

Ritchie, [A. I.] Anne Thackeray [Miss Thackeray]. Cornhill Stories. Boston: Loring, Publisher, n.d.

FROM AN ISLAND.

Part I.

I.

The long room was full of people sitting quietly in the twilight. Only one lamp was burning at the far end. The verandah outside was dim with shadow; between each leafy arch there glimmered a line of sea and of down. It was a grey still evening, sad, with distant storms. St. Julian, the master of the house, was sitting under the verandah, smoking, with William, the eldest son. The mother and Mrs. William were on a sofa together, talking in a low voice over one thing and another. Hester was sitting at the piano with her hands in her lap, looking at music, though she was not playing, with her white dress quivering in the gloom. Lord Ulleskelf, who had come over to see us, was talking to Emilia, the married daughter, and to Aileen, the youngest of the three; while I and my own little Mona and the little ones were playing at the other end of the room at a sort of twilight game of beating hands and singing sing-song nursery-rhymes,--haymaking the children called it.

"Are there any letters?" said St. Julian, looking in at them all from his verandah. "Has Emmy got hers?"

"I have sent Rogers into Tarmouth to meet the post," said the mother; and as she spoke the door opened, and the post came in.

Poor Emmy's face, which had lighted up eagerly, fell in an instant: she saw that there was no foreign letter for her.

It was a small mail, not worth sending for, Mrs. St. Julian evidently thought as she looked at her daughter with her kind, anxious eyes. "Here is something for you, Emmy," she said; "for you, Queenie" (to me). "My letter is from Mr. Hexham; he is coming to-morrow."

My letter was from the grocer:--

Mrs. Campbell is respectfully informed by Mr. Tiggs that he has sent different samples of tea and coffee for her approbation, for the use of Mr. St. Julian's household and family: also a choice assortment of sperms. Mr. Tiggs regrets extremely that any delay should have arisen in the delivery of the preserved cherries and apricots. He forwards the order this day, as per invoice. Mr. T. trusts that his unremitting exertions may meet with Mrs. C.'s approval and continued recommendation and patronage.

Albert Edward House, September 21.

This was not very interesting, except to the housekeeper: Mrs. St. Julian had set me to keep house for her down here in the country. The children, however, who generally insisted upon reading all my correspondence, were much excited by the paragraph in which Mr. Tiggs mentioned cherries and dried apricots. "Why did Mr. Tiggs forget them?" said little Susan, the granddaughter, solemnly. "Oh, I wish they

would come,” said Nelly. “Greedy, greedy!” sung George, the youngest boy. Meanwhile the elders were discussing their correspondence, and the mother had been reading out Mr. Hexham’s note:--

Lyndhurst, September 21.

Have you room for me, my dear Mrs. St. Julian, and may I come to-morrow for a few days with my van? I find it a most delightful mode of conveyance, and I have been successful enough to take some most lovely photographic views in the New Forest. I now hope to explore your island, beginning with the “Lodges,” if you are still in the same hospitable mind as you were when I last saw you.

With best remembrances to your Husband and the young Ladies,
Your devoted,
G. Hexham.

“I like Mr. Hexham. I am glad he is coming,” said Mrs. St. Julian.

“This is an official-looking missive,” said Lord Ulleskelf, holding out the large square envelope, with a great red seal, which had come for Emmy.

“What a handwriting!” cried Aileen. She was only fifteen, but she was taller already than her married sister, and stood reading over her shoulder. “What a letter! Oh, Emmy what a ----”

But Mrs. St. Julian, seeing Emmy flush up, interposed again:--

“Aileen, take these papers to your father. What is it, my dear?” to Emilia.

“It is from my sister-in-law,” Emilia said, blushing in the light of the lamp.

“Mammy, what a trouble I am to you.... She says she is—may she come to stay!... And—and—you see she is dear Bevis’s sister, and ----”

“Of course, my dear,” said her mother, almost reproachfully. “How can you ask?”

Emilia looked a little relieved, but wistful still. “Have you room? To-morrow?” she faltered.

Mrs. St. Julian gave her a kiss, and smiled and said, “Plenty of room, you goose.” And then she read,--

To the Hon. Mrs. Bevis Beverly,
The Island,
Tarmouth,
Broadshire.

Scudamore Castle, September 21.

My Dear Emilia,--

Bevis told me to be sure and pay you a visit in his absence, if I had an opportunity, and so I shall come, if convenient to you, with my maid and a man, on Saturday, across country from Scudamore Castle. I hear I must cross from Helmington. I cannot imagine how people can live on an island when there is the mainland for them to choose. Yours is not even an island on the map. Things have been very pleasant here till two days ago, when it began to pour with rain, and my stepmother arrived unexpectedly

with Clem, and Clem lost her temper, and Pritchard spoilt my new dress, and several pleasant people went away, and I, too, determined to take myself off. I shall only stay a couple of days with you, so pray tell Mrs. St. Julian that I shall not, I hope, be much in her way. Do not let her make any changes for me; I shall be quite willing to live exactly as you are all in the habit of doing. Any room will do for my man. The maid need only have a little room next to mine. You won't mind, I know, if I go my own gait while I stay with you, for I am an odd creature, as I dare say you may have often heard from Bevis. I expect to feel dreadfully small with all you clever artistic people, but I shall be safe from my lady and Clem, who would never venture to come near you.

My father is all alone at home, and I want to get back to him if I can steal a march on my lady. She is so jealous that she will not let me be alone with him for one hour if she can help it, in her absence. Before she left Castlerookham she sent for that odious sister of hers to play picquet with him, and there was a general scene when I objected. My father took part against me, so I started off in a huff, but he has managed to shake off the old wretch, I hear, and so I do not mind going back. I must say it is very pleasant to have a few halfpence that one can call one's own, and to be able to come and go one's own way. I assure you that the said halfpence do not last for every, however. Clem took 50*l.* to pay her milliner's bill, and Bevis borrowed 100*l.* before he left, but I dare say he will pay me back.

So good-by, my dear Emilia, for the present.

Yours ever,

Jane Beverley.

Mrs. St. Julian did not offer to show Lady Jane's letter to St. Julian, but folded it up with a faint little suppressed smile. "I think she must be a character, Emmy," she said. "I dare say she will be very happy with us. Queenie" (to me), "will you see what can be done to make Lady Jane comfortable?" and there was an end of the matter. Lord Ulleskelf went and sat out in the verandah with the others until the storm burst which had been gathering, through which he insisted on hurrying home, notwithstanding all they could say to detain him.

We had expected Lady Jane by the boat which brought our other guest the next day, but only Mr. Hexham's dark close-cropped head appeared out of the carriage which had been sent to meet them. The coachman declared there was no lady alone on board. Emilia wondered why her sister-in-law had failed: the others took Lady Jane's absence very calmly, and after some five o'clock tea St. Julian proposed a walk.

"Perhaps I had better stay," Mrs. Beverley said to her mother.

"No, my dear, your father will be disappointed. She cannot come now," said Mrs. St. Julian, decidedly; "and if she does, I am here to receive her. Mr. Hexham, you did not see her on board? A lady alone?" . . .

"No. Hexham had not seen any lone lady on board. There was a good-looking person who might have answered the description, but she had a gentleman with her. He lost sight of them at Tarmouth, as he was looking after his man, and his van, and his photographic apparatus. It was settled that Lady Jane could not possibly come till next day.

Lady Jane Beverley had always declared that she hated three things—*islands*, *clever people*, and *interference*. She knew she was clever, but she did not encourage this disposition. It made people bores and radical in her own class of life, and forward if they were low. She was not pretty. No; she didn't care for beauty, though she confessed she should be very sorry if she was not able to afford to dress in the latest fashion. It was all very well for artists and such people to say the contrary, but she knew that a plain woman well dressed would look better than the loveliest dowdy that ever tied her bonnet-strings crooked. It was true her brother Bevis had thought otherwise. He had married Emilia, who was not in his own rank of life; but Lady Jane supposed he had taught her to dress properly after her marriage. She had done her very best to dissuade him from that crazy step; once it was over she made the best of it, though none of them would listen to her; and indeed she had twice had to lend him sums of money when his father stopped his allowance. It is true he paid her back, otherwise she really did not know how she could have paid her bills that quarter. If she had not had her own independence she scarcely could have got on at all or borne with all Lady Mountmore's whims. However, thanks to old aunt Adelaide, she need not think of anybody but herself, and that was a very great comfort to her in her many vexations. As it was, Clem was for ever riding Bazook, and laming her ponies, and borrowing money. Beverley and Bevis, of course, being her own brothers, had a right to expect she would be ready to lend them a little now and then; but really Clem was only her step-sister, and considering the terms she and Lady Mountmore were on. . . Lady Jane had a way of rambling on, though she was a young woman still, not more than six or seven and twenty. It was quite true that she had had to fight her own battles at home, or she would have been utterly fleeced and set aside. Beverley, her eldest brother, never quite forgave her for being the old aunt's heiress, and did not help her as he should have done. Bevis was always away on his missions or in disgrace. Old Lord Mountmore was feeble and almost childish. Lady Mountmore was not a pleasant person to deal with, and such heart as she possessed was naturally given to Lady Clem, her own child.

Lady Jane was fortunately not of a sensitive disposition. She took life calmly, and did not yearn for the affection that was not there to get, and she made the best of things, and when Bevis was sent to South America on a mission, she it was who brought about a sort of general reconciliation. She was very much pleased with herself on this occasion. Everybody looked to her, and consulted her. "You will go and see Emmy sometimes, won't you, Jane?" said poor Bevis, who was a kind and handsome young fellow. Lady Jane said, "Most likely," and congratulated herself on her own tact and success on this occasion, as well as on her general ways, looks, style, and position in life. She thought poor Emmy was not certainly worth all this fuss, but determined to look after her. Lady Jane was rather Low Church, slightly suspicious but good-natured and not unamenable to reason. She cultivated an abrupt frankness and independence of manner. Her frankness was almost bewildering at times, as Lady Jane expected her dictums to be received in silence and humility by the unlucky victims of her penetration. But still, as I have said, being a true-hearted woman, if she was once convinced that she was in the wrong, she would always own to it. Marriage was rather a sore subject with this lady. She had once notified to a young evangelical rector that although his prospects were not brilliant, yet she was not indisposed to share them, if he liked to come forward. To her utter

amazement, the young man got up in a confused manner, walked across the room, talked to Lady Clem for the rest of his visit, and never called again. Lady Jane was much surprised; but, as her heart was not deeply concerned in the matter, she forgave him on deliberation. The one softness in this strange woman's nature lay in her love for children. Little Bevis, her brother's baby, would coo at her, and beat her high cheekbones with his soft little fat hand; she let him pull her hair, the curls, and frills, and plaitings of an hour's erection, poke his fingers into her eyes, swing her watch violently round and round. She was still too young to have crystallized into a regular old maid. She had never known any love in her life except from Bevis, but Bevis had been a little afraid of her. Beverley was utterly indifferent to anybody but himself.

Lady Jane had fifteen hundred a year of her own. She was not at all bad-looking. Her thick reddish hair was of the fashionable colour. She was a better woman than some people gave her credit for being, seeing this tall over-dressed and overbearing young person going about the world with her two startled attendants and her hunters. Lady Jane had not the smallest sense of humour or feeling for art: at least, this latter faculty had never been cultivated, though she had furnished her boudoir with brand new damask and sprawling gilt legs, and dressed herself in the same style; and had had her picture taken by some travelling artist—a pastille all frame and rose-coloured chalk—which hung up over her chimney, smirking at a rose, to the amusement of some of her visitors. Lady Jane's notion of artists and art were mainly formed upon this trophy, and by what she had seen of the artist who had produced it. Lady Clem used to say that Jane was a born old maid, and would never marry; but everybody was not of that opinion. Lady Jane had been made a great deal of at Scudamore Castle, especially by a certain Captain Sigourney, who had been staying there, a nephew of Lady Scudamore's—tall, dark, interesting, in want of money, notwithstanding his many accomplishments. Poor Tom Sigourney had been for many years a hanger-on at Scudamore. They were extremely tired of him, knew his words, looks, tones by heart. Handsome as he undoubtedly was, there was something indescribably wearisome about him after the first introduction—a certain gentle drawl and prose that irritated some people. But Lady Jane was immensely taken by him. His deference pleased her. She was not insensible to the respectful flattery with which he listened to every word she spoke. Tom Sigourney said she was a fine spirited girl, and Lady Scudamore seized the happy occasion—urged Tom forward, made much of Lady Jane. “Poor girl! She needs a protector,” said Lady Scudamore gravely to her daughters. At which the young ladies burst out laughing. “Can you fancy Tom Sigourney taking care of anybody?” they cried.

Lady Mountmore arrived unexpectedly, and the whole little fabric was destroyed. Sigourney, who had not much impudence, was simply driven off the field by the elder lady's impertinences. Lady Jane was indignant, and declared she should not stay any longer under the same roof as her mother-in-law. Lady Scudamore did not press her to remain. She had not time to attend to her any longer or to family dissensions; but she did write a few words to Tom, telling him of Lady Jane's movements, and then made it up with Lady Mountmore all the more cordially that she felt she had not been quite loyal to her in sending off this little missive.

The little steamer starts for Tarmouth in a little crowd and excitement of rolling barrels and oxen driven and plunging sheep in barges. The people come and look over the side of the wooden pier and talk to the captain at his wheel. Afternoon rays stream

slant, and the island glistens across the straits, and the rocks stand out in the water; limpid waters beat against the rocks, and toss the buoys and splash against the busy little tug; one or two coal-barges make way. Idlers and a child or two in the way of the half-dozen passengers are called upon by name to stand aside on this occasion. There are two country dames returning from market; friend Hexham in an excitement about his van, which is to follow in a barge; and there is a languid dark handsome gentleman talking to a grandly dressed lady whose attendants have been piling up wraps and *Times* and dressing-cases and umbrellas.

“Let me hold this for you, it will tire you,” said the gentleman, tenderly taking *The Times* out of her hand; “are you resting? I thought I would try and meet you, and see if I could save you from fatigue. My aunt Scudamore told me you were coming this way. There, that is where my people live: that white house among the trees.”

“It is a nice place,” said Lady Jane.

The rocks were coming nearer, and the island was brightening to life and colour, and the quaint old bricks and terraces of Tarmouth were beginning to show. There was, a great ship in the distance sliding out to sea, and a couple of gulls flew overhead.

“Before I retired from the service,” said Sigourney, “I was quartered at Portsmouth. I know this coast well; that is Tarmouth opposite, and that is—ah, ‘m—a pretty place, and an uncommon pretty girl at the hotel.”

“How am I to get to these people if they have not sent to meet me, I wonder?” interrupted Lady Jane, rather absently.

“Leave that to me,” said Captain Sigourney. “I am perfectly at home here, and I will order a fly. They all know me, and if they are not engaged will always come for *me*. You go to the inn. I order you a cup of tea, and one for your maid. I see a fast horse put up into a trap, and start you straight off.”

“Oh, Captain Sigourney, I am very much obliged,” said Lady Jane; and so the artless conversation went on.

At Tarmouth the ingenious captain would not let her ask whose was a carriage she saw standing there, nor take one of the two usual flies in waiting, but he made her turn into the inn until a special fast horse, with whose paces he was well acquainted, could be harnessed. This took a long time; but Lady Jane, excited by the novelty of the adventure, calmly enjoyed her afternoon tea and devotion, and sat on the horse-hair sofa of the little inn, admiring the stuffed carp and cuttle-fish on the walls, and listening with a charmed ear to Tom’s reminiscences of the time when he was quartered at Portsmouth.

The fast horse did not go much quicker than his predecessors, and Lady Jane arrived at the Lodges about an hour after Hexham, and at the same time as his great photographic van.

III.

They were all strolling along the cliffs towards the beacon. It stood upon the summit of High Down, a long way off as yet, though it seemed close at hand, so clearly did it stand out in the still atmosphere of the sunset. It stood there stiff and black upon its knoll, an old weather-beaten stick with a creaking coop for a crown, the pivot round which most of this little story turns. For when these holiday people travelled away out of its reach, they also passed out of my ken. We could see the beacon from most of our

windows, through all the autumnal clematis and ivy sprays falling and drifting about. The children loved the beacon, and their little lives were one perpetual struggle to reach it, in despite of winds, of time of meals, of tutors and lessons. The elders, too, loved it after their fashion. Had they not come and established themselves under the shadow of High Down, where it had stood as long as the oldest inhabitant could remember! Lord Ulleskelf, in his yacht out at sea, was always glad to see the familiar old stubby finger rising up out of the mist. My cousin, St. Julian the R. A., had made a strange rough sketch of it, and of his wife and her eldest daughter sitting beneath it; and a sea, and a cloud horizon, grey, green, mysterious beyond. He had painted a drapery over their heads, and young Emilia's arms round the stem. It was an awful little picture Emilia the mother thought when she saw it, and she begged her husband to turn its face to the wall in his studio.

