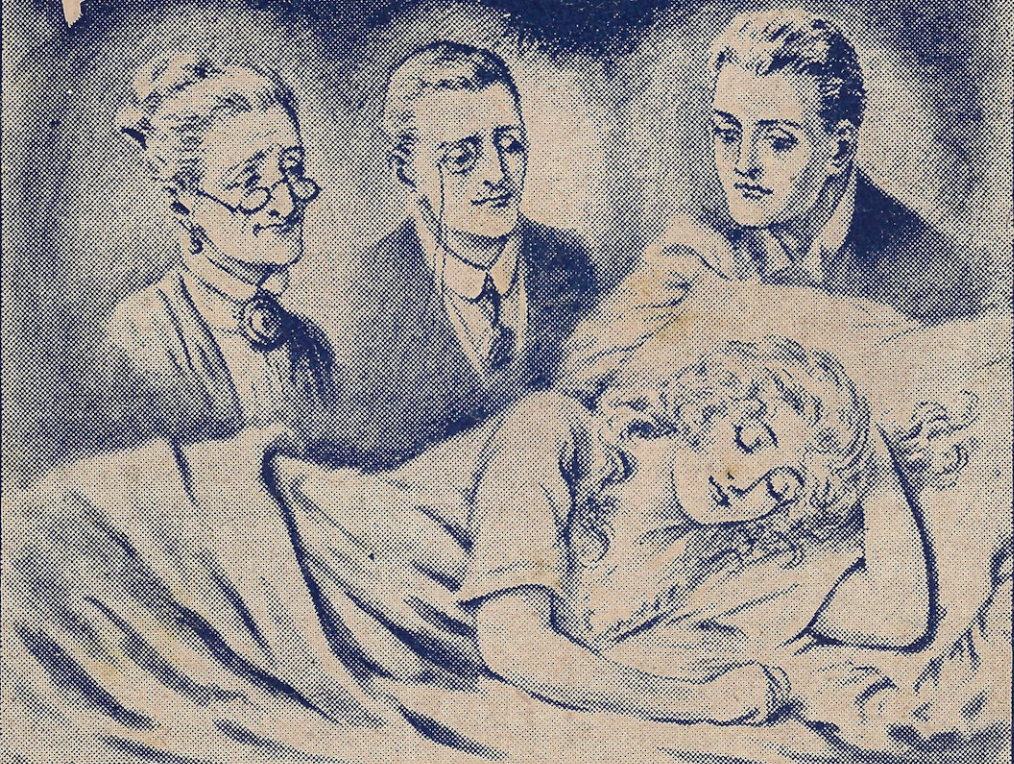


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# POLLIE GREEN AT TWENTY-ONE

By  
Mabel St. John.



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# Pollie Green at Twenty-one.

By MABEL ST. JOHN.

## CHAPTER I.

### Pollie Green's Birthday Party.

POLLIE GREEN drew up the blind, and opened her bed-room window, and put her golden head out into the sunshine.

"Fancy!" she said to herself, in a low voice of wonder.

There was nothing remarkable about the day. The weather was gloriously fine, as it had been for the past two weeks.

The cloudless sky was as blue as the pair of eyes that were taking their first look at to-day's sunshine. The birds were singing busily in the trees. On the high, old red-brick garden wall a white cat was sunning itself, and washing its face placidly.

There were no signs of excitement visible anywhere.

It seemed just a usual, ordinary, everyday sort of day, and there was nothing to proclaim the fact that it was different from yesterday and to-morrow, and any other day there ever had been or would ever be.

"Fancy!" Pollie said again to herself, in a voice of wonder.

She could just see her father as he grubbed about among his roses in search of a marauding snail—her father in his shabby old coat that she distinctly remembered for the past twelve years at least, his shabby old hat, his broad shoulders, and capacious back.

"Daddy!" Pollie called out softly.

Sir Francis Green, who had just chased the snail to its lair, dropped it, and turned quickly.

"Daddy, fancy, to-day is——"

"Of course it is, my darling, and many, many happy returns to you!" he cried.

"I'm twenty-one," Pollie said, "and no longer an infant in the eyes of the law."

Sir Francis Green nodded.

"Of course," he said—"of course you are a woman, my darling, and——" He paused.

"I suppose I am, but I don't feel any older than I did yesterday."

She certainly did not look any older as she leaned out of the window in her white night-dress, with her golden hair rippling down each side of her lovely face.

"Fancy! It is awful to think about, isn't it?"

"Awful!" Sir Francis Green repeated. "Awful! My darling, I don't——"

"I am now responsible for all my debts, and liable to be summoned, and that sort of thing. I wonder if Arkwright is thinking about that?"

"Arkwright? Why should he?"

"Because I owe him a shilling for putting a

patch on the heel of my shoe," she said; "and now, of course, I am legally responsible."

"We must see if we cannot effect some compromise with Arkwright," Sir Francis said seriously. "But, my darling, I want to speak to you. Get dressed, and come down to me."

She nodded to him, and threw him a kiss, and the golden head vanished.

Pollie Green sat down, and looked at herself in her glass.

She studied her face intently for some moments in silence.

"You're getting on," she said slowly. "You are not so young as you used to be. P. Green, you are beginning to show signs of age and wear and tear. In another twenty years you will have turned forty. At forty you will be hideous. You are not improving in looks as it is. Anyone could see that you are quite old."

She made a face at herself in the glass, and then hastened to dress.

Outside in the garden, Sir Francis, having captured the snail, carried it tenderly to the limits of the garden, and dropped it gently over the hedge into the paddock.

He did not kill it; he never killed anything. Knowingly, he would not have wounded any living thing.

Mrs. Macgruder said that, in many ways, Sir Francis Green might be regarded as being a harmless lunatic. Mrs. Macgruder had no patience with him.

"Look at his daughter," she said, "and look at that black girl; and yet anyone would think that, after the really terrible experience Margaret Green has been through, she would have lost her boisterous spirits. It is true that for some months—a year, in fact—she was most becomingly reserved and ladylike. I had great hopes that she had turned over a new leaf. The rector and I quite thought she had, but"—Mrs. Macgruder sighed—"I am afraid," she added, "that troubles to some people are like water on a duck's back. It seems to be so in the case of Miss Green."

"Daddy!"

Pollie came down the garden path a vision in white, with flushed cheeks radiant with health and happiness.

As Mrs. Macgruder said, one could certainly not deny that Miss Green was not ill-looking.

Her hair and her eyes seemed to catch and hold the sunshine, her cheeks were like the pink roses that nodded to her as she passed; the dainty, graceful, girlish figure of three years ago had developed into gracious perfection.

Not in all the length and breadth of England



could beauty more perfect, more sweet and winsome than hers be found; and no wonder Sir Francis stood looking at her with a feeling of pride in his heart.

A few paces from him she stopped.

"Daddy, look at me, please!" she said.

"I am looking, my sweetheart!"

"Do you realise that I am a woman? Yesterday I was an infant. To-day— It is wonderful, isn't it? What a difference a day makes! On Monday last a respectably dressed young woman, giving the name of P. Green, was summoned by William Arkwright, bootmaker, for the sum of one shilling for—"

"My darling, I am waiting to kiss you, and to wish you many, many happy returns of your birthday!" Sir Francis said.

"Every return of it will be happy so long as I am with you," she said, as he took her into his arms. "That's all I want, daddy, to be with you; never to be so far away that when you call me I cannot hear you. I don't think, I know, there is not a happier and more contented girl in all the world than I am. There is nothing I want, nothing I—"

"Nothing," he asked quietly, looking down at her—"nothing, my darling?"

For a moment the flush in her cheeks deepened, and then died out; for a moment the bright eyes filled with tears, and a look of pain came into the lovely face.

"Nothing," she said—"nothing that I may have, nothing that I hope for, dear, and I am content to—to be with you always—always!"

She slipped her hand through his arm, and for a few minutes they walked slowly side by side in silence.

At a bend of the path they came face to face with a black girl. This was Coosha, Pollie's inseparable companion.

"Hallo!" said Sir Francis. "Here is Coosha, come to wish you many happy returns."

Coosha, at eighteen, was tall and slim, but except that she was taller and less ungraceful in her movements, she was exactly the same Coosha as of old—the same perfect double row of white teeth, the same big mouth that spread out in a grin from one black ear almost to the other, the same woolly head, and the same love of finery, especially hats; and perhaps, most of all, the same undying affection and devotion to Pollie Green, whom she still took to task and bullied in exactly the same manner.

"Seen him!" said Coosha excitedly. "Jes' seen him!"

"Who?" Pollie asked.

"Beg to wis' yo' many happy returns ob de day," said Coosha. "Hope yo' lib long, and die happy. See de new queerate come 'long in a cab dis minute. Hope yo' hab bery plesen' birthday, and all de res'. Neber see such a chap! White face, black hair, long nose, big eyes. Look at me like he was s'prised to see brack lady. Den him take off him hat, and I put out my—"

"Coosha!" said Pollie. "You put out your tongue! How—how could you?"

"Didn't," said Coosha. "Don't yo' jump to de conclusions so remarkable quick. I was go-

ing to say I put out de ole grey donkey dat stray on de lawn and eat de roses up, which I am sure Sir Francis bery much obliged, dough he don't say nothing."

"I am sure I am obliged. I shall have to take steps about that donkey," Sir Francis said.

"And the curate?" Pollie asked.

"Poor bees!" said Coosha. "Bery sorry for dat queerate. Him don't look strong. Look like him want plenty good libing; dat him won't get 'long wid dat ole Macgruder cat. Ho, I got presen' for yo', Pollie Green, on dis birthday ob yours!"

"A present? Oh, Coosha, you should not! You have not much money—"

"Pooh! Dat's not'ing. Yo' come 'long!"

"You are a dear, generous thing," Pollie said; "but I wish you wouldn't. I wish—"

"Dat's all right," said Coosha. "Here de presen'. Lef' it here to keep cool out de sun."

She stooped, and picked up a small square box from the grass under a tree.

"Be careful how yo' open it; it might jump out, den it get los', which a pity."

"It's a frog!" Pollie cried. "Coosha, it's a frog!"

"Speck I know dat," said Coosha. "Course it am a frog. It isn't a carriage and pair of horses. It bery unusual, particular frog. Dat yo' may not hab notis. Dat frog hab pink spot on him back."

"How could you put the poor thing into a box?" Pollie cried. "Oh, Coosha, let it go! Let it hop home to its friends and relations!"

Pollie opened the box, and, with a wild spring, the frog accepted its liberty, and in a few moments had vanished from sight.

"Dat's de end ob my presen'," said Coosha. "Don't tink much ob presen's from de poor brack girl. I speck yo' tink I ought to hab buy yo' a di'mond ring, or suffling. Neber satisfy, yo' aren't, Pollie Green. Neber seen such a dissatisfy girl as yo' am. Getting not'ing good enough for yo'. Neber mind, I see de new queerate, and you didn't. Got de laugh ob yo' dat time. I kiss my han' to him—"

"You did what, Coosha?"

"Kiss my han'. Why not? Only just to show him dat we bery please to see him. Hope him don't preach long sermons. Bery tired dat ole Macgruder; him gib me de hump. Ho, dey come to put up de tents!" Coosha cried excitedly. "Come and see!"

But the breakfast-bell rang at this moment, and Pollie went in to pour out her father's coffee.

There were to be great doings at the Manor House to-day, in honour of Pollie Green's twenty-first birthday.

Already on the big lawn in front of the house the men were erecting a large tent, in which, later on in the day, the refreshments would be served out.

Everyone who was anyone at all in the village, and those who were nobodies, had been invited. In fact, all the village, big and little, had been invited to come. The school children, the choir, the farmers from the neighbouring villages, with their wives and their children—all were coming.



"Who shall we ask, darling?" Sir Francis had asked, a week before. And Pollie had said, "Everybody," and so everybody had been asked. And now carts were rattling up, one after another, and discharging hampers and cases of food.

The trestles were set up, and the long boards laid over them to form tables.

The quiet old garden was alive with men hurrying this way and that, staggering under loads of food.

"I hope there will be enough for everybody," Sir Francis said. "I should not like anyone to go short."

There was so much to do. Now that the large tent was up, another was erected. This was for the select few, the aristocrats of the neighbourhood—Mr. Macgruder, the rector, his wife, and the new curate, who had arrived only to-day; Dr. Spurgeon, Mr. Didey, the lawyer, and their wives and families; Sir Hector Thornton, from Millover, and a dozen more besides.

The hour for the arrival of the guests had been timed for three o'clock, and precisely as the clock was striking, Miss Pickney, the village dressmaker, who always came first, and left last, hurried in with an anxious look on her face.

"Oh, there, now, I did think I was late! I had to get Mrs. Didey's dress off. And the temper she was in, to be sure, yesterday! And how do you do, Miss Green? And I am sure I wish you very many—I do, indeed. And I never did see you looking better, though I don't like— You wouldn't mind me saying I didn't like, would you? I mean, your dress, Miss Green. It is very nice material, of course but the making! Not that it is for me to cast aspersions on anyone. No, indeed, as I always say to Mrs. Macgruder, live and let live. And I hope you will see very many; I do, indeed!"

"I'm sorry you don't like the dress," Pollie said. "It's one of my old Lucine frocks, and she isn't considered bad, you know."

Miss Pickney shook her head.

"Not good—not good," she said. "No, nothing—nothing distangy. You'll excuse me saying so, me as hasn't the right; but I'm sure no offence meant. And I'd hope to have the pleasure one of these days of making a dress that will be a credit to see you in."

They came in twos and threes, and sixes and sevens, and Pollie stood in her pretty white dress, receiving them, and shaking hands with those that she did not kiss.

And the sun never shone on a sweeter face or a prettier figure than that of Miss Margaret Green, on her twenty-first birthday.

And so Mr. John Lonsdale, fresh from the London slums, thought, as his eyes fell on her for the first time.

"Dat's the new queerate," Coosha whispered. "Dat chap wid de big brack eyes and de white face."

Mrs. Macgruder, in a lavender silk dress, and in a state of perspiration, sailed in and kissed Pollie on both cheeks.

"My dear child," she said, "so many happy returns of the day! On this very auspicious occasion I have the pleasure to present you with a little token—a little humble token, yet none the less sincere, of good will and affection from a very old friend, and I am sure you will prize and value it none the less highly because it is the product of my own skill."

Mrs. Macgruder produced a parcel, and tore off the paper.

It was a tea-cosy, and had evidently been fashioned out of samples of dress material and fragments from some of Mrs. Macgruder's own wearing apparel; and then, as a brilliant and happy thought, Mrs. Macgruder had embroidered a large, round yellow patch, with white stitches radiating from it in the centre.

This was meant to represent a daisy, or, rather, a marguerite, happily inspired by Pollie's Christian name.

"It is simply lovely, and I shall value it and keep it for ever!" Pollie said.

Mrs. Macgruder looked satisfied.

"And now let me present Mr. — Dear me, I really forgot! Mr. —"

"Lonsdale!" the new curate said in a deep, manly voice.

"To be sure! So very forgetful! Mr.—er—er—Miss Green."

Pollie held out her hand to him.

"I am very glad to see you," she said frankly. "We have all been looking forward to your coming. There is not much excitement here, you know, and even a new—I mean a new-comer—that is, someone fresh-coming, is so unusual."

He certainly had wonderful dark eyes.

They were not wonderful because they were dark, or because they were remarkably fine eyes, but there was a strange expression in them—wistful, even sad.

He was tall and broad-shouldered, but thin.

"Very thin," Pollie thought, "and his face —"

Pollie glanced at him and was conscious that she liked his face—it was strong, intellectual, not handsome, for the features were irregular, and the mouth was large, though its expression was kindly, and his chin was heavy and firm and strong—the sort of chin a man should have.

But he was shabby. His clerical coat was worn and threadbare, brown and shiny in the light.

It was strange that Pollie did not notice this. But Miss Rosina Didey, who had remarkably sharp eyes, saw it at once.

"Quite a shabby creature," she said shrilly, "And so very ugly; such a disappointment. At least, we ought to have a good-looking curate. Not that it matters to me, of course! But good-looking people are so much more pleasant to see than ugly ones." And she tried to catch sight of the reflection of her own round, red face in a highly-polished milk-churn.

"And Miss Green, of course making herself very pleasant," said Miss Floretta Macgruder.



with an unpleasant laugh. "One would think, as my mother says, that, after the great disappointment Miss Green suffered, she would be more reserved and quieter in her manner, but some people have no sense of delicacy and refinement. I know if I had been situated as she was—and they say it was suicide, though, of course, the papers never—"

"Dat's a beesly lie!" said Coosha suddenly. "And yo' a beesly liar! 'Scuse de freedom ob de remark."

"Don't dare speak to me, you wicked heathen!" said Miss Macgruder angrily.

"Headen!" shouted Coosha, her big eyes darting fire. "Don't yo' a-call me headen, yo' red-nose old, ugly old—"

But Sir Francis—the only person on earth of whom Coosha stood in awe—coming into the tent at this moment, Coosha took her departure hurriedly.

"A perfect wild beast!" said Miss Macgruder. "She ought really to be kept in a cage, or at the end of a chain!"

"And to think that she might have been a duchess! It is wonderful, isn't it?" said Miss Thornton, who was a pretty fair girl, with pale-blue eyes and pink cheeks. "How terribly—terribly disappointed she must have been! I know that, child as I was when it all happened, years and years ago, I cried so; I thought it so terrible. I quite thought that she would never smile again."

"I have heard so much of you, Miss Green," the new curate was saying.

"I am so sorry," Pollie said. "I hoped that we should be friends."

He looked puzzled.

"Of course, if you have been hearing about me from Mrs. Macgruder you must hate the sight of me already," Pollie said.

"But it was not from Mrs. Macgruder. It was from someone in London. A Mrs. Gibbs, who—"

"Elizabeth, the old school cook and my old friend!" Pollie cried. "Oh, do you know her?"

"Yes. A very good woman, kind-hearted and charitable. I wish there were more like her," he said. "And she often spoke of you. And I can assure you that what she said wasn't likely to turn anyone against you, though—"

He looked at her with serious eyes.

"Thought?" Pollie asked.

A faint colour came into his cheeks.

"I beg your pardon. I have rather a bad habit of thinking aloud," he said. "I did not mean to say 'thought.'"

He had been thinking that when Elizabeth Gibbs had spoken of Pollie's beauty she had never done her subject justice.

He had pictured Miss Pollie Green to himself as a merely pretty young woman, and the radiant loveliness of the girl before him filled him with wondering admiration.

There had been very little of the beautiful in his life.

His work had been among the poorest of the poor; he had seen poverty in its lowest and most debased form, human suffering so terrible that his soul had sickened at it, and

the memory of it had come back to him again in his dreams. Vice and sin and pain had stalked in those narrow courts and noisome alleys where he had toiled.

He had seen babies starving at their mothers' breasts; he had seen the hopeless despair in the eyes of men who asked in vain for the right to work and live.

He had seen men and women, and children, too, stricken down under the curse of the bottle, and he had worked among them, doing such good as he could do, till his strength was almost gone.

And then the time had gone, the hour that he had dreaded and put off for so long as he dared.

The doctor had said to him:

"Six months more of this life and you will be a dead man. Every week here means a year of life lost to you. Get some curacy out in the country for a couple of years, and then come back if you like. But stay here now and you are doomed."

And so he had to leave his work undone.

But one day he would go back to it again with new health and new strength. It was what he had to look forward to, what he had to live for.

And when that time came he would leave all, and go back to those who needed him, giving them the rest of his life willingly and gladly.

He knew something of her history, too; he knew that but for the accident of death she would be one of the greatest ladies in the land—a duchess.

And how lovely a duchess!

He looked at her now, and perhaps wondered at the serene content in her blue eyes; and yet, in spite of the smile upon her lips, in spite of the happiness in her sweet face, he thought he could detect a shade of sadness—something that might be invisible, perhaps, to other eyes less keen than his.

The broad, sweeping lawn of the old Manor House was alive with movement and sound. The elders were sitting under the trees in comfortable wicker chairs. Sir Hector Thornton, a loud-voiced, red-faced, white-haired old gentleman with a fiery temper, was discussing the drainage question with Miss Pickney, because he could get no one else to listen to him; and Miss Pickney, though she felt flattered at being singled out by so great a man, felt that the subject was far too indelicate to be touched upon in a manner so public.

"What we want—and I've said it a hundred times during the past ten years, madam—I say what we want is a sewer—a main sewer, ma'am!" the old gentleman shouted.

"It certainly do hang a bit to one side," said Miss Pickney, who was watching the set of Mrs. Didey's skirt as she crossed the lawn.

"First, and before all, a sewer!" shouted the old baronet, thumping his knees.

"To be sure," murmured Miss Pickney. "I'll have to see about it. I hope no one won't notice it. And I'm sure Miss Floretta's dress is a credit to anyone, considering the price



was only thirty-two-and-six; which I am sure it looks worth at least three guineas!"

"Such a lack of dignity!" Mrs. Macgruder was saying. "Really, Sir Francis Green has so little sense of his own importance in the county, he might just as well not be a J.P. and a land proprietor. Quite indelicate, I call it! Mr. Macgruder, I protest; and you as a clergyman should protest, too. Young girls should not run races, it is most indelicate and unrefined!"

"Certainly!" said Mr. Macgruder, who was a hard-faced man with iron-grey hair and a thick, red nose. "Very wrong! But what is one to do, my dear? What can one say?"

"Mr. Macgruder, your new curate is actually taking part in this exhibition. I perceive him with Miss Green actually encouraging those young girls to run races. This is most disgraceful!"

"I shall speak to him seriously," said the rector.

"Now," said his wife—"now is the time. There is no time like the present. I consider that this should be stopped at once!"

The little boys under seven had just run a race round the lawn, and now it was the turn of the little girls under ten.

It was certainly horrifying to see such a spectacle; but worse was in store for Mrs. Macgruder presently, when girls over ten and under fifteen lined up under the direction of Sir Francis, who threw himself heart and soul into amusing the children.

"Mr. Macgruder," Mrs. Macgruder cried, "this is more—more than I can bear! Do you perceive what is going on? Those great girls are going to run in a race. It is offensive and indelicate in the highest degree. As a clergyman of the Church of England, you have the right to stop this. I implore you to cry 'Hold, enough!'"

"My dear," said the rector, "I really cannot interfere. This is Sir Francis Green's—"

"Nonsense! Think of the respect due to your cloth, Mr. Macgruder! I call your attention to the fact that your new curate, Mr.—er—Mr.—is aiding and abetting in this. He and Miss Green and Sir Francis Green are doing this to insult and annoy us. If you will not make any move in the matter, I—I will!"

Mrs. Macgruder rose, but she was too late.

"One to be ready, two to be steady, three to be off!" shouted Pollie.

And away they tore, a score of long-legged, red-cheeked girls, with their hair flying in the wind.

How they ran!

"Bravo! Bravo!" shouted Sir Francis.

The new curate smiled, Pollie clapped her hands.

"Run! Run like de deb—dickens, I mean!" shouted Coosha. "For goodness gracious sake, yo', Nellie Jones; yo' be lef' all be'ine, like de donkey's tail! Run, for goodness' sake, child!"

Coosha raced along beside them, encouraging, blaming, directing.

It was a terrible and degrading spectacle, and Mrs. Macgruder lay back in her deck-chair, and closed her eyes. She, at any rate—mobile, pure-minded woman—would not encourage such a scene by even witnessing it.

"That man will not suit us, Mr. Macgruder!" she said fiercely.

"He is very cheap," Mr. Macgruder said; "and he seems capable."

"Capable? Capable of assisting in the most indelicate and abominable exhibition I have ever witnessed!" Mrs. Macgruder said. "Understand, Mr. Macgruder, that man goes!"

"Who, mamma?" asked Miss Floretta, who was turned twenty-eight, and getting anxious.

"That man—the new curate—he goes!"

"Oh, he is quite nice; not good-looking, of course, but gentlemanly, and quite nice!" said Miss Floretta.

"He goes!" said Mrs. Macgruder.

Miss Floretta shrugged her plump shoulders.

"You really take absurd dislikes!" she said.

"I do nothing of the kind, miss!"

"Yes, you do; you are very unreasonable and prejudiced and absurd."

"How dare you speak in that way to me?"

"You are really too silly, mamma!"

"And you dare to tell me this—you, a mere chit of a child! I have a mind to order you to go home at once, and stay in your bedroom!"

"Pooh, pooh!" said the rector. "We will discuss this later! Run away, Floretta; you only incense your dear mother!"

The chit of a child ambled off in search of the new curate. In two years' time she would be thirty, and there was not really an eligible single man in the whole district. The last curate had been a married man with seven children, the next one might be, too; and so Miss Floretta decided to champion Mr. Lonsdale's cause.

"Bravo, bravo!" said Sir Francis. "You ran very well, my dear—very nicely indeed!" He patted the winner—the same Miss Nellie Jones who had been encouraged by Coosha—on the shoulder. "We will find a nice prize for you later on. Let me see, the next thing on the programme is the high jump—yes, that is, high jump for boys under thirteen."

Mrs. Sinkinson, with a wisp of pale hair across her forehead, came out and blinked in the sunshine. She was looking for someone. She was a useful person, who came in to oblige; sometimes she did the cooking; sometimes she thought she did; and she always had a black smear down one side of her nose. She had it now, and it looked distinguished in the sunshine.

"Anyone seen Miss Pollie?" she asked. "Oh, there she is! Miss Polly, my dear, you're wanted!"

"Wanted?" Pollie asked.

Mrs. Sinkinson nodded, and loosened another strand of hair which hung over her right eye.

"A old person," she said—"very stiff and starchy. I says, 'What's your business?' and ha



said, "Miss Green; I wish to see her important and immedjut!"

"To see me?" Pollie said. "Is he a guest—I mean, is he invited?"

"A stiff, elderly person with white 'air," said Mrs. Sinkinson. "Very standoffish in 'is manners, my dear. Not affable and easy like Sir Francis, bless 'im!"

"Where is he?" Pollie asked.

"In the library, my dear. I don't know as I done right leaving 'im there. You never know 'oo people are till you find out!"

"There's nothing he could steal!" Pollie said, with a laugh. "All right, I will go to him!"

She hurried across the lawn, and stepped into the library through the open French window.

"You wanted to see me?"

She could not see in the twilight of the room after the bright glare of the sunshine outside, but she was conscious of the presence of a tall, thin, upright figure.

"You are Miss Margaret Green?"

"Yes," Pollie nodded.

She could see him more distinctly now—a very tall, thin, elderly gentleman, with a keen face, white hair, and short side whiskers, irreproachably dressed in black.

"Who have this day attained the age of twenty-one years?" he asked.

"Yes," said Pollie; "that's why all the kick-up—the party, I mean—is going on."

"I am Mr. Bannockburn, of Bannockburn, Harley & Wishdale, solicitors, Lincoln's Inn Fields."

"How d'you do?" Pollie said frankly. "I haven't heard of you before, but I am very glad to see you. Will you have something—an ice, or—"

"I thank you, but I have but little time, and my business is pressing and immediate!"

"With—with me?" Pollie gasped.

"With you, Miss Green. I have a communication to make to you of the greatest importance. Will you be kind enough to be seated?"

"A—a communication to make to me!" Pollie said, as she dropped into a shabby old chair.

The lawyer bowed.

"Of the very first importance. Have I your permission, Miss Green, to proceed?"

"Yes," said Pollie faintly—"fire away!"

Mr. Bannockburn looked faintly surprised. He was not accustomed to be told to "Fire away!" by his clients; but, still, a country-bred young person would not, of course—

No matter.

"Ahem!"

He coughed and adjusted his shirt collar.

"Three years ago, my dear young lady, you were on the eve of becoming the wife of his Grace the Duke of Hammersford, when, by a regrettable, a never-to-be-sufficiently regretted and most sad accident, he—"

"Is—is this necessary?" Pollie looked up quickly, her face and her manner had changed. The fun and the laughter had died out of her eyes, giving place to unutterable sadness.

"Need you—" she whispered in an almost imploring voice.

"I fear I must," he said. "Naturally you are deeply affected, and on such a day as this I am sorry to have to reawaken sad memories in your mind." Mr. Bannockburn looked out of the window on to the crowded lawn. "But for the purpose of my visit I must—"

He paused, as the door opened suddenly.

"Oh, goodness, chile, where de doose you got to all de time? De race —" Coosha paused. "Beg pardon; didn't know nobody was here. Bery sorry. S'pose yo' de chap dat done de refreshmens? If yo' am, all I got to say, I'd like to know how—"

"Please go away, Coosha," said Pollie.

"Bery sorry; always in de way!" said Coosha.

"Neber hab no luck in dis worl'." She withdrew to the door and looked the solicitor up and down. "Look a dry ole stick, I tink," she muttered audibly. "Hope to goodness him not going to stop here long."

"Coosha!" Pollie said warningly.

And Coosha retired hurriedly, banging the door after her.

Mr. Barrockburn coughed.

"And now, my dear Miss Green, I will once more—I say we will—"

"Oh, I am so sorry! I didn't know anyone was in here; but it is so hot out on the lawn that I thought I would try and find some shady place!"

Miss Floretta Macgruder looked keenly at the old gentleman. Who was he, and what did he want? Why was he here? What did he want to see Pollie Green alone for? Why did he look so annoyed at the interruption? Why did Pollie Green look so depressed and unhappy? Miss Macgruder had the bump of curiosity largely developed.

"As my business with Miss Green is important," said Mr. Bannockburn severely, "I regret that I must ask you to be so good as to—"

"Oh, certainly! I am very sorry indeed to intrude. It is my very best wish, I am sure."

Miss Macgruder, with her nose in the air, went out.

"And now," said Mr. Bannockburn, with an air of relief, "if I am sufficiently fortunate, I hope that we—"

"Oh, lor', 'ere you are!" said Mrs. Sinkinson, with an air of relief. "I've 'unted for you everywhere! And ain't the old person gone yet? Well, it don't matter. What I wanted to know, is the children to 'ave tea, or only milk-and-water? Some says that tea isn't good for young things; but I've brought up seven of my own, as I was telling Mrs. Macgruder, which, though she is the rector's wife, I will say is the most interferingest old thing I ever set—"

There was a look of tragedy almost on Mr. Bannockburn's face.

"My good woman, you must go away. I have most important business with your mistress," he said.

"Good woman! I'd like to know 'oo—"



"You must go at once," said Mr. Bannockburn.

"Yes. Please do. I will see to everything presently," Pollie said.

Mrs. Sinkinson went out. She was evidently annoyed. Outside in the hall she loudly demanded:

"Oo's 'e, giving 'isself airs in other people's 'ouses, I'd like to know? And 'good-womaning' a respectable married woman, as has brought up seven and done 'er duty, as the saying is, and afraid to face no man, neither! Ugly old image, and no gentleman neither, as anyone could see with 'arf an eye!"

"With your permission, Miss Green," Mr. Bannockburn said, as he turned the key in the lock. "And now, with great regret, I must refer to a time, to a period in your life, my dear young lady, that I can well understand you look back upon with great sadness and regret. You were to have been the bride of his Grace the Duke of Hammersford, who, unfortunately, was removed by death in the very prime and pride of his manhood; and, if you will permit me to say so, a very lovely young duchess you—"

"Don't!" Pollie said faintly. "Don't—don't! Tell me what you have to tell me."

Mr. Bannockburn looked slightly offended.

"As you prefer it, we will deal strictly with business alone," he said.

"Shortly before his death his Grace made a will. Naturally, a part of the estate is entailed, and goes with the title; but his Grace had the power to will away a great deal of personal property, and all that part of the ducal estate that did not come into the entail. As, perhaps you were aware, his Grace was one of the richest men in the kingdom."

"I did not know," Pollie said.

Mr. Bannockburn looked as if he did not quite believe her.

"One of the richest men in the kingdom. And even though the estate coming into the entail is of very considerable value, the personal property over which his Grace had absolute power amounts to a very large sum, to no less a sum, indeed, than three hundred thousand pounds, Miss Green."

Pollie nodded. She looked out of the window and saw the boys from the village choir forming up for a race.

"They are giving Peter Rankin too long a start," she thought. "I know he can run. It's a shame! There's Bob Wyatt in the back, and he won't get a look-in. I wish— Oh, there's Coosha! Thank goodness she has some common-sense!" Pollie nodded as she watched Coosha putting back Peter Rankin and advancing Bob Wyatt a yard or two. "That's better now. Oh, wait a moment! There's Jimmy Hurst! Wait a moment for him. It's a shame to— I beg your pardon!" Pollie said.

"And so I will ask you to accept my warm congratulations," Mr. Bannockburn said; "and to assure you, Miss Green, that if you honour our firm with your instructions, your interests will always receive our most careful attention."

"Thank you," Pollie said. "It is very kind, but—"

"You have some other men of business then, I suppose?" said Mr. Bannockburn.

"No. But—but, you see, I am sorry; but—but I didn't—" Pollie paused in confusion. "You see, they were just going to start the race, and it was a rotten handicap," she explained. "Mr. Macgruder didn't know anything at all about it. He was putting Peter— But you don't know, of course—"

"I am afraid—" Mr. Bannockburn looked confused. Was it possible that this very prepossessing young woman was out of her mind? What more likely? On the eve of her wedding with the richest peer in the kingdom, a terrible accident had happened. It was quite likely, indeed, that her mind should become unhinged. Poor young thing!

"If you will favour me with the name of your man of business. But no; I think you said you had not one. Under the circumstances I should be pleased to act for you, and to execute all the necessary formalities."

"Thank you!" Pollie said. "What for?"

"With so much money to deal with," Mr. Bannockburn said, "there are naturally many—"

"There, I knew he'd win, the little wretch!" Pollie muttered. "And yet— I am very sorry; but, you see, I was so interested. But it is all over now," she said, turning to the lawyer. "I am afraid I have been very rude. Would you mind telling me all about it?"

"All about— Do you mean to say, Miss Green, that you have not heard?"

Pollie shook her head.

"Mr. Macgruder was giving Peter Rankin too much start," she said, "and I knew it, and it made me angry. Coosha put him back, but in spite of that he won easily. I hate favouritism! Don't you? Mr. Macgruder always favours Peter Rankin, and I know why it is—because he is a nasty little sneak, and carries tales, and that sort of thing, which I hate. I am afraid that I have been very rude," Pollie ended contritely. "Would you mind please telling me all about it?"

Mr. Bannockburn looked angry.

"My business is briefly this, Miss Green," he said sharply. "By a will made some days before his regrettable death, his Grace the Duke of Hammersford left you all his personal property, to the value of the sum of about three hundred thousand pounds, to come to you on your attaining the age of twenty-one years. He naturally anticipated that you would then be his wife; but the wording of the will makes it clear that you are, in any event, entitled to the money, even though by his lamentable death you were prevented from fulfilling the marriage contract with him. You are, therefore, now possessed of this money, as I say, amounting to three hundred thousand pounds, and my firm will be glad to receive your instructions."

"He left me—" Pollie gasped. "He, Walter— Oh, I can't take it—I can't take



it! I have not the right"—the tears suddenly brimmed over and ran down her cheeks—I have not the right to it," she said.

"On the contrary, you have the most perfect right. Your right is absolutely indisputable."

"But I can't—can't take it!" Pollie said wildly.

"I am afraid you must," said Mr. Bannockburn. Oh, certainly this young lady was not in her right mind!

Pollie had broken down; she was sobbing unrestrainedly.

"My dear young lady," he said, "try and control yourself. I know, I can understand how terribly sad this subject must be to you."

"I can't take it!" Pollie muttered. "Oh, I have not the right to—I have not the right, and I don't want it—all that money! How shall I need it?"

This was a question that Mr. Bannockburn felt he could not answer.

"You will think better of it presently," he said soothingly. "And now, having delivered my message, Miss Green, it only remains for me to say that if you will entrust the firm I have the honour to represent and to be a member of with your business affairs, we shall always do our utmost to safeguard your interests and give our immediate and close attention to your instructions."

"Thank you," Pollie said miserably—"thank you, but—but I wish you hadn't come to-day."

"I followed out the instructions in the will by coming to-day," he said. "I am sorry that my coming has been inopportune, and now, with your permission, I will make my way back to the station, and—"

"You'll have something before you go?" Pollie said, rousing herself.

"No, thank you!"

"But you must!" she said. "You can't go without having anything. Oh, you must please wait!"

She rose and opened the French window, and darted out. A few minutes later she was back with a small tray, at which Mr. Bannockburn looked in amazement.

An elderly lawyer who took his chop and glass of port at noon, and his solid British dinner every night at seven, and who had a kindly regard for his digestion, the mixture placed under his nose at this moment was full of horrors.

There was some yellow and pink stuff on a plate, some very brightly coloured jelly, seed cake, currant cake, cake with masses of what looked to him like chalk clinging to it; biscuits with bright things on top, other biscuits decorated with yellow and white.

Mr. Bannockburn seized his hat.

"I must go," he said. "My train! I beg you to excuse me. My card." He put a card down on the table, with trembling hands and a hunted look in his eyes. "I will write you to-morrow, Miss Green, and if you will favour us with your instructions, they will receive our immediate attention. I have the honour to

congratulate you on your—on this, and—and— Good afternoon!"

He was gone, and Pollie wished from the bottom of her heart that he had never come.

She had tried so hard to live down the memory of those days. She had never loved the man who was to have been her husband, but none had mourned him more sincerely than she had. None had felt his death more keenly than she. It had been a grief to her that she knew she would never quite forget. She would never be the same light-hearted, happy girl that she used to be. No one could go through such an experience as that and remain unaltered.

And now, on this day of all others, he had come and brought back the memory of those sad and terrible days to her.

"I never, never will!" she muttered. "I will never touch a penny—never! Oh, I couldn't; I don't deserve it! I don't deserve that he should have thought of me as he did. Oh, Walter—Walter, I was never worthy!"

She sank down in a chair, and covered her face with her hands, and sobbed aloud. She could see his white, dead face now as she had seen it that terrible night three years ago. For a year it had been before her eyes constantly. How she had prayed sometimes that she might forget, if only for a little while, that relief might come! And it had come at last. The image of the dead face grew less distinct. Gradually it gave place to the image of another face—a face that she had not seen for many and many a day; but this was a living face, the face of the man she loved.

And now to-day, on this her twenty-first birthday, to which she had looked forward with such happiness and anticipation, it all came back to her again—all the old grief and sorrow, all the old pain and regret of those unhappy days.

She leaned her fair head against the dingy old leather of the chair, and covered her face with her hands.

"Walter, how good you were! Always thoughtful of me, always far, far too good for me. Oh, if I could only think that I had ever been worthy of your great love! It was cruel—cruel that you had to die. You were so young, there was so much in life for you. And I would have tried, I would have been a good and dutiful wife, trying hard to be worthy of you and your love. Oh, Walter—"

"Miss Green, forgive my intrusion. I did not know that you were here. Are you in pain or trouble? Can I help you?"

She looked up with her tear-filled eyes into the kindly, sympathetic face of the young curate.

"Forgive my intrusion," he said. "I came out of the sunshine, seeing the door open, and thought I might find a book. But I will go now. May I ask your father to come to you?"

"No, no; please don't," she said. "Oh, don't tell him! I don't want him to see that I have been crying. And—and you needn't go," she added, as he turned towards the door.



"I have not the right to ask you what trouble you are suffering," he said. "I am only a perfect stranger to you; but, believe me, if I could help—"

"You can't; no one can," she said sadly—"no man on earth. It is death—someone is dead. Oh, not recently, not to-day or last week, but years ago! And someone has been here to-day reminding me of it."

"I am very sorry," he said. "It was inopportune."

"The someone who is dead was the man I was going to marry—"

"Yes; I think I know," he said. "His Grace—"

Pollie nodded.

"Yes, the duke died just two days before the day we were to have been married. It was an accident—a terrible accident. Oh, I shall never forget!" She shivered. "Poor Walter! And he was so young, he had so much to live for, he was so generous and good!"

He was silent. What could he say? How could he attempt to comfort her when even time did not seem to have taken away the sting of the pain.

"But I am not going to cry any more now," