Dove! Miss Grossman!"

Again she paused to take what breath she could. Her eyes tingled, she felt choked, but as yet she saw no fire.

"I must, I must," she repeated and strangely enough came the words to her mind, "the Path of Perfection." Was this the Path? If only Aunt Dove were not locked in! If only Uncle Evas had been here! if only— "Now," she thought, feeling the towel was getting dry and smoke-laden, "Now!"

Never had Toney made such a desperate dart down the passage. Oh, the heat! and the roaring and the smoke!—the smoke, that was the most terrible part of it! She hurled herself, blindfolded as she was, against the door and it gave way, but how the smoke rolled in with her! So immediately she shut the door, then she loosed the towel and called out.

"Aunt Dove, Aunt Dove! where are you? Speak, I can't see, Aunt Dove!"

"Help! help!" was the feeble smothered answer, but it was Miss Grossman's voice.

"Where? where?" She stumbled forwards across the big room and knocked against the bath filled with water. She stooped down and dashed her head in it, towel and all. What a relief she felt as she staggered forwards.

”Miss Grossman, where is Aunt Dove? Where are you?”

”In the wardrobe—we are suffocated! Help! help!”

”Come out quick.” Toney seized another towel and dipped it in the bath. ”We can still cross—at least I think so.”

The big wardrobe opened, and as Miss Grossman crawled out Toney threw the wet towel over her; then Lady Dove emerged speechless from fear and smoke.

”Miss Grossman, why didn’t you go down? I, think we can still do it.”

”I ran in here, and then—Lady Dove would not follow me. Oh, the smoke—the window—open the window!”

”No, no, not yet, the draught—quick, oh, quick—Aunt Dove, take my arm. You have only your dressing-gown—take a blanket—Miss Grossman, run fast, we will follow.” Miss Grossman was feeling the relief of the wet towel, she made a dash towards the door.

”Quick! Aunt Dove, follow me—I’ll drag you, we have only just time.”

”I can’t, Antonia—don’t leave me—oh, I can’t breathe!”

”You must, you must.” Toney dragged her a few steps, but fear had paralyzed her; at this moment Miss Grossman had reached the door and realised the danger of opening it more than once. A dull roar was heard.

”Are you coming? For God’s sake, I cannot go alone——”

”Go,” cried Toney, ”you have time—I think. Aunt Dove, come, for Uncle Evas’ sake come—pull yourself together. In a minute we——”

The door was opened by Miss Grossman, whose muffled voice again called out, ”Come, come,” then she shut it again, and Toney was left alone with her aunt. A terrible column of smoke had rolled in, and she noticed that one tongue of fire tried to pierce the smoke in the big chamber.

”Toney, I can’t—I can’t walk. Don’t leave me—air—air—open the window!”

”Yes, it’s too late for the door, Aunt Dove, we must come back—I’ll open the window and call. Oh! they must be trying to save us now—don’t leave go—stick tight to me: they will hear us.” Toney felt a terrible weight on her; would her aunt give in? Here was one of the windows, the red curtain drawn across it, she pulled it back, a sofa was against it, she managed with superhuman effort to get her aunt on it, but it was terribly difficult.

”Aunt Dove, I’ll open now or we shall be suffocated—only—there is danger—the draught—you know! I’ll not leave you. Hold my jacket whilst I open.” The window was locked, she could not find the bolt with that weight impeding her, she wrapped her hand round the towel and smashed the glass. Oh, the relief of the air! all danger seemed for a moment swallowed up in that relief. She was even able to unbolt the latch and pull up the sash.

”Help! help! Jim, ladders—help!” She saw a crowd below, some holding lanterns, some torches. She heard a fire engine gallop up, she even saw a shoot.

”Here! here!” she called. Were they saved?

”Aunt Dove, they are coming. Put your head out of the window!” Toney said this because the roar behind them was increasing. She saw the tongue of fire very plainly now. Was there time? The engine was there. A great jet of water was playing on them, no, above them, they had not yet located the fire and it was coming, coming. Oh! the heat, the terrible heat! but now the fire escape was there, it was placed against the wall.

”Oh, Aunt Dove, don’t give up—here they are!”

”Don’t leave me! I can’t move, Toney! the fire—look!”

”No, no, don’t look.” A ringing cheer, and a man was on the sill, having run up a ladder whilst the shoot was placed in position close to the window.

”Quick,” he said, ”not a moment to waste—one at a time.” Toney did not hesitate, never thought of hesitating, as she dragged her aunt up to the sill. Her powerlessness had returned. The long shoot was there, it would have been so easy for Toney to step into it, but Aunt Dove was utterly unnerved—no one but Toney could rouse her.

”Help her, so—Aunt Dove, you are saved, it is not difficult; you slide down. Get in—you must—think of Uncle Evas.” Lady Dove had clutched Toney so tightly that she could not, or would not, leave go. The fireman had to wrench her hand away by main force, and precious minutes were lost!

For God’s sake—quick! It was certainly a very undignified retreat, but it was done; Lady Dove was saved!

But Toney, what of Toney? was there time? A great flare of light seemed suddenly visible behind her. The fireman had disappeared, and Toney could not linger another minute. She jumped on the sill and stood for a few seconds clinging to the sash above. Then she saw there was but one chance for her; she must let herself drop on to a kind of parapet below, and then clutch the iron rod that was now at her feet—if she did not miss it! In the lurid light she was seen by everybody—there was a breathless moment, then she let go—and without once hesitating clutched and retained the rod. A roar of admiration and horror mingled together was heard; then suddenly, like a lightning flash, another form had run up the ladder, and though it was not in right position Jim stretched out both arms and supported her, in what was an untenable position—because—Toney’s sleeve had caught fire.

”Miss Tonia, hold on one minute. Now”—with one hand he held her, with the other he crushed the fire out, then—but for Jim there would have been no then, Toney could not have held on—the next instant the shoot was moved and again placed in position for Toney, and Jim straining forward helped her to get in—alone she could not have done it.

”Miss Tonia, Miss Tonia—thank God, it’s all right.” Then Toney heard a

great shout, a shout that permeated everywhere, and she felt herself sliding down, down, always down; but the truth was that for the first time in her life Toney had fainted, and when she came to herself she was in the big barn where the grand supper had been served, and which was situated on the side where the fire was not.

"Aunt Dove—and everybody?" she gasped. It was Maud who was beside her, and Dr. Latham was cutting off her sleeve and wrapping up her left arm in cotton wool after having soaked it in oil.

"Oh! Toney, Toney, all are saved; you did it; is the pain very bad?"

Toney shut her eyes a moment.

"Gracious stars!—I forgot—I thought I was going down and down, and the fire was running after me! Oh, all saved! Maud! I am glad. Where's Trick?" At this moment a poor, singed, bedraggled animal made a bound and was on Toney's couch, licking her face and half wild with joy.

"I was so afraid we should never get aunt out! Trick, Trick, you gave the first warning; you're just a hero! Let me get up, Dr. Latham; I'm quite fit—is my study burnt?

"No, all that wing is safe; the wind carried the fire the other way, and the engines are keeping it down. Lady Dove and Miss Grossman have been driven to Waycott Hall; she revived wonderfully, but you were not ready to go off with them."

"The maids were saved first," added Maud; "fortunately, they were on the roof, and very visible, but till Miss Grossman appeared we could not locate where you were. Mr. Russell has done wonders. Oh, it was dreadful!"

Toney's colour began to return; she insisted on getting up, and Maud fetched a great ulster for her to keep her warm.

"We must telephone to Uncle Evas at once," she said; "he's at Charing Cross Hotel." To herself Toney thought, "Lewis Waycott will know I did my best before he goes." Then she shook herself to make sure her legs were her own.

"Now I must go—where's Jim? Oh, Maud, I couldn't have held on a second longer without him!"

The two girls went out to the front of the house. It was four o'clock now, and a great glare and volumes of smoke made lurid light, but every now and then the water conquered the fire. All the villagers were working with a will, carrying pictures and valuables to safety, and, strange to say, most ably directed by Plantagenet Russell. He seemed to forget entirely his own personality, and thought only of saving all that was precious in the best possible way. Every now and then a cheer was heard, when something was brought out through the danger zone. It was on this scene that Toney appeared, and again there was a shout that drowned all other sounds. The old men and women gathered round

her, the others were working for all they were worth.

”Miss Tonia! Miss Tonia! Thank God! thank God! You gave us such a fright, that you did! when you stood up there. Jim wouldn’t wait; he did his duty, did Jim. There wasn’t time to wait, though the fireman said there was——Here, Jim, stop a bit, and come and see Miss Tonia!” Jim, looking like a sweep, touched his hat.

”It’s all right now you’re safe, Miss Tonia.”

”It’s all owing to you, Jim; I couldn’t have kept hold another minute.”

”You saved her ladyship, Miss Tonia; she was sheer dazed with fright; the fireman said he couldn’t have managed it himself. Her ladyship was very upset, and directly she heard you were safe she went off with Miss Grossman. We can’t think how you managed that drop, miss; none of us could have done it!”

”I had to, Jim, the heat was so awful!”

”I came just in time,” said Maud. ”Oh! Toney, to see you dropping down from that ledge made me feel sick! I shall never forget it. If only Lewis had been here!” Toney turned to see the men again.

”Thank you very much for helping to save uncle’s things; but please don’t go into danger for them. Mr. Russell, how good you’ve been; you’ll take care of the men? Now I think I’ll go to Waycott Hall to see after Aunt Dove. Come, Maud.” Doctor Latham joined her.

”There’s the carriage coming back. I’ll come too. You will feel your arm pain you more later.”

* * * * *

”If you please, Sir Evas Dove, you’re wanted at the telephone immediately,” said a sleepy waiter.

”Hulloa! what’s up? Is it Lady Dove?—Impossible—I’ll come immediately.”

”Are you Sir Evas?”

”Yes; who is it? Ah! Russell, is it you? What’s the matter?”

”Aldersfield is on fire; can you come first train? Everybody saved; Lady Dove much upset; Miss Whitburn has burnt her arm—Miss Hamilton wants Mr. Waycott to know.”

”What the Dickens are you all up to? I’ll come first train; never mind if all are safe.”

Sir Evas rushed to Lewis Waycott’s room.

”Waycott, are you awake?”

”Yes; what’s up?”

”I’m off immediately; Aldersfield is burning; Toney has been burnt.”

”Toney burnt! Good heavens! I’ll come with you.”

”No need, only her arm; but Maud wanted you to know. Good-bye; good luck to your hungry lions.”

But Lewis did not reply, he was hurrying into his clothes with greater rapidity than ever before, and when Sir Evas stepped into the carriage he did not see that Lewis Waycott jumped in too, just as the train was starting.

CHAPTER XXXI.

HOME AGAIN.

Hardly had Maud, Toney, and Dr. Latham reached Waycott Hall in the grey light of morning, than a rider galloped up. It was Edward Lang, who threw himself off his saddle to greet the girls.

”We heard such stories that I simply threw myself on Tempest and galloped here. You were reported dead, Miss Whitburn—are you hurt, Miss Hamilton? They sent me on here from Aldersfield.”

”Toney’s arm is burnt, I was only a spectator.”

”The fire is being got under, but the left wing looks bad.” He kept close to Maud and looked more at her than at Toney. Maud told the tale. Toney did not care to talk about it, so she left them to go and find her aunt, and met Miss Honoria, Mrs. Hamilton, and Miss Grossman looking for her.

”My dear child,” cried Miss Honoria, kissing her, ”is your arm bad? You must go to bed.”

”We are all proud of you,” said Mrs. Hamilton, conquered at last, for personal courage was her special admiration, ”Miss Grossman told us all. Lady Dove has gone to bed and begged not to be disturbed, so you had better not see her yet, she is much shaken.”

”How did you get through?” said Toney to the companion. ”Aunt Dove couldn’t move, I think fear paralyzed her, and, gracious stars! the shoot just finished her for a moment. We had to use force, I couldn’t go down on her head, and by the time I could I had to move away from it along the sill, out of reach. But you know, Miss Honoria, Jim saved me. I was holding on for all I was worth, but—oh, I couldn’t have done it half a minute longer.”

Toney was simply bent on praising Jim, forgetting that these horrible moments had been endured for Aunt Dove’s sake.

”I couldn’t have got through but for that soaked towel, Miss Whitburn, you

saved my life, I shall feel in your debt for the rest of my life," said Miss Grossman, who having washed and dressed looked quite normal. Toney laughed.

"Oh don't, please, a towel is a very old joke, isn't it?"

"I find, to my surprise, that the obvious escapes one at such moments. Lady Dove rang the bell in my room violently and, smelling smoke, I ran to her without thought. Once there I did the best I could for us both."

"Well, that was real lucky for her, but I guess you were nearly stifled in that wardrobe," said Toney smiling. "Tell me what Aunt Dove said afterwards?"

"If you wish to know, she said it was the first time you had been of real use."

"That's grand from her! Now, Miss Honoria, I think I'll go and curl up till Uncle Evas comes. I don't want to go to bed, thank you," she said smiling bravely.

"Then just come to Lewis' study. No one will go there to disturb you, dear," answered Miss Honoria.

"All right, I'll go, don't come with me. Maud's somewhere telling Mr. Lang."

Toney washed her face and brushed her hair in Maud's room, then she hurried towards the study. She would like to be there, quiet and alone; she wanted to get rid of that horrible feeling of holding on to an impossible position. She had fancied herself braver. Pups wouldn't have turned a hair over it—neither would she formerly. This life of luxury was unnerving her; how glad, how very glad she was that her will had been altered. She heaved a sigh of relief as she opened the door. Then she stood still thunderstruck! The room was not empty, Maud was talking eagerly to Edward Lang and they were close to each other and he was holding her hand. How horrid of Maud! What would Lewis think?

"Ehem!" said Toney in a loud voice, and the two flew apart, Maud turning round with a crimson face.

"Oh, Toney, we—I didn't think you would come here—— I was telling Mr. Lang——"

"Oh I say, Miss Whitburn, I'll take a leaf out of your book—— I want Maud to marry me and she won't say 'yes!'"

Toney nearly said, "How dishonourable," then by a sudden inspiration her mind was illumined. She must have imagined, all—the other thing? A great weight seemed to be suddenly lifted from her heart, she felt light as air so that she actually burst out laughing.

"Oh! Stars and Stripes!—Maud—you never told me—— Is it really true—or——"

Edward Lang's eyes were so blue and so kind, he seized Maud's hand.

"She'll obey you, Miss Whitburn—tell her to say 'yes'—and you can't say I love her for her money—because she has none, and if she will just reform this extravagant personage we shall be as happy as——"

”Gracious stars! Maud—do you——”

”He’s most unworthy,” said Maud laughing, ”but I have a slight regard for him only—it’s all very well promising to reform but——”

”You can’t tell unless you try me,” he answered, looking really in earnest, ”but be witness, Miss Whitburn, ’pon my honour I will, Maud says I must work, and really I mean in future to be less of a lazy dog, but if Maud throws me up——”

”A gentleman always keeps his word, Maud,” said Toney, ”and indeed, Mr. Lang, Maud won’t always be penniless, I’ve just made my will, and when Aunt Dove dies, you’ll have two thousand a year, Maud—it’s my wedding gift to you.”

The lovers stared hard, then Maud actually cried and ended by laughing.

”Oh, Toney! We can’t—he won’t reform if I’m not a beggar!”

”Aunt Dove’s got an awfully good constitution, so there’s no hurry,” said Toney, ”but I’m so very, very glad, Mr. Lang, though of course, Maud is too good for you, only——”

They all laughed, and Maud seeing Toney’s tired look, suggested she should lie down and be left alone.

”Yes, I think I’ll curl up,” said Toney, ”I’m still a bit dazed—but, oh, Maud—I never guessed!”

The lovers went out and Toney called Trick, then literally curled herself round on the big sofa, feeling that it would take a long time to re-adjust her ideas. Why had she believed Aunt Dove, and—oh, it was all a mistake—what about Lewis’ strange coldness? But even the new sweet, strange puzzle, and the great lightness of heart, could not keep her weary eyes open, though she did not want to sleep but to see Sir Evas directly he appeared, so she took her little book out of her pocket and opened it at the place where the little boy saw St. Francis in a wood, surrounded with heavenly visitors, and she read how St. Francis, returning home, stumbled over the boy, and then lifted him in his arms, ”as doth a good shepherd with his sheep,” and Toney thought of the terrible moments on the sill, and thanked God that she had been upheld by the Good Shepherd till help had come, for she heard Jim tell someone that it was a miracle how Miss Tonia had held on—— Then ”The Little Flowers of St. Francis” dropped from her hands and Toney fell asleep.

* * * * *

Sir Evas, getting out at Winchley Station, stumbled against Lewis Waycott.

”Bless my soul, you came too, Waycott! How can you spare the time? There’s a fly waiting, come with me, I wanted to talk about your lions, but all this has driven everything out of my head.”

”The lions will wait,” said Lewis gravely. Then Sir Evas spoke a few words

to the Station Master, after which both men hurried into the fly.

”It might have been worse, but Ingram says it was a near shave for Toney. However, now the fire is got under. She saved her aunt’s life, Ingram says. What a fright I had, but Toney’s safe; I’m as fond of that girl as if she was my own.”

”Of course,” said Lewis, ”I’m sure she never thought of herself.”

”Always was foolhardy—but coming down I was reading a letter from Staines, he’s terribly upset. What do you think Toney did yesterday?”

”Yesterday! Was she in town?”

”Yes, I forgot to say so—Staines said she insisted on making an immediate deed of gift to that confoun—well, that Stone House of hers of £30,000, and to think of all the time I wasted on that girl’s money affairs! It’s preposterous! I don’t wonder Staines is nearly off his head!”

”A deed of gift of £30,000!” repeated Lewis turning towards Sir Evas with a flash of joy in his eyes.

”Yes, I thought you’d be as surprised as I am. Worse—Staines said he would tell me—out of the remainder, she’s given my wife £2,000 principal and interest, and at her death it’s to go on to your Cousin Maud.”

”To Maud!”

”Yes, Toney’s very fond of Maud, and—you know I expect she thought it would help you.”

”Help me! Why?”

”Oh she told me not to let the cat out of the bag, but I never could keep a cat in anything. She heard you were engaged to Maud—keeping it quiet—much better—I wouldn’t have mentioned it but for this money.”

”Good heavens! What else—she won’t have much left.”

”Confound it all—the rest, I suppose, will build Stone House, only——” and Sir Evas chuckled,

”Staines has kept the coal mines as her share, and there’s no knowing what they are worth, unless the seam fails—there’ll be pickings, but only pickings. Such a fortune, a princely fortune. Stone couldn’t have foreseen it.”

”I believe he did, Sir Evas, I believe it was his fashion of dispensing charity.”

”I don’t know, he was a queer fish himself, gave lavishly in secret, but—it’s really enough to turn Staines’ hair white.”

Here Lewis Waycott laughed aloud; Sir Evas looked at him a little reproachfully.

”I don’t see the joke.”

”Forgive me, Sir Evas—I do—but what made Toney say that about Maud? What an absurd idea! I’m awfully fond of Maud—I think I told Toney so—but I look upon these girls as my sisters. They’re tremendously improved, and it’s Toney’s doing.”

”Then you’re not engaged to Maud! I always said it surprised me—Toney’s too cute. Here we are—good heavens! It’s not pleasant to see your ancestral home looking like this!”

The two men were surrounded immediately by responsible and irresponsible people. Sir Evas heard all that was known, and Lewis was shown where Toney had stood and told how she had saved the lives of Lady Dove and Miss Grossman. Lewis Waycott looked away. He was a strong man but at that moment he felt faint.

”They are all at Waycott, Sir Evas,” said Lewis, ”I think I’ll go on.”

”Yes, do, say I am coming. I must thank my people for saving so much of my property. There isn’t a picture burnt, and much of the furniture is saved.”

Sir Evas had become very popular since Toney had rubbed his shyness off, so now he went about among his tenants scattering kind words, and he was almost overcome by their heartfelt sympathy. Though his treasures had been at everybody’s mercy, not the smallest thing had been injured.—”It will soon be built up again, sir—’Twas a mercy everyone was saved—Her ladyship wouldn’t face the shoot at first, sir—If Miss Tonia hadn’t been there the two ladies would have been roasted alive—The ways of Providence is wonderful! ’Tain’t for such of us to understand them!”

On leaving Sir Evas, Lewis had stumbled on Jim.

”Jim, if you’re not wanted, take me home in the motor—at least if it isn’t burnt.”

”No, sir, the stables never suffered. Miss Tonia asked after Colon and the others, sir, and the little dorg went near mad with joy. He tried to run into the fire to find Miss Tonia. Trick ain’t like other dorgs.”

”I hear, Jim, you saved Miss Toney—you know we shan’t forget that.”

Jim grinned broadly, he was going faster than any regulation speed, so he could not do more.

”That wasn’t nothing, sir. I was so mad that they didn’t move the shoot quicker, I thought her ladyship must have stuck half-way, so I ran up a ladder, and though it wasn’t quite in the right place I managed, by stretching out, to hold Miss Tonia for a minute till the shoot came. If it hadn’t been for that she couldn’t have held on, how she did it at all, sir, is a miracle, but she’s got such a cool head has Miss Tonia, ’tain’t another like her anywhere, sir.”

”You’re right, Jim, there isn’t another like her, anywhere.”

”Thought you had started for foreign parts, sir.”

”I haven’t started yet—I may go next week—or I may not. Tell me how the fire began, Jim.” And Jim’s ideas on this point lasted till they reached Waycott Hall gates.

”All right, Jim, I’ll walk from here—I don’t want to disturb the ladies—they

are not expecting me. Go back for Sir Evas." Lewis sneaked into his own house like a thief. His brain seemed spinning round with a multitude of ideas, as if it were on fire. He mentally saw Toney on that ledge and—he muttered some savage words about himself for not being there, adding, "Hang that Jim, he'll be unbearable for the rest of his life."

No one was expecting him, the hall was deserted, he walked through it and from habit made for his own study. He wanted to calm himself before seeing them all; of course Toney was upstairs—perhaps in bed. Oh! he could wait now. If he told anyone he was here, Aunt Honoria would claim him, and he should have to hear that horrid story again. He opened the door and stepped in. He walked to the fireplace—then—— Good heavens! there was Toney on his sofa, fast asleep, and there too was Trick, who pricked up his ears and barked!

Toney woke up with a start, and with her right hand rubbed her eyes.

"Gracious stars! Uncle—oh, it's——" She sank down again because her legs refused to carry her.

"It's only Lewis," he said sitting down beside her. "Toney—Toney, I've come back to tell you what a fool I've been."

"You haven't yet killed all the lions in Somaliland, have you?" said Toney trying to laugh in her old manner; but the laugh died away before the look in Lewis' eyes.

"Let me tell you quick, Toney." He took her hand, and Toney felt she was dreaming, for never had he looked like that before, never had he held her hand in this manner. "I went away because I loved you—yes, I have always loved you, and you only, but that beastly money came in the way! Lady Dove said I wanted your money, and my horrid pride couldn't swallow the gold! I sacrificed everything to it; then came the day when I couldn't stand any more, I couldn't live and see you every day and say nothing when I wasn't sure—of your feelings. I wasn't worthy of you, Toney; I might have trusted you, I might have known that the money would never stay with you, and now I've heard; but, oh, my Toney, will you believe that I was coming before I knew; I was coming to swallow the whole fortune, and the *on dits* of the whole county, only your uncle told me, and, anyhow, I ask you now, will you be my wife, not for the money, but for yourself? If you say I don't deserve you, if you say you don't care enough for me, I'll go off again and wait—and then, another thing, Toney, you thought about Maud—how could you? I expect it was Lady Dove again, and now you have just saved her life, and nearly—Toney—Toney." He put his strong arm round her and she did not resist. "Speak to me and tell me—and then I'll face all those Society lions."

Then Toney just laid her weary head on his shoulder, and there was a lump in her throat and a great, great gladness in her heart.

"Don't go away, ever again—I've been very, very miserable, and I hated

myself because I thought you belonged to Maud—— Is it true, quite, quite true?"

"It's awfully true—Toney, you won't go on believing about Maud?"

"Oh, gracious stars! no!" cried Toney lifting up her face that was so pink, and her eyes that were so bright; "because she's just been engaging herself to the Honourable Edward Lang!"

"Maud?" shouted Lewis, and they both laughed together. "So you knew—when?"

"Oh, here, just before I went to sleep. Then all the horrid feelings went away—and dear, dear Lewis, I sort of felt you would come back, and I was so happy—and you won't mind my being rather poor, though Aunt Dove says you ought to marry money; but even for you I could not keep it, because it was all dedicated long ago to the poor and needy."

"My darling, I've proved I don't care, though in a stupid way—— Toney, say you forgive me for hurting you, and now—I claim the gift you promised me long ago from the cottage window."

"Oh, Lewis, was it that? and I never guessed!" Then a great content fell on them both. "I said I would give you what you asked, and I think that I always have loved you, though I never knew it till—you went away! Oh! there's uncle—let me go—and tell him; he sort of guessed it before I did!"

"He's more sense than I have," said Lewis laughing.

Then they stood up with shining eyes waiting for Sir Evas, and Toney whispered,

"I was so lonely, so lonely, and the work seemed so hard, and now you'll never leave me and we'll work together; I see now I can't do it alone, and I do hope 'That is the way God would have us to go,' as dear St. Francis said whenever he was starting on a journey!"

"We'll go, God helping us, all the way together, my Toney," said Lewis as they stood together "and as for the lions, they may eat each other up. Come and tell Aunt Honoria, and Maud and the others, they will all be so glad!"

"They've been so awfully good to me, but—I am not *quite* sure about Aunt Dove's joy!"

"Hang her," muttered Lewis.

As they went out hand-in-hand together, they laughed the old happy laugh, and met Sir Evas face to face at the hall door.

"What the Dickens!" he began. "By Jove! is *that* it?"

"Yes, you dear, ducky uncle," said Toney, throwing her arms round his neck and giving him a bear's hug, "yes, *that's* it!"

THE END.

Printed in Great Britain at
The Mayflower Press, Plymouth. William Brendon & Son, Ltd

*** END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HARUM SCARUM'S FORTUNE ***

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