"Don't you see how limpid the water is, and how the mist is transparent and drifting before the wind?" St. Julian said. "Why do you object, you perverse woman?"

The wife didn't answer, but her soft cheeks flushed. Emilia the daughter spoke, a little frightened.

"They are like mourners, papa," she whispered.

St. Julian shrugged his shoulders at them. "And this is a painter's wife!" he cried; "and a painter's daughter!" But he put the picture away, for he was too tender to pain them, and it lay now forgotten in a closet. This was two years ago, before Emilia was married, or had come home with her little son during her husband's absence. She was carrying the child in her arms as she toiled up the hill in company with the others, a tender bright flush in her face. Her little Bevis thinks it is he who is carrying "Mozzer," as he clutches her tight round the neck with his two little arms.

I suppose nobody ever reached the top of a high cliff without some momentary feeling of elation,--so much left behind, so much achieved. There you stand at peace, glowing with exertion, raised far above the din of the world. They were gazing as they came along (for it is only of an island that I am writing) at the great sight of shining waters, of smiling fertile fields and country; and of distant waters again, that separated them from the pale glimmering coast of the mainland. The straits, which lie between the island and Broadshire, are not deserted like the horizon on the other side (it lies calm, and tossing, and self-sufficing, for the coast is a dangerous one, and little frequented); but are crowded and alive with boats and white sails: ships go sliding past, yachts drift, and great brigs slowly travel in tow of the tiny steamer that crosses and recrosses the water with letters and provisions, and comers and goers and guests to Ulles Hall and to the Lodge, where St. Julian and his family live all thought the summer-time; and where some of us indeed remain the whole year round.

The little procession comes winding up the down, Lord Ulleskelf and the painter walking first, in broad-brimmed hats and coats fashioned in the island, of a somewhat looser and more comfortable cut than London coats. The tutor is with them. Mr. Hexham, too, is with them; as I can see, a little puzzled and interested by the ways of us islanders.

As St. Julian talks his eyes flash, and he puts out one hand to emphasize what he is saying. He is not calm and self-contained as one might imagine so great a painter, but a man of strong convictions, alive to every life about him and to every event. His cordial heart and bright artistic nature are quickly touched and moved. He believes in his own

genius, grasps at life as it passes, and translates it into a strange quaint revelation of his own, and brings others into his way of seeing things almost by magic. But his charm is almost irresistible, and he knows it, and likes to know it. The time that he is best himself is when he is at his painting; his brown eyes are alight in his pale face, his thick grey hair stands on end; he is a middle-aged man, broad, firmly-knit, with a curly grey beard, active, mighty in his kingdom. He lets people in to his sacred temple; but he makes them put their shoes off, so to speak, and will allow no word of criticism except from one or two. In a moment his thick brows knit, and the master turns upon the unlucky victim.

The old tutor had a special and unlucky knack of exciting St. Julian's ire. He teaches the boys as he taught St. Julian in bygone days, but he cannot forget that he is not always St. Julian's tutor, and constantly stings and irritates him with his caustic disappointed old wits. But St. Julian bears it all with admirable impatience for the sake of old days and of age and misfortune.

As they all climb the hill together on this special day, the fathers go walking first, then comes a pretty rout of maidens and children, and Hexham's tall dark head among them. Little Mona goes wandering by the edge of the cliff, with her long gleaming locks hanging in ripples not unlike those of the sea. The two elder girls had come out with some bright-coloured scarfs tied round their necks; but finding them oppressive, they had pulled them off, and given them to the boys to carry. These scarfs were now banners streaming in the air as the boys attacked a tumulus, where the peaceful bones of the bygone Danish invaders were lying buried. The gay young voices echo across the heather calling to each other.

Hester comes last with Mrs. William—Hester with the mysterious sweet eyes and crown of soft hair. It is not very thick, but like a dark yet gleaming cloud about her pretty head. She is quite pale, but her lips are bright carnation red, and when she smiles she blushes. Hester is tall, as are all the sisters, Emilia Beverley, and Aileen, who is only fifteen, but the tallest of the three. Aileen is walking a little ahead with Mrs. William's children, and driving them away from the edge of the cliff, towards which these little moths seem perpetually buzzing.

The sun begins to set in a strange wild glory, and the light to flow along the heights; all these people look to one another like beautified men and women. Ulleskelf and St. Julian cease their discussion at last, and stand looking seawards.

"Look at that band of fire on the sea," said Lord Ulleskelf.

"What an evening vesper," said St. Julian. "Hester, are you there?"

Hester was there, with sweet, wondering sunset eyes. Her father put his hand fondly on her shoulder. There was a sympathy between the two which was very touching; they liked to admire together, to praise together. In sorrow or trouble St. Julian looked for his wife, in happiness he instinctively seemed to turn to his favourite daughter.

Hester's charm did not always strike people at first sight. She was like some of those sweet simple tunes which haunt you after you have heard them, or like some of those flowers of which the faint delicate scent only comes to you when you have waited for an instant.

Hexham, for instance, until now had admired Mrs. Beverley infinitely more than he did her sister. He thought Miss St. Julian handsome certainly, but charmless; whereas the sweet, gentle young mother, whose wistful eyes seemed looking beyond the sunset, and trying in vain to reach the distant world where her husband would presently see it

rise, appealed to every manly feeling in his nature. But as the father and daughter turned to each other, something in the girl's face—a dim reflex light from the pure bright soul within—seemed to touch him, to disclose a something, I cannot tell you what. It seemed to Hexham as if the scales had fallen suddenly from his eyes, and as if in that instant Hester was revealed to him. She moved on a little way with two of the children who had joined her. The young man followed her with his eyes, and almost started when some one spoke to him. . .

As St. Julian walked on, he began mechanically to turn over possible effects and combinations in his mind. The great colourist understood better than any other, how to lay his colours, luminous, harmonious, shining with the real light of nature, for they were in conformity to her laws; and suddenly he spoke, turning to Hexham, who was a photographer, as I have said, and who indeed was not travelling in a gipsy fashion, in search of subjects for his camera.

“In many things,” he said, “my art can equal yours, but how helpless we both are when we look at such scenes as these. It makes me sometimes mad to think that I am only a man with oil-pots attempting to reproduce such wonders.”

“Fortunately they will reproduce themselves whether you succeed or not,” said the tutor. St. Julian looked at him with his bright eyes. The old man had spoken quite simply. He did not mean to be rude,—and the painter was silent.

“My art is ‘a game half of skill, half of chance,’” said Hexham. “When both these divinities favour me I shall begin to think myself repaid for the time and the money and the chemicals I have wasted.”

“Have you ever tried to photograph figures in a full blaze of light?” Lord Ulleskelf asked, looking at Mona and his own little girl standing with Hester, and shading their eyes from a bright stream that was playing like a halo about their heads. There was something unconscious and lovely in the little group, with their white draperies and flowing locks. A bunch of illumined berries and trailing creepers hung from little Lady Millicent's hair: the light of youth and of life, the sweet wondering eyes, all went to make a more beautiful picture than graces or models could ever attain to. St. Julian looked and smiled with Lord Ulleskelf.

Hexham answered, a little distractedly, that he should like to show Lord Ulleskelf the attempt he had once made. “Nature is a very uncertain sort of assistant,” he added; “and I, too, might exclaim, ‘Oh, that I am but a man, with a bit of yellow paper across my window, and a row of bottles on a shelf, trying to evoke life from the film upon my glasses!’”

“I think you are all of you talking very profanely,” said Lord Ulleskelf, “before all these children, and in such a sight as this. But I shall be very glad to come down and look at your photographs, Mr. Hexham, to-morrow morning,” he added, fearing the young man might be hurt by his tone.

The firebrand in the still rippled sea turned from flame to silver as the light changed and ebbed. The light on the sea seemed dimmer, but then the land caught fire in turn, and trees and down and distant roof-tops blazed in this great illumination, and the shadows fell back upon the turf.

Here Mrs. William began saying in a plaintive tone of voice that she was tired, and I offered to go back with her. Everybody indeed was on the move, but we two took a

shorter cut, while the others went home with the Ulleskelfs, turning down by a turn of the down towards the lane that leads to Ulles Hall.

And so, having climbed up with some toil and effort to that beautiful height, we all began to descend once more into the everyday of life, and turn from flowing seas and calm sailing clouds to the thought of cutlets and chickens. The girls had taken back their scarfs and were running down hill. Aileen was carrying one of Margaret's children, Emilia Beverley had her little Bevis in her arms, Hester was holding by her father's arm as they came back rather silent, but satisfied and happy. The sounds from the village below began to reach us, and the lights in the cottages and houses to twinkle; the cliffs rose higher and higher as we descended our different ways. The old beacon stood black against the ruddy sky: a moon began to hang in the high faint heaven, and a bright star to pierce through the daylight.

Ulles Hall stands on the way from Tarmouth to the Lodges: it is a lovely old house standing among woods in a hollow, and blown by sea-breezes that come through pine-stems and sweet green glades, starred with primroses in spring, and sprinkled with russet leaves in autumn. The Lodges where St. Julian lives are built a mile nearer to the sea. Houses built on the roadside, but inclosed by tall banks and hedges, and with long green gardens running to the down. They have been built piece by piece. It would be difficult to describe them: a gable here, a wooden gallery thatched, a window twinkling in a bed of ivy, hanging creepers, clematis and loveliest Virginian sprays reddening and drinking in the western light and reflecting it undimmed in their beautiful scarlet veins—scarlet gold melting into green: one of the rooms streams with light through strained windows of a church.*

[* A little child passing by in the road looked up one day at the Lodges, and said, "Oh, what pretty leaf houses! Oh, mother, do let us live there. I think the robins must have made them." "I think that is where we are going to, Mona," said the mother. She was a poor young widowed cousin of St. Julian's. She came for a time, but they took her in and never let her go again out of the leaf house. She stayed and became a sort of friend, chaperone, governess, and housekeeper; and to these kind and tender friends and relations, if she were to attempt to set down here all that she owes to them, to their warm, cordial hearts, and bright, sweet natures, it would make a story apart from the one she has in her mind to write to-day.]

IV.

As I reached the door with Mrs. William, I saw a bustle of some sort, a fly, some boxes, a man, a maid, a tall lady of about seven or eight and twenty, dressed in the very height of fashion, with a very tall hat and feather, whom I guessed at once to be Lady Jane. Mrs. William, who has not the good manners of the rest of the family, shrunk back a little, saying,—"I really cannot face her: it's that Lady Jane;" but at that moment Lady Jane, who was talking in a loud querulous tone, suddenly ceased, and turned round.

"Here is Mrs. St. Julian," said the fly-man, and my dear mistress came out into the garden to receive her guest.

"I am so glad you have come," I heard her say quietly; "we had given you up,—are you tired? Come in. Let the servant see to your luggage." She put out her white gentle

hand, and I was amused to see Lady Jane's undisguised look of surprise: she had expected to meet with some bustling, good-humoured housekeeper. Bevis had always praised his mother-in-law to her, but Lady Jane had a way of not always listening to what people said, as she rambled on in her own fashion; and now, having fully made up her mind as to the sort of person Mrs. St. Julian would be, Lady Jane felt slightly aggrieved at her utter dissimilarity to her preconceptions. She followed her into the house, with her high hat stuck upon the top of her tall head, walking in a slightly defiant manner.

"I thought Emilia would have been here to receive me," said Lady Jane, not over pleased.

"I sent her out," the mother said. "I thought you would let me be your hostess for an hour. Will you come up into my room?"

Mrs. St. Julian led the way into the drawing-room, where Lady Jane sank down into a chair, crossing her top-boots and shaking out her skirts.

"I am afraid there was a mistake about meeting you," said the hostess; "the carriage went, but only brought back Mr. Hexham and a message that you were not there."

"I fortunately met a friend on board," said Lady Jane, hurriedly. "He got me a fly; thank you, it did not signify."

Lady Jane was not anxious to enter into particulars, and when Mrs. St. Julian went on to ask how it was she had had to wait so long, the young lady abruptly said something about afternoon tea, asked to see her room and to speak to her maid.

"Will you come back to me when you have given your orders?" said Mrs. St. Julian. "My cousin, Mrs. Campbell, will show you the way."

Lady Jane, with a haughty nod to poor Mrs. Campbell, followed with her high head up the quaint wooden stairs along the gallery, with its odd windows and slits, and china, and ornaments.

"This is your room; I hope you will find it comfortable," said the housekeeper, opening a door, through which came a flood of light.

"Is that for my maid?" asked Lady Jane, pointing to a large and very comfortably furnished room just opposite to her own door.

"That room is Mr. Hexham's," said Queenie; "your maid's room leads out of your dressing-room." The arrangement seemed obvious, but Lady Jane was not quite in a temper to be pleased.

"Is it comfortable, Pritchard? Shall you be able to work there? I must speak about it if you are not comfortable."

Pritchard was a person who did not like to commit herself. Not that she wished to complain, but she would prefer her ladyship to judge; it was not for her to say. She looked so mysteriously that Lady Jane ran up the little winding stair that led to the turret, and found a little white curtained chamber, with a pleasant, bright look-out over land and sea.

"Why, this is a delightful room, Pritchard," said Lady Jane. "I should like it myself; it is most comfortable."

"Yes, my lady, I thought it was highly comfortable," said Pritchard; "but it was not for me to venture to say so."

Lady Jane was a little afraid of Mrs. St. Julian's questionings. To tell the truth, she felt that she had been somewhat imprudent; and though she was a person of mature

age and independence, yet she was not willing to resign entirely all pretensions to youthful dependence, and she was determined if possible not to mention Sigourney's name to her entertainers. Having frizzed up her curling red locks, with Mrs. Pritchard's assistance, shaken out her short skirts, added a few more bracelets, tied on a coroneted locket and girded in her tight silver waistband, she prepared to return to her hostess and her tea. She felt excessively ill-used by Emilia's absence, but, as I have said, dared not complain for fear of more questions as to the cause of her delay.

All along the passage were more odds and ends, paintings, pictures, sketches framed, a cabinet or two full of china. Lady Jane was too much used to the ways of the world to mistake the real merit of this heterogeneous collection; but she supposed that the artists made the things up, or perhaps sold them again to advantage, and that there was some meaning which would be presently explained for it all. What most impressed Lady Jane with a feeling of respect for the inhabitants of the house was a huge Scotch sheep-dog, who came slowly down the gallery to meet her, and then passed on with a snuff and a wag of his tail.

The door of the mistress's room, as it was called, was open; and as Lady Jane followed her conductress in, she found a second five-o'clock tea and a table spread with rolls and country butter and home-made cake. A stream of western light was flowing through the room and out into the gallery beyond, where the old majolica plates flashed in the glitter of its sparkle. The mistress herself was standing with her back turned, looking out through the window across the sea, and trying to compose herself before she asked a question she had very near at heart.

Lady Jane remained waiting, feeling for once a little shy, and not knowing exactly what to do next, for Mrs. Campbell, who was not without a certain amount of feminine malice, stood meekly until Lady Jane should take the lead. The young lady was not accustomed to deal with inferiors who did not exactly behave as such, and though inwardly indignant, she did not quite know how to resent the indifference with which she considered she was treated. She tossed her head, and at least said, not in the most conciliatory voice, "I suppose I may take some tea, Mrs. St. Julian?" The sight of the sweet pale face turning round at her question softened her tone. Mrs. St. Julian came slowly forward, and began to push a chair with her white feeble hands, evidently so unfit for such work that Jane, who was kind-hearted, sprang forward, lockets, top-boots, and all, to prevent her. "You had much better sit down yourself," said she, good-naturedly. "I thought you looked ill just now, though I had never seen you in my life before. Let me pour out the tea."

Mrs. St. Julian softened, too, in the other's unexpected heartiness and kindness. "I had something to say to you. I think it upset me a little. I heard—I feared"—she said, nervously hesitating. "Lady Jane, did you hear from your bother—from Bevis—by the last mail? . . . Emmy does not know the mail is in. . . . I have been a little anxious for her," and Mrs. St. Julian changed colour.

"Certainly I heard," said Lady Jane; "or at least my father did. Bevis wanted some money raised. Why were you so anxious, Mrs. St. Julian?" asked Lady Jane, with a slightly amused look in her face. It was really too absurd to have these people making scenes and alarms when she was perfectly at her ease.

"I am thankful you have heard," said Mrs. St. Julian, with a sudden flush and brightness in her wan face, which made Lady Jane open her eyes in wonder.

“Do you care so much?” said she, a little puzzled. “I am glad that I do not belong to an anxious family. I am very like Bevis, they say; and I know there is nothing that he dislikes so much as a fuss about nothing.”

“I know it,” said Mrs. St. Julian. “He is very good and kind to bear with my foolish alarms, and I wonder,—could you—would you too,—forgive me for my foolishness, Lady Jane, if I were to ask you a great favour? Do you think I might see that letter to your father? I cannot tell you what a relief it would be to me. I told you that Emilia does not know that the mail is in; and if,—if she might learn it by seeing in his own handwriting that Bevis was well, I think it would make all the difference to her, poor child.”

There was something in the elder lady’s gentle persistence which struck the young one as odd, and yet touching; and although she was much inclined to refuse, from a usual habit of contradiction, she did not know how to do so when it came to the point.

“I’ll write to my father,” said Lady Jane, with a little laugh. “I have no doubt he will let you see the letter since you wish it so much.”

“Thank you, my dear,” said Mrs. St. Julian, “and for the good news you have given me; and I will not confess to you,” she added, smiling, “that I sent Emmy out on purpose that I might have this little talk. Are you rested? Will you come into the garden with me for a little?”

Lady Jane was touched by the sweet maternal manner of the elder woman, and followed quite meekly and kindly. As the two ladies were pacing the garden-walk they were joined by the housekeeper and by Mrs. William, with her little dribble of small talk.

Many of the windows of the Lodges were alight. The light from without still painted the creepers, the lights from within were coming and going, and the gleams were falling upon the ivy-leaves here and there. One-half of the place was in shadow, and the western side in daylight still. There was a sweet rush of scent from the sweetbriars and clematis. It seemed to hang in the still evening air. Underneath the hedges, bright-coloured flowers seemed suddenly starting out of the twilight, while above, in the lingering daylight, the red berries sparkled and caught the stray limpid rays. There was a sound of sea-waves washing the not distant beach; a fisherman or two, and soldiers from the little fort, were strolling along the road, and peering in as they passed the bright little homes. The doors were wide open, and now and then a figure passed—a servant, Mrs. Campbell—who was always coming and going; William, the eldest son, coming out of the house: he had been at work all day.

The walking-party came up so silently that they were there in the garden almost before the others had heard them: a beloved crowd, exclaiming, dispersing again. It was a pretty sight to see the meetings: little Susan running straight to her father, William St. Julian. He adored his little round-eyed daughter, and immediately carried her off in his arms. Little Mona, too, had got hold of her mother’s hand, while Lady Jane was admiring Bevis, and being greeted by the rest of the party, and introduced to those whom she did not already know.

“We had quite given you up, dear Jane,” said little Emilia, wistfully gazing and trying to see some look of big Bevis in his sister’s face. “How I wish I had stayed, but you had mamma.”

“We gave you up,” said Hester, “when Mr. Hexham came without you . . .”

“I now find I had the honour of travelling with Lady Jane,” said Hexham, looking amused, and making a little bow.

Lady Jane turned her back upon Mr. Hexham. She had taken a great dislike to him on board the boat; she had noticed him looking at her once or twice, and at Captain Sigourney. She found it a very good plan and always turned her back upon people she did not like. It checked any familiarity. It was much better to do so at once, and let them see what their proper place was. If people of a certain position in the world did not keep others in their proper places, there was no knowing what familiarity might not ensue. And then she ran back to little Bevis again, and lifted him up, struggling. For the child had forgotten her, and seemed not much attracted by her appearance.

“Lady Jane Beverley has something military about her,” said Hexham to Mrs. Campbell.

As he spoke a great loud bell began to ring, and with a little chorus of exclamations, the ladies began to disperse for dinner.

“You know your way, Mr. Hexham,” said Mrs. Campbell, pointing. “Go through that side-door, and straight up and along the gallery.”

Mrs. St. Julian had put her arm into her husband’s, and walked a little way towards the house.

“Henry,” she said, “thank heaven, all is well. Lord Mountmore heard from Bevis by this mail. Lady Jane has promised to show me the letter: she had heard nothing of that dreadful report.”

“It was not likely,” St. Julian said; “Ulleskelf only saw the paper by chance. I am glad you were so discreet, my dear.”

“I should like to paint a picture of them,” said Hexham to the housekeeper, looking at them once more before he hurried into the house.

The two were standing at the threshold of their home, Mrs. St. Julian leaning upon her husband’s arm: the strong keen-faced man with his bright gallant bearing, and the wife with her self feminine looks fixed upon him as she bent anxiously to catch his glance. She was as tall as he was: for St. Julian was a middle-sized man, and Mrs. St. Julian was tall for a woman.

Meanwhile Hexham, who was not familiar with the ways of the house, and who took time at his toilet, ran upstairs, hastily passed his own door, and went along a passage, up a staircase and down a staircase.

. . . He found himself in the garden again, where the lights were almost put out by this time, though all the flowers were glimmering, and scenting, and awake still. There was a red streak in the sky; all the people had vanished, but turning round he saw—he blinked his eyes at the sight—a white figure standing, visionary, mystical, in the very centre of a bed of tall lilies, in a soft gloom of evening light. Was it a vision? For the first time in his life Hexham felt a little strangely; and as if he could believe in the super-nature which he sometimes had scoffed at, the young mad made one step forward and stopped again. “It is I, Mr. Hexham,” said a shy clear voice. “I came to find some flowers for Emilia.” It was Hester’s voice. Surely some kind providence sets true lovers’ way in pleasant places; and all they do and say has a grace of its own which they impart to inanimate things. The evening, the sweet stillness, the trembling garden hedges, the fields beyond, the sweet girlish *tinkle* of Hester’s voice, made Hexham feel for the first

time in his life as if he were standing at a living shrine, and as if he ought to fall down on his knees and worship.

“Can I help you?” he said. “Miss Hester, may I have a flower for my buttonhole?”

“They are nothing but lilies,” said the voice.

PART II.

V.

In writing this little episode I have tried to put together one thing and another—to describe some scenes that I saw myself, and some that were described to me. My window looks out upon the garden, and is just over the great bed of lilies. I shut it down, and began to dress for dinner, with an odd dim feeling already of what the future might have in store. It was a half-conscious consciousness of what was passing in the minds of those all about. For some days past Mrs. St. Julian’s anxious face seemed to follow me about the room. Poor little Emilia’s forced patience and cheerfulness were more sad to me than any impatience or fretfulness. Hexham, Hester, even Lady Jane, each seemed to strike a note, in my present excited and receptive state of mind. It is one for which there is no name, but which few people have not experienced. I dressed quickly, the dark corners of my room seemed looming at me, and it was with an odd anxious conviction of disturbance at hand that I hurried down along the gallery to the drawing-room, where we assembled before dinner. On my way I met Emilia on the stairs, in her white dinner dress, with a soft white knitted shawl drawn closely around her. She slid her little chill hand through my arm, and asked me why I looked so pale. Dear soft little woman, she seemed of us all the most tender and disarming. Even sorrow and desolation, I thought, should be vanquished by her sweetness. And perhaps I was right when I thought so.

We were not the last. Hester followed us. She was dressed in a floating gauze dress, and she had one great white lily in her dark hair. “It is a great deal too big, Hester,” cried Mrs. William; but I thought I had never seen her more charming.

“How much better mamma is looking,” Hester said that evening at dinner, and as she spoke she glanced at her mother sitting at the head of the long table in the carved chair.

When the party was large, and the sons of the house at home, we dined in an old disused studio of St. Julian’s: a great wooden room, unpapered and raftered, with a tressel-table of the painter’s designing, and half-finished frescos and sketches hanging upon the walls. There was a high wooden chimney and an old-fashioned glass reflecting the scene, the table, the people, the crimson drugget, of which a square covered the boards. In everything St. Julian touched there was a quaint stamp of his own, and this room had been inhabited and altered by him. Two rough hanging lamps from the rafter lit up the long white table, and the cups of berries and green leaves with which I had attempted to dress it. There was something almost patriarchal in this little assembly: the father at the end of the table, the sons and daughters all around, William and his wife by Mrs. St. Julian, and pretty Hester sitting by her father. On the other side Lady Jane was established. St. Julian had taken her in. He had asked her a few questions at first,

especially about the letter she had received from Bevis, but carefully, so that Emilia should not overhear them.

“He seemed to enjoy himself,” said Lady Jane. “He was talking of going on a shooting-party a little way up the river if he could get through his work in time.”

She did not notice St. Julian’s grave look as she spoke, and went on in her usual fashion. I remember she was giving him one person’s views on art and another’s, and her own, and describing the pastille she had done. St. Julian looked graver and graver, and more impatient as she went on. Patience was not his strong point.

“How long does it take you to paint a picture, Mr. St. Julian?” Lady Jane asked. “I wish I could paint, and I am sure I wish Beverley could, for he cannot manage upon his allowance at all. How nice it must be to take up a brush and—paint cheques, in fact, as you do. Clem can sketch wonderfully quickly; she took off Lord Scudamore capitally. Of course she would not paint for money, but artists have said they would gladly offer large sums for her paintings. Do your daughters help you?” inquired poor Lady Jane, affably feeling that she was suiting her conversation to her company. “Do you ever do caricatures?”

“We will talk about pointing, Lady Jane, when you have been here two or three days longer,” said St. Julian. “You had better ask the girls any questions you may wish to have answered, and get them, if possible, to give you some idea of the world we live in.”

To poor Lady Jane’s utter amazement, St. Julian then began talking to Hexham across the table, and signed to his wife to move immediately after dinner was over. We all went back walking across the garden to the drawing-room, for the night was fine, and the little covered way was for bad weather.

Some of us sat in the verandah. It was a bright starry evening. A great planet was rising from behind the sweeping down. The lights from the wooden room were shining too. Lady Jane presently seemed to get tired listening to poor Mrs. Williams’ nursery retrospections—Mary Annes, and Susans, and tea and sugar, and what Mrs. Mickleman had said when she parted from her nursery-maid; and what Mrs. William herself meant to say to the girl when she got home on Monday: not that Mrs. William was disposed to rely entirely upon Mrs. Mickleman, who was certainly given to exaggerate, etc. The girls were in the garden. Emilia had gone up to little Bevis. Lady Jane jumped up with the usual rattle of bracelets and necklaces, and said she should take a turn too, and join the young ladies.

Mrs. William confessed, as Lady Jane left the verandah, that she was glad she was not *her* sister-in-law.

“She has such a strange abrupt manner,” said the poor lady. “Don’t you find it very awkward, Queenie? I never know whether she likes me to talk to her or not—do you?”

“I have no doubt about it,” I said, laughing.

The evening was irresistible: starlit, moonlit, soft-winded.

A few minutes later I, too, went out into the garden, and walked along the dark alley towards the knoll, from whence there is a pretty view of the sea by night, and over the hedge and along the lane. From where I stood I saw that the garden-gate was open, for the moon was shining in a broad silver stream along the lane that led to the farm. The farm was not really ours, but all our supplies came from there, and we felt as if it belonged to us. Mona knew the cows and the horses, and very sheep enclosed in their

pen for the night. As I was standing peaceful and resting under the starlit dome, something a little strange and inexplicable now happened, which I could not at all understand at the time. I saw some one moving in the lane beyond the hedge. I certainly recognized Lady Jane walking away in the shadow that lay along the banks of that moonlight stream; but what was curious to me was this: it seemed to me that she was not alone, that a dark tall figure of a man was beside her. It was not one of our men, though I could not see the face—of this I felt quite sure. The two went on a little way, then she turned; and I could have declared that I saw the gleam of his face in the distance through the shadow. Lady Jane's hand was hanging in the moonlight, and her trinkets glistening. Of her identity I had no doubt. There is a big tree which hangs over the road, and when they, or when she, reached it, she stopped for a moment, as if to look about her, and then only Lady Jane appeared from its shadow—the other figure had vanished. I could not understand it at all. I have confessed that I am a foolish person, and superstitious at times. I had never seen poor Bevis. Had anything happened? Could it be a vision of him that I had seen? I got a little frightened, and my heart began to beat. It was only for an instant that I was so absurd. I walked hastily towards the garden-door, and met Lady Jane only a few steps off, coming up very coolly.

“How lovely this moonlight is, Mrs. Campbell!” she cried, more affably than usual.

“Who was that with you? Didn't I see some one with you, Lady Jane?” I asked, hurriedly.

Lady Jane looked me full in the face.

“What do you mean?” said she. “I went out for a stroll by myself. I am quite alone, as you see.”

Something in her tone reassured me. I felt sure she was not speaking the truth. It was no apparition I had seen, but a real tangible person. It was no affair of mine, though it struck me as a singular proceeding. We both walked back to the house together. The girls' white dresses were gleaming here and there upon the lawn. Hexham passed us hastily and went and joined them. William was taking a turn with his cigar. As we passed the dining room window I happened to look in. St. Julian was sitting at the table, with his head resting on his hands, and beside him Mrs. St. Julian, who must have gone back to the room after dinner. A paper was before them, over which the two were bending.

We found no one in the drawing-room, and only a lamp spluttering and a tea-table simmering in one corner, and Mrs. William, who was half asleep on the sofa. “I shall go back to the others,” said my companion; and I followed, nothing loth.

What a night it was! Still, dark, sweet, fragrant shadows, quivering upon the moon-stream; a sudden, glowing, summer's night, coming like a gem set in the midst of grey days, of storms, swift gales, of falling autumnal leaves and seasons.

The clear three-quarter moon was hanging over the gables and roofs of the Lodges; the high stars streamed light; a distant sea burnt with pale radiance; the young folks chattered in the trembling gleams.

“Look at that great planet rising over the down,” said Hexham. “Should you like that to be your star, Miss St. Julian?”

“I should like a fixed star,” Hester answered gravely. “I should like it to be quite still and unchanging, and to shine with an even light.”

“That is not a bit like you, Hester,” said William, who had come up, and who still had a school-boy trick of teasing his sisters; “it is much more like Emilia, or my wife. You describe them, and take all the credit to yourself.”

“Oh, William! Emilia is anything but a fixed star,” cried Aileen. “She would like to jump out of her orbit to-morrow, and go off to Bevis, if she could. Margaret is certainly more like.”

“you shall have the whole earth for your planet, Miss Hester,” said Hexham. Then he added less seriously, “They say it looks very bright a little way off.”

Moonlight gives a strange, intensified meaning to voices as well as to shadows. No one spoke for a minute, until Lady Jane, who was easily bored, jumped up, and said that people ought to be ashamed to talk about stars now-a-days, so much had been said already; and that, after all, she should go back for some tea.

I left her stirring her cup, with Mrs. William still half asleep in her corner, and I myself went up to my room. Mrs. St. Julian was sitting with her husband in the studio, the parlour-maid told me. Outside was the great burning night, inside a silent house, dark, with empty chambers and doors wide open on the dim staircase and passages. I would gladly have stayed out with the others, but I had a week’s accounts to overlook on this Saturday night. The odd anxiety I had felt before dinner came back to me again now that I was alone. I tried to shake off the feeling which oppressed me, and I went in and stood for a moment by my little Mona’s bedside. Her sweet face, her quiet breath, and peaceful dreams seemed to me to belong to the stars outside. As I looked at the child, I found myself once more thinking over my odd little adventure with lady Jane, and wondering whether it would be well to speak of it, and to whom? I had lived long enough to feel some of the troubles and complications both of speech and silence. Once more my heart sank, as it used to do when difficulties seemed to grow on every side before I had come to this kind house of refuge; and yet, difficult as life was undoubtedly to me, as well as to others, it seemed to me, looking back, that, seen from a distance, a light shone from the hearts and doings of the children of men, as clear as the light of which Hexham had spoken, reflected from this sin-weighted and sorrow-driven world. I pulled my table and my lamp to the window: the figures were still wandering in the garden; I saw Hester’s white dress flit by more than once. Such nights count in the sum of one’s life.

VI.

Mona was standing ready dressed in her Sunday frills and ribbons by my bedside when I awoke next morning.

“It is raining, mamma,” she said. “We wanted to go to the beacon before breakfast.”

It seemed difficult to believe that this was the same world that I had closed my eyes upon. The silent, brilliant, mysterious world of stars and sentiment was now grey, and mist-wreathed, and rain-drenched. The practical result of my observations was to say, “Mona, go and tell them to light a fire in the dining-room.”

St. Julian, who is possessed by a horrible stray demon of punctuality, likes all his family to assemble to the sound of a certain clanging bell, that is poor Emilia’s special aversion. Mrs. St. Julian never comes down to breakfast. I was only just in time this

morning to fulfil my duties and make the tea and coffee. Hester came out of her room as I passed the door. She, too, had come back to every-day life again, and had put away her white robes and lilies for a stuff dress,—a quaint blue dress, with puffed sleeves, and a pretty fanciful trimming of her mother’s devising, gold braid and velvet round the wrist and neck. Her pretty gloom of dark hair was pinned up with golden pins. As I looked at her admiringly, I began to think to myself that, after all, rainy mornings were perhaps as compatible with sentiment as purple starry skies. I could not help thinking that there was something a little shy and conscious in her manner: she seemed to tread gently, as if she were afraid of waking some one, as if she were thinking of other things. She waited for me, and would not go into the dining-room until she had made sure that I was following. Only Hexham was there, reading his letters by the burning fire of wood, when we first came in. He turned round and smiled:—had the stars left their imprint upon him too? He carried his selection of eggs and cutlets and toasted bread from the side-table, and put himself quietly down by Hester: the others dropped in by degrees.

“Here is another French newspaper for you, papa,” said Emilia, turning over her letters with a sigh. St. Julian took it from her quickly, and put it in his pocket.

Breakfast was over. The rain was still pouring in a fitful, gusty way, green ivy-leaves were dripping, creepers were hanging dully glistening about the windows, against which the great fresh drops came tumbling. The children stood curiously watching, and making a play of the falling drops. There was Susy’s raindrop, and George’s on the window-ledge, and Mr. Hexham’s.

“Oh, Mr. Hexham’s has won!” cried Susy, clasping her little fat hands in an agony of interest.

I looked out and saw the great gusts of rain beating and drifting against the hedge-rows, wind-blown mists crossing the fields and the downs. It was a stormy Sunday, coming after that night of wonders. But the wind was high; the clouds might break. The church was two miles off, and we could not get there then; later we hoped we might have a calmer hour to walk to it.

The afternoon brightened as we had expected, and most of us went to afternoon service snugly wrapped in cloaks, and stoutly shod, walking up hill and down hill between the bright and dripping hedges to the little white-washed building where we Islanders were exhorted, buried, christened, married by turns. It is always to me a touching sight to see the country folks fathering to the sound of the old jangling village bells, as they ring their pleasant calls from among the ivy and bird’s-nests in the steeple, and summon—what a strange, toil-worn, weather-beaten company!—to prayer and praise. Furrowed faces bent, hymn-books grasped in hard crooked fingers, the honest red smiling cheeks of the lads and lasses trudging along side by side, the ancient garments from lavender drawers, the brown old women from their kitchen corners, the babies toddling hand-in-hand. Does one not know the kindly Sunday throng, as it assembles, across fields and downs, from nestling farm and village by-ways? Mrs. William’s children came trotting behind her, exchanging cautious glances with the Sunday-school, and trying to imitate a certain business-like, church-going air which their mother affected. Hexham and the others were following at some little distance. Emilia never spoke much, and to-day she was very silent; but though she was silent I could feel her depression, and knew, as well as if she had put it all into words, what was passing in her mind. Once during the service, I heard a low shivering sigh by my side, but when I glanced at her, her

face looked placed, and as we came away the light of the setting sun came shining full upon it. A row of boys were sitting on the low churchyard wall in the western light, which lit up the fields and streamed across the homeward paths of the little congregation. I must not forget to say that, as we passed out, it seemed to me that, in the crowd waiting about the door, I recognized a tall and bending figure that I had seen somewhere before. Somewhere—by moonlight. I remembered presently where and when it was.

“Who was that?” asked Emilia, seeing me glance curiously.

“That is what I should like to know,” said I. “Shall we wait for Lady Jane? I have a notion she could tell us.”

We waited but no Lady Jane appeared.

“She must have gone on,” said Emilia. “It is getting cold; let us follow them, dear Queenie.”

I was still undecided as to what I had better do. It seemed that it would be better to speak to Lady Jane herself than to relate my vague suspicions to anybody else. Little Emilia of all people was so innocent and unsuspecting that I hesitated before I told her what I had seen. I was hesitating still, when Emmy took my arm again.

“Come!” she said; and so we went on together through the darkening village street, past the cottages where the pans were shining against the walls as the kitchen fires flamed. The people began to disperse once more: some were at home, stooping as they crossed their low cottage thresholds; others were walking away along the paths and the hills that slope from the village church to cottages by the sea. We saw Hester and Aileen and Hexham going off by the long way over the downs; but no Lady Jane was with them. We were not far from home when Emilia stopped before a little rising mound by the roadside, on which a tufted holly-tree was standing, already reddening against the winter.

“That is the tree my husband likes,” said she. “It was bright red with holly-berries the morning we were married. Little Bevy watches the berries beginning to burn, as he calls it. I often bring him here.”

Some people cannot put themselves into words, and they say, not the actual thing they are feeling, but something quite unlike, and yet which means all they would say. Some other people, it is true, have words enough, but no selves to put to them. Emilia never said a striking thing, rarely a pathetic one; but commonplaces came often more near to me than the most passionate expressions of love or devotion. Something in the way she looked, in the tone with which she spoke of the holly-tree, touched me more than there seemed any occasion for. I cannot tell what it was; but this I do know, that silence, dulness, everything utters at times, the very stones cry out, and, in one way or another, love finds a language that we all can understand.

We stood there for a few minutes under the holly-tree, and then walked quickly home. I let Emilia go in. I waited outside in the dim grey garden, pacing up and down in the twilight. Lady Jane, as I expected, arrived some ten minutes after we did; but I missed the opportunity I had wished for, for Hexham and the two girls appeared almost at the same minute, with bright eyes and fresh rosy faces, from their walk, and we all went up to tea in the mistress’s room.

This was the Williams’ last evening. Only one little incident somewhat spoilt its harmony.

“Who was that Captain Sigourney, who called just after we had gone to church?” Mrs. Williams asked, innocently, during a pause in the talk at dinner.

This simple question caused some of us to look up curiously.

“Captain Sigourney,” said Lady Jane, in a loud, trumpet-like tone, “is a friend of mine. I asked him to call upon me.”

St. Julian gave one of his flashes, a look half-amused, half-angry. He glanced at his wife, and then at Lady Jane, who was cutting up her mutton into long strips, calmly excited, and prepared for battle. St. Julian was silent, however, and the engagement, if engagement there was to be, did not take place until later in the evening. I felt very glad that the matter was taking this turn and that the absurd mystery, whatever it might be, should come to an end without my being implicated in it. It was no affair of mine if Lady Jane liked to have a dozen Captains in attendance upon her, but it seemed to me a foolish proceeding. I had reason to conclude that St. Julian had said something to Lady Jane that evening. I was not in the drawing-room after dinner. One of the servants was ill, and I was obliged to attend to her; but as I was coming down to say good-night to them all I met Lady Jane—I met a whirlwind in the passage. She gave me one look. Her whole aspect was terrible; her chains and many trinkets seemed rattling with indignation. She looked quite handsome in her fury; her red hair and false plaits seemed to stand on end, her eyes to pierce me through and through, and if I had been guilty I think I must have run away from this irate apparition. Do I dream it, or did I hear the two words, “impertinent interference,” as she turned round with the air of an empress, and shut her door loud in my face? Mrs. St. Julian happened to be in her room, and the noise brought her kind head out into the passage, and, not I am afraid very calmly or coherently, I told her what had happened.

“I must try and appease her. I suppose my husband has spoken to her,” said Mrs. St. Julian; and she boldly went and knocked at the door of Lady Jane’s room, and, after an instant’s hesitation, walked quietly in. I do not know what charm she used, but somewhat to my dismay, a messenger came to me in the drawing-room presently to beg that I would speak to Lady Jane. I saw malicious Aileen with a gleam of fun in her eyes at my unfeigned alarm. I found Lady Jane standing the middle of the room, in a majestic sort of dressing-gown, with all her long tawny locks about her shoulders. Mrs. St. Julian was sitting in an arm-chair near the toilet-table, which was all glittering with little bottles and ivory handles. This scarlet apparition came straight up to me as I entered, with three brisk strides. “I find I did you an injustice,” she said, loftily relenting, though indignant still. “Mrs. St. Julian has explained matters to me. I thought you would be glad to know at once that I was aware of the mistake I had made. I beg your pardon. Good evening, Mrs. Campbell,” said Lady Jane, dismissing me all of a breath. I found myself outside in the dark passage again, with a curious dazzle of the brilliantly lighted room, with its odd perfume of ottar of roses, of that weird apparition with its flaming robe and red hair and burning cheeks.

I was too busy next morning helping Mrs. Williams and her children and boxes to get off by the early boat, to have much time to think of apparitions or my own wounded feelings. Dear little Georgy and Susy peeped out of the carriage-window with many farewell kisses. The three girls stood waving their hands as the carriage drove past the garden. The usual breakfast-bell rang and we all assembled, and Lady Jane, whose anger was never long-lived, came down in pretty good-humour. To me she was most friendly. There was a shade of displeasure in her manner to St. Julian. To Hexham she said that she had quite determined upon an expedition to Warren Bay that afternoon, and to the

castle next day, and she hoped he would come too. Lady Jane bustled off after breakfast to order a carriage.

VII.

From “the mistress’s” room, with its corner windows looking out every way, we could see downs, and sea, and fields, and the busy road down to the shore. Mrs. St. Julian was able to be out so little that she liked life at second-hand, and the sight of people passing, and of her children swinging at the gate, and of St. Julian as he came and went from his studio sometimes, with his pipe and his broad-brimmed hat—all this was a never failing delight to her. Hester sat writing for her mother this morning. It was the Monday after Lady Jane’s arrival, and I established myself with my work in the window. Suddenly the mother asked, “Where is Emilia?”

“Emilia is in the garden with Bevis,” said Hester; “they were picking red berries off the hedge when I came up.”

“And where is Lady Jane?” said Mrs. St. Julian.

“She is gone to look at a pony-carriage, with her maid,” said Hester.

“Poor Lady Jane was very indignant last night. You will be amused to hear that I am supposed to be encouraging a young man at this moment, for purposes of my own, to carry her off,” said Mrs. St. Julian. “I am afraid Henry is vexed about it. Look here.” As she spoke she gave me a satiny, flowingly-written note to read.

Castle Scudamore, Saturday

Dear Mrs. St. Julian,

I have been made aware that my stepdaughter has been followed to your house by a person with whom I and her father are most anxious that she should have no communication *whatever*. Whether this has happened with your cognizance I cannot tell, but I shall naturally consider you responsible while she is under your roof, and I must beg you will be so good as not to continue to admit Captain Sigourney’s visits. He is a person totally unsuitable in *every* respect to my stepdaughter, and it is a marriage her father could not sanction.

I hope Emilia is well, and that she has had satisfactory accounts by the last mail. We received a few lines only, on business, from Bevis. Believe me,

Yours truly, E. Mountmore.

“The whole thing is almost too absurd to be vexed about,” said Mrs. St. Julian, smiling.

“Why was Lady Jane so angry with you, Queenie?” Hester asked; and then it was I confessed what I had seen that evening on the Knoll.

“Lady Jane told me all about it,” my mistress continued. “She says Captain Sigourney’s only object in life is to see her pass by. To tell you the truth, I do not think she cares in the least for him. She found him at the gate that evening, she says.” Mrs. St. Julian hesitated, and then went on. “She must be very attractive. She tells me that she believes Mr. Hexham admires her very much, and that, on the whole, she thinks he is more the sort of person to suit her.” Mrs. St. Julian spoke with a little gentle malice; and

yet I could see she half believed, and that there was prudence, too, in what she was saying.

There was a pause. Hester looked straight before her, and I stitched on. At last the mother spoke again,—

“I wish you would go to Emilia, my Hester,” she said, a little anxiously. “I am afraid she is fretting sometimes when she is by herself.”

“You poor mamma,” cried Hester, jumping up and running to her, and kissing her again and again; “you have all our pain and none of our fun.”

“Don’t you think so, my dear,” said the mother; “I think I have both.” Then she called Hester back to her, held her hand, and looked into her face tenderly for a minute. “Go, darling!—but—but take care,” she said, as she let her go.

“Take care of what, mamma?” the girl asked, a little consciously; and then Hester ran off, as all young girls will do, nothing loth to get out into the sunshine.

I stitched on at my work, but presently looking up I saw that Hester and Emilia were not alone; Mr. Hexham, who had, I suppose, been smoking his cigar in the garden, had joined them. He was lifting Bevis high up over head, to pick the berries that were shining in the hedge. The Lodges seemed built for pretty live pictures; and the mistress’s room, most specially of all the rooms in the house, is a peep-show to see them from. Through this window, with its illuminated border of clematis and ivy and Virginian creeper, I could see the bit of garden lawn, green still and sunlit; the two pretty sisters, in their flowing dresses, straight and slim, smiling at little Bevis; the high sweetbriar hedge, branching like a bower over their heads; and the swallows skimming across the distant down. This was the most romantic window of the three which lighted her room, and I asked my cousin to come and see a pretty group. She smiled, and then sighed as she looked. Poor troubled mother!

“I cannot feel one moment’s ease about Bevis,” she said. “My poor Emmy! And yet Lady Jane was very positive.”

“We shall know to-morrow. You are too anxious, I think,” I answered cheerfully; and then I could not help asking her if she thought she should ever be as anxious about George Hexham.

She did not answer except by a soft little smile. Then she sighed again.

Lady Jane’s expected letter had not come that Monday evening, but Mrs. St. Julian hoped on. Emilia was dialing growing more anxious; she said very little, but every opening door startled her, every word seemed to her to have a meaning. She began to have a clear, ill-defined feeling that they were hiding something from her, and yet, poor little thing, she did not dare ask, for fear of getting bad news. Her soft, wan, appealing looks went to the very hearts of the people looking on. Lady Jane was the only person who could resist her. She was, or seemed to be, ruffled and annoyed, that any one should be anxious when she had said there was occasion for fear. Mrs. St. Julian would have quietly put off a certain expedition which had been arranged some time before the next day; but Lady Jane, out of very opposition, was most eager and decided that it should take place. An invitation came for the girls to a ball; this the parents decidedly refused, though Hexham, and Hester too, looked sorely disappointed. Of course Lady Jane knew no reason for any special anxiety, any more than Emilia, and perhaps her confidence and cheerfulness were the best medicine for the poor young wife; who, seeing her sister so bright, began to think that she had overestimated dangers which she only dimly felt and

guessed at. So the carriages were ordered after luncheon; but the sun was shining bright in the morning, and Hexham asked Hester and Aileen (shyly, and hesitating as he spoke,) if they would mind being photographed directly.

“Why should you not try a group?” said St. Julian. “Here are Hester, Lady Jane, Mona, Aileen, and Emilia, all wanting to be done at once.”

Emilia shrank back, and said she only wanted baby done, not herself.

“I was longing to try a group,” said Hexham, “and only waiting for leave. How will you sit?” And he began placing them in a sort of row, two up and one down, with a property-table in the middle. He then began focussing, and presently emerged, pale and breathless and excited, from the little black hood into which he had dived. “Will you look?” said he to St. Julian.

“I think it might be improved upon,” said St. Julian, getting interested. “Look up, Mona,--up, up. That is better. And cannot you take the ribbon out of your hair?”

“Yes, uncle St. Julian,” said Mona; “but it will all tumble down.”

“Never mind that,” said he; and with one hand Mona pulled away the snood, and then the beautiful stream came flowing and rippling and falling all about her shoulders.

“That is excellent,” said the painter. “You, too, Aileen, shake out your locks.” Then he began sending one for one thing and one for another. I was dispatched for some lilies into the garden, and Lady Jane came too, carrying little Bevis in her arms. When we got back we found one of the prettiest sights I have every yet seen,--a dream of fair ladies against an ivy wall, flowers and flowing locks, and sweeping garments. It is impossible to describe the peculiar charm of this living, breathing picture. Emilia, after all, had been made to come into it; little Bevis clapped his hands, and said, “Pooty mamma,” when he saw her.

“I don’t mind being done in the group,” said Lady Jane, “if you will promise not to put any of those absurd white pinafores on me.”

Neither of the gentlemen answered, they were both too busy. As for me, I shall never forget the sweet child wonder in my little Mona’s face, Hester’s bright deep eyes, or my poor Emilia’s patient and most affecting expression, as they all stood there motionless; while Hexham held his watch, and St. Julian looked on, almost as excited as the photographer. As Hexham rushed away into his van, with his glass under his arm, we all began talking again.

“It takes one’s breath away,” said St. Julian, quite excited, “to have the picture there, breathing on the glass, and to feel every instant that it may vanish or dissolve with a word, with a breath. I should never have nerve for photography.”

“I believe the great objection is that it blackens one’s fingers so,” said Lady Jane. “I should have tried it myself, but I did not care to spoil my hands.”

As for the picture, Hexham came out wildly exclaiming from his little dark room: never had he done anything so strangely beautiful,--he could not believe it,--it was magical. The self-controlled young man was quite wild with delight and excitement. Lord Ulleskelf walked up, just as we were all clustering round, and he, too, admired immensely.

Hexham rushed up to St. Julian. “It is your doing,” he said. “It is wonderful. My fortune is made.” He all but embraced his precious glass.

St. Julian was to be the next subject. What a noble wild head it was! There was something human and yet almost mysterious to me in the flash of those pale circling eyes

with the black brows and shaggy grey hair. But Hexham's luck failed him, perhaps from over-excitement and inexperience in success. Three or four attempts failed, and we were still at it when the luncheon-bell rang. Hexham was for going on all day; but St. Julian laughed and said it should be another time. This sentiment was particularly approved by Lady Jane, who had a childish liking for expeditions and picknickings, and who had set her heart upon carrying out her drive that afternoon.

VIII.

Hexham had known scarcely anything before this of home life or home peace. He had carefully treasured his liberty, and vowed to himself that he would keep that liberty always. But now that he had seen Hester, fair, and maidenly, and serene, he could not tell what mysterious sympathy had attracted him. To speak to her, to hear her shy tender voice, affected him strangely. George Hexham did not care to give way to sentimental emotion; he felt that his hour had come. He had shared the common lot of men. It was a pity, perhaps to give up independence and freedom and peace of mind, but no sacrifice was too great to win so dear a prize. So said George to himself as he looked at the glass upon which her image was printed, the image with the wondering eyes. He must get one more picture, he thought, eating his luncheon thoughtfully, but with a good appetite undisturbed by these reflections,—one more of Hester alone. He determined to try and keep her at home that afternoon.

He followed her as she left the room. "You are not going? Do stay," said Hexham, imploringly: "I want you; I want a picture of you all to myself. I told my man we should come back after luncheon."

Hester coloured up. Her mother's warning was still in her ears.

"I—I am afraid I must go," she said, shyly.

"What nonsense!" cried Hexham, who was perfectly unused to contradiction, and excited by his success. "I shall go and tell your mother that it is horrible tyranny to send you off with that *corvée* of children and women, and that you want to stay behind. Lady Jane would stay if I asked her."

Hester did not quite approve of this familiar way of speaking. She drew herself up more and more shyly and coldly.

"No, thank you," she said; "mamma lets me do just as I like. I had rather go with the others."

"In that case," said Hexham, offended, "I shall not presume to interfere." And he turned and walked away.

What is a difference? A word that means nothing—a look a little to the right or to the left of an appealing glance. I think that people who quarrel are often as fond of one another as people who embrace. They speak a different language, that is all. Affection and agreement are things quite apart. To agree with the people you love is a blessing unspeakable. But people who differ may also be travelling along the same road on opposite sides. And there are two sides to every road that both lead the same way.

Hexham was so unused to being opposed that his indignation knew no bounds. He first thought of remaining behind, and showing his displeasure by a haughty seclusion. But Lady Jane happened to drive up with Aileen in the pony-carriage she had hired, feathers flying, gauntleted, all prepared to go to conquer.

“Won’t you come with us, Mr. Hexham?” she said, in her most gracious tone.

After a moment’s hesitation, Hexham jumped in, for he saw Hester standing not far off, and he began immediately to make himself as agreeable as he possibly could to his companion. It was not much that happened this afternoon, but trifles show which way the wind is blowing. Lady Jane and her cavalier went in first, the rest of us followed in Mrs. St. Julian’s carriage. We were bound for a certain pretty bay some two miles off. The way there led across a wide and desolate warren, where sand and gorse spread on either side to meet a sky whose reflections always seemed to me saddened by the dark growth of this arid place. A broad stony military road let a building on the edge of the cliff—a hotel, where the carriages put up. Then we began clambering down the side of the cliff, out of this somewhat dreary region, into a world brighter and more lovely than I have words to put to it—a smiling plain of glassy blue sea, a vast firmament of heaven; and close at hand bright sandy banks, shining with streams of colour reflected from the crystals and strata upheaved in shining strands; and farther off the boats drifted towards the opal Broadshire Hills.

I do not suppose that anybody seeing us strolling along these lovely cliffs would have guessed the odd and depressing influence that was at work upon most of us. As far as Lady Jane and Hexham and Aileen were concerned, the expedition seemed successful enough; they laughed and chattered, and laughed again. Emilia and her sister followed, listening to their shrieks, in silence, with little Bevis between them. Mona and I brought up the rear. Lady Jane seemed quite well pleased with her companion, and evidently accepted his homage all to herself. I could have shaken her for being so stupid. Could she not see that not one single word he spoke was intended for her? Every one of Hexham’s arrows flew straight to the gentle heart for which they were intended. It was not a very long walk—perhaps half an hour in duration—but half an hour is long enough to change a lifetime, to put a new meaning to all that has passed, and to all that is yet to come. People may laugh at such a thing as *désillusionnement*, but it is a very real and bitter thing, for all that people may say. To some constant natures certainty and unchangeableness are the great charm, the whole meaning of love. Hester, suddenly bewildered and made to doubt, would freeze, and change, and fly at a shadow; where Hester, once certain, would endure all things, bear, and hope, and forgive. I could see that Hexham did not dislike a little excitement; *l’imprévu* had an immense charm for him. He was rapid, determined; so sure of himself that he could afford not to be sure of others. Hexham’s tactics were very simple. He loved Hester. Of this he had no doubt, but he had no idea of loving a woman as Shakspeare, for instance, was content to love, or at least to write of it—“Being your slave, what should I do but wait?” This was not in Hexham’s philosophy. Hester had offended him, and he had been snubbed; he would show her his indifference, and punish her for his punishment.

We were all on our way back to the carriages when Hester stopped suddenly at a little zigzag path leading down to the sands, down which Mona and I had been scrambling. “Do let us go down, Emilia. I think we have time; the carriages are not yet ready.”

Emilia, although frightened out of her wits, instantly assented, and Mona and I watched Hester springing from rock to rock and from step to step. She lifted Bevis safe down the steep side; little falling stones, and shells, and sands went showering on to the shingle below; a sea-gull came out of a hole in the sand, and flew out to sea. Bevvv

screamed with delight. Hester's quick light step seemed everywhere; she put him safe down below, and then sprang up again to her sister's help. The little excitement acted like a tonic: "How pretty it is here," she said.

We had sat for some ten minutes under the wing of the great cliff, in an arch or hollow, lined with a slender tracery of granite lines closely following one another. The arching ridge of the cliff cut the high line of the blue sea sharply into a curve.

"It was like a desert island," Hester said, looking at the little cove enclosed in its might walls, with the smooth unfurrowed crescent of shingle gleaming and shining, and the white light little waves rushing against the stones; "an island upon which we had been wrecked."

"An island," I thought to myself, "no Hexham has as yet discovered." I wondered how long it would be a desert?

Mona, tired of sitting, soon wandered off, and disappeared at the side of the cliff. I do not know how long we should have stayed there if little Bevis, who had never yet heard of a desert island, and who thought people always all lived together, and that it was naughty to be shy, and that he was getting very hungry, and that he had better cry a little, had not suddenly set up a shrill and imperious demand for his dinner, his "ome," as he called it, Toosan his nurse, and his rocking-horse. Emilia jumped up, and Hester too.

"It must be time for us to go," said Mrs. Beverley.

It is generally easier to climb than to descend, and, so it would have been now for Hester alone. I do not know why the sun-beaten path seemed so hard, the blocks of stone so loose and crumbling. Hester went first, with Bevis in her arms, and at first got on pretty well; but for some reason or other—perhaps that in coming down we had disturbed the stones—certainly as she went on her footsteps seemed less rapid and lucky than they usually were. She stumbled, righted herself, took another step, Bevis clinging tight to her neck. Emilia cried out, frightened. Hester, a little nervous, put Bevy on a big stone, and stood breathless for an instant. "Come up, Emmy," she said; "this way,—there, to that next big step." Emmy did her best, but before she could catch at Hester's extended hand her foot slipped again, and she gave another little scream.

"Hester, help me!"

I was at some little distance. I had tried a little independent track of my own, which proved more impracticable than I had expected. It was in vain I tried to get to Emilia's assistance. There was no real danger for Emilia, clinging to a big granite boulder fixed in the sand, but it was absurd and not pleasant. The sun baked upon the sandy paths. Hester told Bevy to sit still while she went to help mamma. "No, no, no," cried little Bevis, when his aunt attempted to leave him, clutching at her with a sudden spring, which nearly overset her. It was at this instant that I saw, to my inexpressible relief, two keen eyes peering over the edge of the cliff, and Hexham coming down the path to our relief.

"I could not think where you had got to," he said; "I came back to see. Will you take hold of my stick, Mrs. Beverley? I will come back for the boy, Miss St. Julian." Hexham would have returned a third time for Hester, but she was close behind him, and silently rejected his proffered help. George Hexham turned away in silence. Hester was already scarcely grateful to him for coming back at all. He had spoken to her, but her manner had been so cold, his voice so hard, that it seemed as if indeed all was over between them. Hester was no patient Griselda, but a tender and yet imperious princess,

accustomed to confer favours and to receive gratitude from her subjects. Here was one who had revolted from her allegiance.

* * * * *

(Fragment of a letter found in Mr. Hexham's room after his departure:--)

. . . . A little bit of the island is shining through my open glass-pane. I see a green field with a low hedge, a thatched farm, woods, flecks of shade, a line of down rising from the frill of the muslin blind to the straggling branch of clematis that has been put to grow round my window. It is all a nothing compared to really beautiful scenery, and yet it is everything when one has once been conquered by the charm of the place,—the still, sweet influence of its tender lights, its charming *humility* and unpretension, of one can so speak of anything inanimate. It is six o'clock; the sky is patched and streaked with grey and yellowish clouds upon a faint sunset aqua-marine; a wind from the sea is moving through the clematis and making the light tendrils dance and swing; a sudden unexpected gleam of light has worked enchantment with the field and the farmstead, the straw is aflame, the thatch is golden, the dry stubble is gleaming. A sense of peace and evening and rest comes over me as I write and look from my window. This sort of family-life suits me. I do not find time heavy on my hands. St. Julian is a lucky fellow to be the ruler of such a pleasant dominion. I never saw anything more charmingly pretty than its boundaries studded with scarlet berries, and twisted twigs, with birds starting and flying across the road, almost under our horses' feet, as we came along. I am glad I came. Old St. Julian is as ever capital company, and the most hospitable of hosts. Mrs. St. Julian is an old love of mine: she is a sweet and gracious creature. This is more than I can say of my fellow-guest, Lady Jane Beverley, who is the most overpowering of women. I carefully keep out of her way, but I cannot always escape her. Hester St. Julian is very like her mother, but with something of St. Julian's strength of character—she has almost too much. She was angry with me to-day. Perhaps I deserved it. I hope she has forgiven me by this time, for I, to tell the truth, cannot afford to quarrel with her.

Lord Ulleskelf is here a good deal; his long white hair is more silvery than ever; he came up this morning to see my photography; I wish you had been standing by to see our general eagerness and excitement; the fact is, that here in this island, the simplest emotions seem intensified and magnified. Its very stillness and isolation keep us and our energies from overpassing its boundaries. I have been here two days,—I feel as if I had spent a lifetime in the place, and were never going away any more, and as if the world all about was as visionary as the grey Broadshire Hills that we see from High Down. As for certain old loves and interests that you may have known of, I do not believe they ever existed, except upon paper. If I mistake not, I have found an interest here more deep than any passing fancy.

IX.

The day had begun well and brightly, but there was a jar in the music that evening which was evident enough to most of us. We had all been highly wrought from one cause and another, and this may have accounted for some natural reaction. For one thing,

we missed William and his family; tiresome as Mrs. William undoubtedly was, her placid monotone harmonized with the rest of the performance, for though she was prosy, she was certainly sweet-tempered, and the children were charming. It had seemed like the beginning of the summer's end to see them drive off; little hands waving and rosy faces smiling good-by. Poor Mona was in despair, and went to bed early. Lady Jane sat looking still black and offended with her host in her corner; something had occasioned a renewed access of indignation. Mrs. St. Julian did her very best to propitiate her indignant guest, but the poor lady gave up trying at last, and leant back in her chair wearily, and closed her eyes. I myself was haunted by the well-defined feeling of something amiss,—of trouble present or at hand. Hester, too, was out of spirits. It was evident that she and Mr. Hexham had not quite forgiven each other for the morning's discussion. Altogether it was a dismal disjointed evening, during which a new phase of Hexham's character was revealed to us, and it was not the best or the kindest. There was a hard look in his handsome face and skeptical tone in his voice. He seemed possessed by what the French call *l'esprit moqueur*. Hester, pained and silenced at last, would scarcely answer him when he spoke. Her father with an effort got up and took a book and began to read something out of one of Wordsworth's sonnets. It is always delightful to me to hear St. Julian read. His voice rolled and thrilled through the room, and we were all silent for a moment:

Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart,
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea.

"I hate Wordsworth. He is always preaching to one," said Hexham, not very politely as St. Julian ceased reading. "I never feel so wicked as when I am being preached to."

"I am sorry for you," said St. Julian drily. "I have never been able to read this passage of Wordsworth without emotion since I was a boy, and first found it in my school-books."

Hester had jumped up and slipped out of the room while this discussion was going on; I followed presently, for I remembered a little bit of work which St. Julian had asked us to see to that evening.

He used sometimes to give me work to do for him, although I was not so clever as Hester in fashioning and fitting the things he wanted for his models; but I did my best, and between us we had produced some very respectable coiffes, wimples, slashed bodices, and other bygone elegances. We had also concocted an Italian peasant, and a mediæval princess, and a dear little Dutch girl—our triumph. I found I had not my materials at hand, and I went to the studio to look for them. I was looking for a certain piece of silken stuff which I thought I had seen in the outer studio, and which my cousin had asked me to stitch together so as to make a cloak. I turned the things over and over, but I could not discover what I was in quest of among the piles and heaped-up properties that were kept there. I supposed it must be in the inner room, and I lifted the curtain and went in. I had expected to find the place dark, and silent, and empty. But the room was not dark. The wood fire was burning; the tall candles were lighted; the pictures on the walls were reflecting the light, and looking almost alive, crowding there, and gazing with those strange living eyes that St. Julian knew so well how to paint: a statesman in his

robe; a musician leaning against the wall, drawing his bow across the strings of his violin. As I looked at him in the stream of the fire-flame, I almost expected to hear the conquering sound of the wailing melody. But he did not play; he seemed to me to be waiting, and looking out, and listening to other music than his own. All these pictures were so familiar to us all as we came and went, that we often scarcely paused to look at them. But to-night, in the firelight, they impressed me anew with a sense of admiration for the wonderful power of the man who had produced them. Over the chimney hung a poet, noble and simple and kingly, as St. Julian had painted him. Next to the poet was the head of a calm and beautiful woman, bending in a stream of light. It was either Emilia or her mother in her young. . . An evangelist, with a grand, quiet brow and a white flood of silver beard, came next; and then warriors, and nobles, and maidens with flowing hair. They seemed almost touched to life to-night. Hester was standing underneath the picture of the evangelist, a real living picture. Her head was leaning wearily against the wall. She had come in before me, and seemed standing in a dreary way, with hanging hands. The silk stuffs she had collected were on the ground at her feet, and the pattern cloak was hanging from a chair; but she had thrown her work away. I don't know why, unless it was that her eyes were full of great tired tears that she was trying vainly to keep back.

"My dear," I said, frightened; "my dear, what is it? What has happened? Has he vexed you?" I hated myself next instant. I had spoken hastily and without reflection. My question upset her; she struggled for a minute, and then burst out crying, though she was a brave girl—courageous and not given to useless complaints. Then she looked up, flushing crimson reproach at me. "It is not what you seem to think," she said. "Don't you know me better? It is something—I don't know what. How foolish I am." And this time, with an effort, she conquered her tears. "Oh, Queenie!" She said "I know there is something wrong; some terrible news. I don't dare ask, for they have not told me; and I don't, don't dare ask," she repeated. I was silent, for she was speaking the thought which had been in my own heart of late. At last I said, "One has foolish, nervous frights at times. What makes you so afraid, Hester?"

Hester smiled faintly, with her tear-dimmed face.

"There has been another absurd and provoking scene," she said, "with Lady Jane. Something she said of anxiety, and a letter, and—and—I don't know what frightened me," said Hester, faltering. "She said she would go immediately, that she should marry, meet, write, invite anybody she chose, and that if it were not for this anxiety for Emilia—some letter she expected—she would leave us that instant; and then my mother stopped her, and that is all I know," said Hester, with a great sigh. "It is not worth crying for, is it, Queenie?"

As she spoke the door opened and St. Julian and Hexham came in to smoke their evening pipes. Hester drew herself up with bright flushed cheeks and said a haughty good-night to Hexham as she passed him. But in my heart I thought more than one doubt had caused Hester's tears to flow that night.

Hexham seemed unconscious enough. "I shall be quite ready for sitters to-morrow morning, Miss Hester," said the provoking young man cheerfully. "You won't disappoint me again?"

Hester did not answer, and walked out of the room.

Hexham tried to persuade himself next day that he had made it all right with Hester over-night. He had come down late and had missed her at breakfast, but he made

sure she would not fail him, and he got ready his chemicals and kept telling himself that she would come. The glasses were polished bright, and in their places. Everything was as it should be, he thought; the sun was shining as photographers wish it to shine. Once hearing steps Hexham turned hastily, but it was only St. Julian on his way to the studio; Lady Jane went by presently; then it was Lord Ulleskelf who passed by; and each time Hexham felt more aggrieved and disappointed. Hexham came to me twice as I sat at work in the drawing-room window, but I did not know where Hester had gone, or if she meant to sit to him. Little Mona went by last of all. The child had her hands full of grasses that I had sent her to gather. She went wandering on between the garden beds with a little busy brain full of pretty fancies, strange fairy dreams and stories of a world in which she was living apart from us all. It was an enchanted world, a court where lords and ladies were doing stately obeisance to a fairy Queen in the lily-bed. The tall pampas grasses waved over my little maiden's head and bowed their yellow flowers in the wind. The myrtles glimmered mysteriously, the tamarisks drooped their fringed stems, wind-blown shrubs shivered and shook, while a woodpecker from the outer world who had ventured into fairy realms was laboriously climbing the stem of a slender elm-tree. Hexham asked Mona if she knew where Hester was, and the child, waking up, pointed to the house: "She was there, at work for uncle Henry, in the housekeeper's room, as I passed," said Mona.

Hexham was, as I have said, a young man of an impatient humour. He was a little hard, as young men are apt to be. But there was something reassuring in his very hardness and faith in himself and his own doings. Reassuring because it was a genuine expression of youthful strength and power. No bad man could have had that perfect confidence which marked most of George Hexham's sayings and doings. His was, after all, the complacency of good intentions.

He had taken it as a matter of course, not only that Hester would come, but that she would come with a feeling not unlike the feeling with which he was expecting her. He could not understand her absence, her continued coldness. What did it mean? did it, could it mean that she was unconscious of his admiration? It had suddenly become a matter of utter consequence to the young man that he should find her now, reproach her, read her face, and discover why she had thwarted him. He might see her all day and at any hour, and yet this was the hour he had set apart as his own—when he wanted her—the hour he had looked forward to and counted on and longed for. He came to me a third time, and asked me if I would take a message for him. I was a little sorry for him, although I thought he deserved this gentle punishment.

"If you will come with me we will go and look for her," I said.

"You are doing me an immense kindness," cried Hexham, gratefully.

The housekeeper's room could be entered by the courtyard: it was next to the outer studio, in which it led by a door. It was used for models and had been taken from the servants. As Mona had said, Hester was sitting in the window at work when we came in; the door into the studio was open, and I heard voices of people talking within.

Hester's needle flew along in a sort of rhythmic measure. She knew Hexham had come in with me, but she did not look up, only worked on. Poor Hester! her heart was too heavy for blushes or passing agitations. Hexham had wounded her and disappointed her, but, young as she was, the girl had a sense of the fitness of things which kept her from betraying all she felt; and, indeed, this great unaccountable feeling of anxiety now

occupied most thoughts and feelings, except those to which she would not own. George Hexham stood with a curious face, full of anger and sympathy and compunction, watching her stitches as they flew. One, two, three, he counted, and the quaint little garment turned and twisted in her pale hands. Once she looked up at him. It would have been better if she had looked reproachful; but no, it was a grave cold glance she gave, and then her head bent down once more over her work. I left them to their own explanations, and went back to my drawing-room window.

Afterwards Hester told me how angry she was with me for bringing him.

“Have you nearly done? May I talk to you when you have finished that stitching?” he said to her presently.

“I can listen while I work,” said Hester, still sewing, and if she paused it was only to measure the seams upon the little model for whom they were intended.

That needle flying seemed to poor Hexham an impassable barrier—a weapon wielded by this Amazon that he could not overcome. It kept him at arms’ length; it absorbed her attention; she scarcely listened to what he said as she stuck and threaded and travelled along the strange little garment. He found himself counting the stitches—one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight,—it was absurd; it was like an enchantment.

“Hester,” cried Hexham, “you won’t understand me!” Hester worked on and did not answer. His voice was quick, passionate, and agitated. “You are so calm,” he cried. “I do not believe the common weaknesses of life touch you in the least, or that you ever know how to make any allowance for others.”

“I can make allowance,” faltered Hester, as with trembling hands she stooped and began tying on the child’s little garment.

To Hexham’s annoyance, at that moment St. Julian appeared.

“You here, Hexham? Come and see Lord Ulleskelf. Is the child ready?” he asked. “That is right;” and he led off the little girl, in her funny Velasquez dress, trotting along to his long quick strides. Hexham followed them to the door, and then turned back slowly.

Hester had sunk wearily in the chair in which she had been sitting, leaning her head upon her hand. She thought it was all over; Hexham was gone. “She did not care,” she said to herself; as people say they do not care, when they know in their heart of hearts that they have but to speak to call a welcome answering voice, to put out their hand for another hand to grasp. They do not say so when all is really gone, and there is no answer anywhere. Sometimes she softened, but Hester was indignant to think of the possibility of having been laughed at and made a play of when she herself had come with a heart trusting and true and tender. He could not care for Lady Jane, but he had ventured to say more he really felt to Hester herself. Now it seemed to her that the whole aim and object of her care should be to prevent Hexham from guessing what she had foolishly fancied—Hexham, who had come back, and who was standing looking with keen doubtful glances into her face. She turned her two clear inscrutable eyes upon him once more, and tried to meet his gaze quietly, but her eyes fell beneath his.

“Hester,” he said once again, and stopped short, hearing a step at the door. Poor Hester blushed up crimson with blushes that she blushed for again. Had she betrayed herself? Ah, no, no! She started up. “I must go,” she said. Ah! She would go to her father. There was love, tender and generous love, to shield, to protect, to help her; not love like this, that was but a play, false, cruel, ready to wound.

“Dear Hester, don’t go! Stay!” Hexham entreated, as she began to move towards the door leading to her father’s studio. He had not chosen his time well, poor fellow, for Lady Jane, who was still in the other studio, hearing his voice, came to the door, looked in for one instant, and turned away with an odd expression in her face and a brisk shrug of the shoulders. They both saw her. Hester looked up once again, with doubtful, questioning eyes, and then there was a minute’s silence. Hexham understood her: a minute ago he had been gentle, now her doubts angered him.

“Why are you so hard to me?” he burst out at last, a little indignantly, and thoroughly in earnest. “How can you suppose I have ever fancied that odious woman? Will you believe me, or not, when I tell you how truly and devotedly I love and admire you? You are the only woman I have ever seen whom I would make my wife. If you send me away you will crush all that is best and truest in my nature, and destroy my only chance of salvation.”

“This is not the way to speak,” said Hester, gravely, with a beating heart. His hardness frightened her, as her coldness and self-control angered him; and yet he could not quite forget her sudden emotion of a moment before. It was a curious reluctant attraction that seemed to unite these two people, who loved each other, and yet were cold; and who, like a pair of children as they were, were playing with their best chance of happiness, and willfully putting it away. They stood looking at each other, doubtful still, excited, at once angry and gentle.

“How can I trust you,” said proud Hester, coldly still, “after yesterday?—after—No, you do not really care for me, or—”

It was, I think, at that moment that they heard a sort of low stifled scream from outside, and then hasty footsteps. Hester started. “Was that Lady Jane?” she said. “Oh, what is it? Oh, has it come?” Unnerved, excited, she put up her two hands nervously, and instinctively turning to Hexham for help.

“My dearest,” said Hexham, melting, utterly forgetting all her coldness, thinking only of her—“what is it—what do you fear? And he kept her back for one instant by the two trembling hands, grasping them firmly in his own. . . .

No other word was spoken, but from that moment they felt that they belonged to each other.

“I don’t know what I fear,” she said. “Oh, come, come!”

PART III.

X.

Lady Jane had walked angrily out through the studio door into the garden. Her temper had not been improved by a disagreeable scolding letter from Lady Mountmore which had just been put into her hand. It contained the long-looked-for scrap from Bevis, which his father had forwarded. Lady Jane was venting a certain inward indignation in a brisk walk up and down the front of the house, when Lord Ulleskelf came towards her.

“Are you coming this afternoon to explore the castle with us?” she asked. “I believe we are all going—that is, most of us. Aileen and Mona have gone off with my maid in the coach.”

He shook his head. "No," he said, "And I think if it were not for the children's sake you none of your would much care to go. But I suppose it is better to live on as usual, and make no change to express the hidden anxieties which must trouble us all at times."

"Well, I must say I think it is very ridiculous," said Lady Jane, who was thoroughly out of temper. "These young wives seem to think that they and their husbands are of so much consequence, that every convulsion of life and nature must combine to injure them and keep them apart."

Lord Ulleskelf had spoken forgetting that Lady Jane was quite ignorant of their present cause for alarm. He was half indignant at what he thought utter want of feeling, half convinced by Lady Jane's logic. He had first known St. Julian at Rome, years before, and had been his friend all his life. He admired his genius, loved the girls, and was devoted to the mother: any trouble which befell them came home to him almost as a personal matter. . . .

"It is perfectly absurd," the young lady went on. "We have heard at home all was well; and I cannot sympathize with this mawkish sentimentality. I hate humbug. I'm a peculiar character, and I always disliked much ado about nothing. I am something of a stoic."

"You heard by this mail?" said Lord Ulleskelf, anxiously.

"Of course we did," said Lady Jane. "I had written to my father to send me the letter. Here it is." And she put it into his hand.

They had walked on side by side, and come almost in front of the house, with its open windows. Lady Jane was utterly vexed and put out. Hexham's look of annoyance when she had come in upon them a minute before was the last drop in her cup, and she now went on, in her jerky way,—

"Emilia is all very well; but really I do pity poor Bevis if this is the future in store for him—an anxious wife taking fright at every shadow. Mrs. St. Julian only encourages her in her want of self-control. It is absurd."

Lord Ulleskelf, who had been examining the letter with some anxiety, folded it up. He was shocked and overcome. He confessed to me afterwards that he thought there was no necessity for sparing the feelings of a young lady so well able as Lady Jane to bear anxiety and to blame the over-sensitiveness of others. The letter was short, and about money affairs. In a postscript to the letter, Bevis said,—"Da Costa and Dubois want me to join a shooting-expedition; but I shall not be able to get away." This was some slight comfort, though to Lord Ulleskelf it only seemed a confirmation of his worst fears.

"It is not a shadow," he said, gravely. "If you like to look at this"—and he took a folded newspaper out of his pocket—"you will see why we have been so anxious for poor Emmy. Some one sent me a French paper, in which a paragraph had been copied from the Rio paper, containing an account of an accident to some young Englishman there. I have now, with some difficulty, obtained the original paper itself, with fuller particulars. You will see that this translation is added. I need not ask you to spare Mrs. Bevis a little longer, while the news is uncertain. The accident happened on the 2nd, four days before the steamer left. This letter is dated the 30th August, and must have been written before the accident happened."

He turned away as he spoke, and left her standing there, poor woman, in the blaze of sunshine. Lady Jane never forgot that minute. The sea washed in the distance, a flight

of birds flew overhead, the sun poured down. She stamped upon the crumbling gravel, and then, with an odd, choked sort of cry—hearing some of them coming—fairly ran into the house, and upstairs and along the passage into the mistress's room, of which the door happened to be open.

This was the cry which brought Hester and Hexham out into the yard. I was in the drawing-room, when Lord Ulleskelf came in hurriedly, looking very much disturbed.

“Mrs. Campbell, for heaven's sake go to Lady Jane!” he cried. “Do not let her alarm Emilia. I have been indiscreet—much to blame. Pray go.”

I put down my work and hurried upstairs as he told me. As I went I could hear poor Lady Jane's sobs. I had reached the end of the gallery when I saw a door open, and a figure running towards the mistress's room. Then I knew I was too late, for it was Emmy, who from her mother's bedroom had also heard the cry.

“Mamma, something is wrong,” said Emilia. “Hold Bevvv for me!” And before her mother could prevent her she had put the child in her arms and run along the passage to see what was the matter.

How shall I tell the cruel pang which was waiting for her, running up unconscious to meet the stab. Lady Jane was sitting on Mrs. St. Julian's little sofa. When she saw Emmy she lost all presence of mind: she cried out, “Don't, don't come, Emmy!—not you—not you!” Then jumping up she seized the newspaper and ran out of the room; but the translation Lord Ulleskelf had written out fell on the floor as she left, and poor frightened Emilia, fearing everything, took it out eagerly.

I did not see this—at least I only remembered it afterwards, for poor Lady Jane, meeting me at the door, seized hold of my arm, saying, “God back, go back! Oh, take me to St. Julian!” The poor thing was quite distraught for some minutes. I took her to her room and tried to quiet her, and then I went, as she asked me, to look for my cousin. I ran down by the back way and the little staircase to the studio. It was empty, except that the little model and her mother were getting ready to go. The gentleman was gone, the child said: he had told her to come back next day. She was putting off her little quaint cloak, with her mother's help, in a corner of the big room. I hurried back to the house. On the stairs I found Hester, with her companion, and my mistress at the head of the stairs. Hester and Hexham both turned to me, and my mistress eagerly asked whether I had found St. Julian. I do not know how it was—certainly at the time I could not have described what was happening before my eyes; but afterwards, thinking things over, I seemed to see a phantasmagoria of the events of the day passing before my eyes. I seemed to see the look of motherly sympathy and benediction with which, in all her pain for Emilia, Mrs. St. Julia turned to her Hester. I don't know if the two young folks had spoken to her. They were standing side by side, as people who had a right to one another's help; and afterwards, when I was alone, Hester's face came before me, sad, troubled, and yet illumined by the radiance of a new-found light.

I suppose excitement is a mood which stamps events clearly-marked and well-defined upon our minds. I think for the most part our lives are more wonderful, sadder, and brighter, more beautiful and picturesque, than we have eyes to see or ears to understand, except at certain moments when a crisis comes to stir slow hearts, to brighten dim eyes to sight, and dull ears to the sounds that vibrate all about. So it is with happy people, and lookers-on at the history of others: for those who are in pain a merciful

shadow falls at first, hiding, and covering, and tempering the cruel pangs and passionate regret.

XI.

Emmy read the paper quite quietly, in a sort of dream: this old crumpled paper, lying on the table, in which she saw her husband's name printed. Her first thought was, why had they kept it from her? Here was news, and they had not given it. Bevis Beverley! She even stopped for an instant to think what a pretty, strange name it was; stopped wilfully, with that sort of instinct we all have when we will not realize to ourselves that something of ill to those we love is at hand. Then she began to read, and at first she did not quite understand. A shooting party had gone up the Parana River; the boat was supposed to have over-turned. The names, as well as they could gather, were as follows:--Don Manuel da Costa, Mr. Bevis Beverley of the English Embassy, Mr. Stanmore, and Señor Antonio de Caita,--of whom not one had been saved. Emilia read it once quietly, only her heart suddenly began to beat, and the room to swim round; but even in the bewildering circles she clutched the paper and forced herself to read the dizzy words again. At first she did not feel very much, and even for an instant her mind glanced off to something else—to her mother waiting down below with little Bevis in her lap—then a great cloud began to descend quietly and settle upon the poor little woman, blotting out sunlight and landscape and colour. Emilia lost mention consciousness as the darkness closed in upon her, not bodily consciousness. She had a dim feeling as if some one had drawn a curtain across the window, so she told me afterwards. She was sitting in her mother's room, this she knew; but a terrible, terrible trouble was all about her, all around, everywhere, echoing in the darkness, and cold at her heart. Bevis, she wanted Bevis or her mother: they could send it away; and with a great effort she cried out, "Mamma! mamma!" And at that instant somebody who had been talking to her, but whom she had not heeded, seemed to say, "Here she is," and in a minute more her mother's tender arms were round her, and Emilia coming to herself again looked up into that tender, familiar face.

"My darling," said the mother, "you must hope, and trust, and be brave. Nothing is confirmed; we must pray and love one another, and have faith in a heavenly mercy. If it had been certain, do you think I should have kept it from you all this time?"

"How long?" said the parched lips; and Emilia turned in a dazed way from Mrs. St. Julian to Lady Jane, who had come back, and was standing by with an odd, startled face, looking as pale almost as Emmy herself.

"Oh, Emmy, dear, dear Emmy, don't believe it: we have had a letter since. I shall never forgive myself as long as I live—never! I left it out; that hateful paper. Oh, dear! oh, dear! oh, dear!" sobbed poor Lady Jane, once more completely overcome, as she sank into a chair and hid her face in her hands.

Little Emilia made a great effort. She got up from her seat with a piteous look; she went up to her sister-in-law and put her hand on her shoulder. "Don't cry, Jane," she said, trembling very much. "Mamma says there is hope; and Bevis said I was to try to make the best of things. I had rather know," said poor Emilia turning sick and pale again. "May I see your letter?"

Lady Jane was almost overawed by the gentle sweetness of these two women.

“How can you think of me just now? Oh, Emilia! I—I don’t deserve it!” And she got up and a second time rushed out of the room.

Emmy’s wonderful gentleness and self-control touched me more than I can express. She did not say much more, but went back to her mother, and knelt down and buried her face in her knees in a childish attitude, kneeling there still and motionless, while all the bright light came trembling and shining upon the two bent heads, and the sound of birds and of bleating sheep and shouting children came in at the open windows. I thought they were best alone, and left them, shutting the door. The house was silent and empty of the life which belonged to it, only it seemed to me crowded to suffocation by this great trouble and anxiety. This uncertainty was horrible. How would the time pass until the next mail came due? I was thankful from my heart to think that half the time had passed. Only I felt now at this moment that I must breathe, get out upon the downs, shake off the overpowering sense of sorrow. I could not but feel when those so dear and so near to me were in so much pain; but on my way, as I passed Lady Jane’s door, some compunction made me pause for a moment, and knock and go in. Poor Lady Jane! She was standing at the toilette-table. She had opened her dressing-case to get out the letter which she had hidden away there only a few minutes before, and in so doing she seemed to have caught sight of her own face in the glass, frightened and strange, and unlike anything she had ever seen before. And so she stood looking in a curious stupid way at the tears slowly coursing down her cheeks. She started as I came in, and turned round.

“I—I am not used to this sort of thing,” said she. “I have been feeling as I was somebody else, Mrs. Campbell. I don’t know what I ought to do. What do you think? Shall I take this in? Will it be of any comfort?”

“It will be of no comfort, I fear. It was written before—before that happened. But I fear it is of no use trying to keep anything from her now,” I said, and then together we went back to the door of the mistress’s little room. Mrs. St. Julian put out her hand for the letter, and signed to us to go. Only as we walked away along the passage I heard a great burst of sobbing, and I guessed that it was occasioned by the sight of poor Bevis’s well-known handwriting. Poor Lady Jane began to cry too, and then jerked her tears impatiently away, beginning to look like herself again.

“It’s too absurd,” she said. “All about nothing. Dear old Bevis! I am sure he will come back all safe. I have no patience with such silly frights. I am frightened too now; but there is no more danger than there was yesterday.”

I could not help thinking there was some sense in Lady Jane’s cheerful view of things: after all it was the barest uncertainty and hint of evil, when all round, on every side, dangers of every sort were about each one of those whom we loved, from whom no loving cares or prayers could shield them: a foot slips, a stone falls, and a heart breaks, or a life is ended, and what then? . . . A horrible vision of my own child—close, close to the edge of the dreadful cliff, came before me. I was nervous and infected, too, with sad terrors and presentiments which the sight of the poor sweet young wife’s misery had suggested.

Lady Jane walked beside me with firm, even footsteps, occasionally telling me one thing and another of her favourite brother. Her flow of talk was interrupted: the real true heart within her seemed stirred by an unaffected sympathy for the trouble of the people with whom she was living. Her face seemed kindled, the hard look had gone out of it; for the first time I could imagine a likeness between her and her brother, and I

began to feel a certain trust and reliance in this strange, wayward woman. After a little she was quite silent. We had a dreary little walk, pacing on together along the lane: how long the way seemed, how dull the hedges looked, how dreary the road! It seemed as if our walk had lasted for hours, but we had been out only a very little time. When we came in there was a three-cornered note addressed to Lady Jane lying on the hall table. "A gentleman brought it," said the parlour-maid; and I left Lady Jane to her correspondence, while I ran up to see how my two dear women were going on.

The day lagged on slowly: Emmy had got her little Bevis with her, and was lying down in her own room while he played about. Mrs. St. Julian came and went, doing too much for her own strength; but I could not prevent her. She put me in mind of some bird hovering about her nest, as I met her again and again standing wistful and tender by her daughter's door, listening, and thinking what she could do more to ease her pain.

In the course of the afternoon St. Julian, who had been out when all this happened—having suddenly dismissed his model, and gone off for one of the long solitary tramps to which he was sometimes accustomed—came home to find the house in sad confusion. I think his presence was better medicine for Emmy than her mother's tender, wistful sympathy.

"I don't wonder at your being very uncomfortable," he said; "but I myself think there is a strong probability that your fears are unfounded. Bevis says most distinctly that he has refused to join the expedition. His name has been talked of: that is enough to give rise to a report that he is one of the party. . . . I would give you more sympathy if I did not think that it won't be wanted, my dear." He pulled her little hand through his arm as he spoke, and patted it gently. He looked so tender, so encouraging, so well able to take care of the poor little thing, she clung to him closer and closer.

"Oh, my dearest papa," she said, "I will try, indeed I will!" And she hid her face and tried to choke down her sobs.

I had prepared a bountiful tea for them, to which St. Julian came; but neither Mrs. St. Julian nor Emilia appeared. Lady Jane came down, somewhat subdued, but trying to keep up a desultory conversation, as if nothing had happened, which vexed me at the moment. Even little Bevis soon found that that something was wrong, and his little voice seemed hushed in the big wooden room.

And then the next day dawned, and another long day lagged on. St. Julian would allow no change to be made in the ways of the house. He was right, for any change would but have impressed us all more strongly with the certainty of misfortune. On Thursday we should hear our fate. It was but one more day to wait, and one long, dark, interminable night. Hexham did not mean to leave us: on the contrary, when St. Julian made some proposal of the sort, he said, in true heart-tones, "Let me stay; do not send me away. Oh! St. Julian, don't I belong to you? I don't think I need tell you now that the one great interest of my life is here among you all." The words touched St. Julian very much, and there could be no doubt of their loyalty. "Let him stay, papa," said Hester, gently. In his emotion the young man spoke out quite openly before us all. It was a time which constrained us all to be simple, from the very strength of our sympathy for the dear, and gentle, and stricken young wife above.

Little Bevis came down before dinner, and played about as usual. I was touched to see the tenderness which they all showed to him. His grandfather let him run into his studio, upset his colour-pots, turn over his canvases—one of them came down with a

great sound upon the floor. It was the picture of the two women at the foot of the beacon waiting together in suspense. Little Bevis went to bed as usual, and we dined as usual, but I shall never forget that evening, how endless and interminable it seemed. After dinner St. Julian, who had been up to see Emmy in her room, paced up and down the drawing-room, quite unnerved for once. "My poor child," he kept repeating; "my poor child!"

The wind has risen: we could hear the low roar of the sea moaning against the shingle; the rain suddenly began to pour in the darkness outside, and the fire burnt low, for the great drops came down the chimney. Hexham did his best to cheer us. He was charming in his kindness and thoughtfulness. His manner to Hester was so tender, so gentle, at once humble and protecting, that I could only wonder that she held out as she did against its charm. She scarcely answered him, scarcely looked at him. She sat growing paler and paler. Was it that it seemed to her wrong, when her sister was in such sorrow and anxiety, to think of her own happiness or concerns? It was something of this, for once in the course of the evening I heard her say to him,--

"I cannot talk to you yet. Will you wait?"

"A lifetime," said Hexham, in a low moved voice.

Hexham went away to smoke with St. Julian. I crossed the room and sat down by Hester, and put my arms round her. The poor child leant her head upon my shoulder. Lady Jane was with Emilia, who had sent for her. Long after they had gone up sad and wearily to their rooms, I sat by the fire watching the embers burn out one by one, listening to the sudden gusts of wind against the window-pane, to the dull rush of the sea breaking with loud cries and sobs.

All the events of the day were passing before me, over and over again: first one troubled face, then another; voice after voice echoing in my ears. Was there any hope anywhere in Hester's eyes? I thought; and they seemed looking up out of the fire into my own, as I sat there drowsily and sadly.

It was about two o'clock, I think, when I started: for I heard a sound of footsteps coming. A tall white-robed woman, carrying a lamp, came into the room, and advanced and sat down beside me. It was poor Lady Jane. All her cheerfulness was gone, and I saw now what injustice I had done her, and how she must have struggled to maintain it: she looked old and haggard suddenly.

"I could not rest," she said. "I came down—I thought you might be here. I couldn't stay in my room listening to that dreadful wind." Poor thing, I felt for her. I made up the fire once more, and we two kept a dreary watch for an hour and more, till the wind went down and the sea calmed, and Lady Jane began to nod in her armchair.

XII.

I awoke on the Thursday morning, more hopeful than I had gone to bed. I don't know why, for there was no more reason to hope either more or less than there had been the night before. On Thursday or on Friday the French mail would come with news: that was our one thought. We still tried to go on as usual, as if nothing was the matter. The bells rang, the servants came and went with stolid faces. It is horrible to say, but already at the end of these few interminable hours it seemed as if we were getting used to this new state of things. Emilia still kept upstairs. Lady Jane paced about in her restless way;

from one room to another, from one person to another, she went. Sometimes she would burst out into indignation against Lady Mountmore, who had driven poor Bevis to go. She had influenced his father, Lady Jane declared, and prevented him from advancing a certain sum which he had distinctly promised to Bevis before his marriage. "A promise is a promise," said Lady Jane. "The poor boy was too proud to ask for his rights. He only went, I do believe, to escape that horrid Ephraim. We behaved like brutes, every one of us. I am just as bad as the rest," said the poor lady.

It was as she said. One day in June, when the Minister had sent to Mr. F., of the Foreign Office, to ask who was next on the list of Queen's messengers, it was found that the gentleman first in order had been taken ill only the day before; the second after him was making up his book for the Derby next year.

Poor Bevis—who was sitting disconsolately wondering how it would be possible to take up that bill of Ephraim's, which was daily appearing more terrible and impossible to meet—had heard St. Gervois and De Barty, the two other men in his room, discussing the matter, and announcing in very decided language their intention of remaining in London for the rest of the season, instead of starting off at a moment's notice with despatches to some unknown President in some unknown part of South America.

Bevis said nothing, but got up and left the room. A few minutes after he came back looking very pale. "You fellows," he said, "I shall want you to do a few things for me. I start for Rio to-morrow."

"Mr. St. Gervois told me all about it," poor Lady Jane said, with a grunt, as she told the story.

This sudden determination took the Mountmores and Mr. Ephraim by surprise, and as I have said, it was on this occasion that Lady Jane spoke up on her brother's behalf, and that Emilia, after his departure, was formally recognized by his family. "If he,—when he comes back," cried Lady Jane, in a fume, "my father, in common decency, must increase his allowance." A sudden light came into her face as she spoke. The thought of anything to do or to say for Bevis was a gleam of comfort to the poor sister.

All that day was a feverish looking for news. St. Julian had already started off for London that morning in search of it. Once I saw the telegraph-boy from Tarmouth coming along the lane. I ran down eagerly, but Lady Jane was beforehand, and had pocketed the despatch which the servant had brought her. "It is nothing," she said, "and only concerns me." A certain conscious look seemed to indicate Sigourney. But I asked no questions. I went on in my usual plodding way, putting by candles and soap, serving out sugar. Sometimes now when I stand in the store-closet I remember the odd double feeling with which I stood there that Thursday afternoon, with my heart full of sympathy, and then would come a sudden hardness of long use to me, looking back at the storms of life through which I had passed. A hard, cruel feeling of the inevitable laws of fate came over me. What great matter was it: one more life struck down, one more innocent happiness blasted, one more parting; were we not all of us used to it, was any one spared every? . . . One by one we are sent forth into the storm, alone to struggle through its fierce battlings till we find another shelter, another home, where we may rest for a little while, until the hour comes when once we are driven out. It was an evil frame of mind, and a thankless one, for one who had found friends, a shelter, and help, when most in need of them. As I was still standing among my stores that afternoon, Aileen came to the door, looking a little scared. "Queenie," she said, "Emilia is not in her room. Lady Jane,

too, has been out for ever so long. Her maid tells me that she had a telegraphic message from that Captain Sigourney. Is it not odious of her now, at such a time? Oh, she can't have—can't have----“

“Eloped?” I said, smiling. “No, Aileen, I do not think there is much fear.”

As time went on, however, and neither of them reappeared, I became a little uneasy. Lady Jane's maid when questioned knew nothing of her mistress's intentions. Bevis was alone with his nurse, contentedly stocking a shop in his nursery out of her work-box. But it was not for Lady Jane that I was anxious—she could take care of herself; it was Emilia I was looking for. I put on my bonnet, and set off to try and find her. Hester and Hexham said they would go towards Ulleshall, and see if she was there.

I walked up and down, looking on every side. I thought each clump of furze was Emilia; but at last, high up by the beacon, I saw a dark figure against the sky.

Yes, it was Emilia up there, with beaten garments and with wind-blown hair. She had unconsciously crouched down to escape the fierce blast. She was looking out seawards, at the dull tossing horizon. It seemed to me such an image of desolation that it went to my heart to see her so. I called her by her name, and ran up and put my hand on her shoulder.

“My dear,” I said, “we have been looking for you everywhere.”

Emilia gave a little start. She had not heard me call.

“I could not rest at home,” she said. “I don't know what brought me here. I think I ran almost all the way.”

She spoke with a trembling desperateness that frightened me. Two nights of sleeplessness, and these long maddening hours, were enough to daze the poor child. If she were to break down? But gentle things like Emilia bend and rise again.

“Come home now, dear Emilia,” I said; “it is growing dark. Your mother will be frightened about you.”

“Ah! People are often frightened when there is nothing to fear,” said Emilia, a little strangely.

I could see that she was in a fever. Her cheeks were burning, while I was shivering: for the cold winds came eddying from the valley, and sweeping round and round us, making the beacon creak as they passed. The wind was so chill, the sky so grey, and the green murky sea so dark at our feet, that I longed to get her away. It seemed to me much later than it really was. The solitude oppressed me. There was no life anywhere—no boats about. Perhaps they were lost in the mist that was writhing along from the land, and spreading out to sea. I cannot say why it was so great a relief to me at last to see one little dark speck coming across the straits where the mist was not drifting. The sight of life—for boats are life to people looking out with lonely eyes—this little dark grey speck upon the waters seemed to me to make the blast less dreary, and the lonely heights less lonesome.

We began our walk in silence. Emilia's long blue cloak flapped in the wind, but I pulled it close about her. She let me do as I liked. She didn't speak. Once I said to her, -“Emilia, do you know, when I came up just now, I thought you looked like the picture your father painted. Do you remember it?”

“I—I forget,” said poor Emilia, turning away her face suddenly. All her strength seemed to have left her; her limbs seemed scarcely able to drag her along: her poor little feet slipped and stumbled on the turf and against the white chalk-stones. I put my arm

round her waist and helped her along as best I could, as we crept down the side of the hill.

“I think I cannot walk because my heart is so heavy,” said Emilia once in her childish way, and her head dropped on my shoulder. I hardly can tell what I feared for her, or what I hoped. Sleeplessness and anxiety were enemies too mighty for this helpless little frame to encounter.

I was confused and frightened, and I took a wrong turn. It brought us to the end of a field where a gate had once stood, which was now done away with. We could not force through the hedges and palings: there was nothing to do but turn back. It seems childish to record, but when I found that we must retrace so many of our weary steps, stumbling back all the way, in one of those biting gusts of wind, I burst out crying from fatigue and sympathy, and excitement. It seemed all so dreary and so hopeless. Emilia roused herself, seeing me give way. Poor child, her sweet natural instincts did not desert her even in her own bewildered pain. She took hope suddenly, trying to find strength to help me.

“Oh, Queenie,” she said. “Think if we find, to-morrow, that all is well, and that all this anxiety has been for nothing. But it could not be for nothing, could it?” she said.

It is only another name for something greater and holier than anxiety, I thought; but I could not speak, for I was choking, and I had not yet regained command of my own voice. Our walk was nearly over; we got out on the lane, and so approached our home. At the turn of the road I saw a figure, with hair flying on the gale, who, as we appeared, stumbling and weary, sprang forward to meet us; then suddenly stopped, turned and fled, with fluttering skirts and arms outstretched, like a spirit of the wind. I could not understand it, nor why my little Mona (for it was she) should have run away. Even this moment’s sight of her, in the twilight, did me good and cheered me. How well I remember it all. The dark rustling hedges, a pale streak of yellow light in the west shining beyond the hedge, and beyond the stem of the hawthorn-tree. It gleamed sadly and weirdly in the sky, among clouds of darkness and vaporous shadows; the earth reflected the light faintly at our feet more brightly in the garden, which was higher than the road. Emilia put out her hand, and pulled herself wearily up the steps which led to the garden. It was very dark, but in the light from the stormy gleam she saw something which made her cry out. I pulled Emilia back, with some exclamation, being still confused and not knowing what dark figure it was standing before me in the gloaming; but Emilia burst away from me with a cry, with a low passionate sob. She flew from me straight into two arms that caught her. My heart was beating, my eyes were full of tears, so that I could hardly see what had happened.

But I heard a low “Bevis! Oh, Bevis!” For a moment I stood looking at the two standing clinging together. The cold wind still came in shrill gusts, the grey clouds still drifted, the sun streak was dying; but peace, light, love unspeakable were theirs, and the radiance from their grateful hearts seemed to overflow into ours.

XIII.

“Where is Lady Jane?” interrupted Hexham, coming home in the twilight, from a fruitless search with Hester, to hear the great news. It was so great, so complete, so unexpected, that we none of us quite realized it yet. We were strangely silent; we looked

at each other: some sat still; the younger ones went vaguely rushing about the house, from one end to the other. Aileen and Mona were like a pair of mad kittens, dancing and springing from side to side. It was pretty to see Hester rush in, tremulous, tender, almost frightened by the very depth of her sympathy. The mistress was holding Emilia's hand, and turning from her to Bevis.

"Oh, Bevis, if you knew what three days we have spent," said Hester, flinging her arms round him.

"Don't let us talk about it any more," said he, kissing her blooming cheek, and then he bent over the soft mother's hand that trembled out to meet his own.

It was not at first that we any of us heard very clearly what had happened, for Emilia turned so pale at first when her husband began speaking of that fatal expedition in the boat up the Parana River, that Bevis abruptly changed the subject, and then began describing the road from London to Tarmouth, instead of dwelling on his escape from the accident, or the wonders of that dream-world from whence he had come—an unknown land to us all of mighty streams and waving verdure; of great flowers, and constellations, and mysterious splashings and stirrings along the waters. Emmy—her nerves were still unstrung—turned pale, and Bevis suddenly began to describe his journey from Waterloo to Tarmouth, and his companion from London.

One of the first questions Bevis had asked was news of his sister. Not knowing where anybody was to be found, he had gone straight to the Foreign Office on his arrival, for he was anxious to start again by the mid-day train for Broadshire. It was so early that none of his friends were come; only the porter welcomed him, and told him that there had been many inquiries after him,—a gentleman only that morning, who had left his card for Mr. St. Gervois, with a request for news to be immediately forwarded to him at his lodgings. Bevis glanced at the name on the card,—Captain Sigourney: it was unknown to him, and, to tell the truth, the poor fellow did not care to meet strangers of any sort until he had seen or heard from his own people, and received some answer to that last appeal to his father. "The gentleman was to come again," said the porter; "he seemed very particular." Mr. St. Julian, too, had been there the evening before: he had come up from Broadshire, on purpose to make inquiries. Bevis impatiently looked at his watch: he had not time to find St. Julian out—he had only time to catch the train. He wanted to get to his little Emmy—to put her heart at rest, since all this anxiety had been going on about him. "I shall be back again on Saturday," he wrote on his card, and desired the porter specially to give it to St. Gervois, and to refer all references to him, and to no one else.

"And if the captain should come?" asked the porter.

"Oh, hang the captain," said Bevis; "I don't know what he can want. Tell him anything you like, so long as he does not come after me."

"There is the gentleman," said the porter, pointing to a languid figure that was crossing the street.

Bevis looked doubtfully at the stranger. He hastily turned away, called a passing Hansom, and driving round by the hotel where he had left his luggage, reached the station only in time to catch the quick train to Helmington. He thought of telegraphing, but it was scarcely necessary when he was to see them all so soon. He had posted a note to his father; he also wrote a line to St. Julian, which he left at the "Athenæum" as he passed. . .

. .

As Bevis settled himself in the corner of his carriage, he was much annoyed when the door opened just as the train was starting, and a tall, languid person, whom he recognized as Captain Sigourney, was jerked in. What did he want? Was he following him on purpose? Was it a mere accident, or was this an emissary of that Ephraim's, already on his track? It seemed scarcely possible, and yet Bevis opened his *Times* wide, knitted his handsome brows, and glanced at his companion suspiciously. He had come already to the old anxieties, but the thought of seeing his little Emilia was so delightful to him that it prevented him from troubling himself very seriously about any possible chances or mischances that might be across their path. . . . The young fellow dropped his *Times* gradually, forgetting bills overdue, money troubles, debtors to forgive, and debts to be forgiven. He sat looking out at the rapid landscape, village spires, farms, and broad pleasant fields, dreaming of happy meetings, of Emilia's glad look of recognition, the boys, of Aileen, and his favourite Hester hopping about in an excitement of welcome gladness. "Will you let me look at your *Times*?" said a voice—this was from Captain Sigourney, in his opposite corner. "I had to send off a telegraph at the last moment, and had no time to get a paper," explained that gentleman. Bevis stared, and gave him the paper without speaking; but the undaunted captain, who loved a listener, went on to state that he was anxious about the arrival of the South American mail. "I believe the French steamer comes in about this time?" he said, in an inquiring tone of voice. "Ah!" said Bevis, growing more and more reserved. Poor Signourney's odd insinuating manner was certainly against him. "I shall probably have to telegraph again on the way," continued Sigourney, unabashed, as they neared Winchester. One thing struck Bevis oddly, which was this: When the guard at Winchester came to look at their tickets, his companion's was a return-ticket; and the poor young fellow having got a suspicious idea into his head, began to ask himself what possible object a man could have in travelling all this way down and back again in one day, and whether it would not be as well, under the circumstances, to change carriages, and get out of his way. "Here, let me out," he cried to the guard; and, to his great relief, Sigourney made no opposition to this move on his part.

"A fellow gets suspicious," said honest Bevis. "It is too bad. But I can't understand the fellow now. He seemed dodging me about. He had a return-ticket, too, and I only got away from him by chance. I don't mind so much now that I have seen you, little woman. Ephraim may have a dozen writs out against me, for all I know. I thought there was something uncomfortable about the man the moment I saw him; and I asked the porter at the Foreign Office not to tell him anything about me." As Bevis went on with the account of his morning, my mistress and I had looked at one another and dimly begun to connect one thing and another in our minds. "I suppose I was mistaken," Bevis ended, shrugging his shoulders, "since here I am. But if not to-day, he will have me to-morrow. I only put off the evil day by running away. Well, I've brought back Jane's hundred pounds, and I have seen my little woman again, and the boy, and all of you, and now I don't care what happens."

"Hush," said Mrs. St. Julian: "my husband must help you. Your father has written to him. You should have come to us."

"I believe I acted like a fool," said Beverley, penitently. "Perhaps, after all, I fancied things worse than they were. I couldn't bear to come sponging on St. Julian, I was indignant at something which my step-mother said, and—is Jane here, do you say?"

We were all getting seriously uneasy. Lady Jane's maid brought in the telegram she had found in her room, which seemed to throw some vague light upon her movements.

Captain Sigourney, *Waterloo Station*, to Lady Jane Beverley, *Tarmouth, Broadshire*.

I implore you to meet me at Tarmouth. I come by the four-o'clock boat. I have news of your brother.

(Signed) Sigourney.

"Sigourney!" cried Bevis.

There was a dead silence, and nobody knew exactly what to say next. All our anxiety and speculation were allayed before dinner by the return of the pony-carriage with a hasty note from Lady Jane herself:--

Dearest Mrs. St. Julian,--Kind Captain Sigourney has been to London inquiring for us. He has heard confidentially, from a person at the Foreign Office, that my brother has been heard of by this mail. He thought it best to come to me straight, and I have decided to go off to London immediately. I shall probably find my father at home in Burton Street. I will write to-morrow. Fond love to dearest Emilia.

Your affection, anxious
Jane Beverley.

"But what does it all mean?" cried Bevis, in a fume. "What business has Captain Sigourney with my safety?" And it was only by degrees that he could be appeased at all.

"This fire won't burn!" cried Mona.

There is a little pine-wood growing not far from the Lodges, where Aileen and Mona sometimes boil a kettle and light a fire of dry sticks, twigs, and fir-cones. The pine-wood runs up the side of a steep hill that leads to the down. In the hollow below lie bright pools glistening among wet mosses and fallen leaves and pine-twigs; but the abrupt sides of the little wood are dry and sandy, and laced and overrun by a network of slender roots that go spreading in every direction. In between the clefts and jagged fissures of the ground the sea shines, blue and gleaming, while the white ships, like birds, seem to slide in between the branches. The tea-party was in honour of Bevis's return, the little maidens said. They had transported cups and cloths, pats of butter and brown loaves, all of which good things were set out on a narrow ledge; while a little higher, the flames were sparkling, and a kettle hanging in the pretty thread of blue faint smoke. Mona, on her knees, was piling sticks and cones upon the fire; Aileen was busy spreading her table; and little Bevis was trotting about picking up various little shreds and stones that took his fancy, and bringing them to poke into the bright little flame that was crackling and sparkling and growing every moment more bright.

Bevis and Emilia were the hero and heroine of the entertainment. Hexham was fine, Aileen said, and would not fake an interest, and so he was left with Hester pasting photographs in the dining-room, while the rest of us came off this bright autumnal afternoon to camp in the copse. The sun still poured unwearied over the country, and the

long delightful summer seemed ending in light and brilliancy. It was during this picnic tea-drinking that I heard more than I had hitherto done of Mr. Beverley's adventures.

"This kettle *won't* boil!" said Mona.

And while Bevis was good-naturedly poking and stirring the flames, Emilia began in a low, frightened voice:--"Oh, Queenie, even now I can hardly believe it. He has been telling me all about it. He finished his work sooner than he had expected. I think the poor General was shot with whom he was negotiating; at all events he found that there was nothing more for him to do, and that he might as well take his passage by the very next ship. And then, to pass the time, he went off with those other poor men for a couple of days' shooting, and then they met a drove of angry cattle swimming across the stream, and they could not get out of the way in time, and two were drowned," faltered Emilia; "but when dear Bevis came to himself, he had floated a long way down the stream. He had been unconscious, but bravely clinging to an oar all the time . . . and then he scrambled on shore and wandered on till he got to a wooden house, belonging to two young men, who took him in,--but he had had a blow on the head, and he was very ill for three days, and the steamer was gone when he got back to Rio—and that was how it was."

As she ceased she caught hold of little Bevis, who was trotting past her, and suddenly clutched him to her heart. How happy she was! A little frightened still, even in her great joy, but with smiles and lights in her radiant face,--her very hair seemed shining as she sat under the pine-trees, sometimes looking up at her husband, or with proud eyes following Bevy's little dumpling figure as he busily came and went.

"Here is Hexham, after all," cried Bevis from the heights, looking down as he spoke, and Hexham's head appeared from behind a bank of moss and twigs.

"Why, what a capital gipsy photograph you would all make," cried the enthusiastic Hexham as he came up. "I have brought you some letters. Hester is coming directly with William St. Julian, who has just arrived."

"I really don't think we can give you all cups," said Aileen, busily pouring from her boiling kettle into her teapot. "You know I didn't expect you."

Bevis took all the letters and began to read them out:--

I.

Lord Mountmore *to the* Hon. Bevis Beverley.

Friday.

My Dear Boy,--The news of your safe return from Rio has relieved us all from a most anxious state of mind. You have had a providential escape, upon which we most warmly and heartily congratulate you. With regard to the subject of your letter, I am willing to accede to your request, and to allow you once more the same sum that you have always had hitherto. I will also assist you to take up the bill, if you will give me your solemn promise never to have anything more to do with the Jews. Jane has pleaded your cause so well that I cannot refuse her. My lady desires her love.

Your affectionate father,

M-----.

Jane is writing, so I send no message from her. She arrived, poor girl, on Thursday in a most distressed state of mind. I hope we shall see you here with your wife before long.

II.

Unknown Friend, *Ch. Coll., Cambridge, to George Hexham, Esq., The Island, Tarmouth.*

My Dear George,--I have been expecting this letter even since I received your last, from which, by the by, one page was missing. Farewell, O friend of my bachelorhood. Seriously, I must also beg to congratulate the future Mrs. Hexham upon having secured the affections of one of the best and truest-hearted of men. I long to see you, and to hear all about it. I have do doubt she full deserves her good fortune.

Ever, my dear fellow, affectionately yours,

_____.

III.

Mrs. William St. Julian *Kensington Square, to Mrs. St. Julian, Tarmouth.*

My Dearest Mrs. St. Julian,--I send this by William, who cannot rest until he has seen you all and told you how heartfelt are our sympathies and congratulations. How little we thought, as we drove off on Monday morning, of all that was at hand. It seems very *unfeeling* as I look back now. I shall feel quite nervous until William comes back, but he has promised to take a return-ticket to reassure me. I am quite surprised by the news you send me this morning of Hester's engagement. I always had my own ideas, though I did not speak of them (we quiet people often see a good deal more than people imagine), and I quite expected that Lady Jane would have been the lady. However, it is much better as it is, and Mr. Hexham is, I have do doubt, all you could wish for dear Hester. Do give my best and kindest congratulations to dear Emilia. How delighted she must have been to get the good news of her husband's safety. I hope it was not too much for her,--excitement is very apt to knock one up. The children send a hundred loves and kisses.

Believe me

Your affectionate daughter,

Margaret St. Julian

P.S.—I have had a visit from a very delightful Captain Sigourney. He called upon me to ask for news of you all. It seems he escorted lady Jane to town, and that in consequence of information he had received at the Foreign Office he was able to be of great service to her, although the information afterwards turned out incorrect. A person there had assured him that Mr. Beverley had been in town some time, and had returned to South America for good. What strange reports get about! One should be very careful never to believe anybody.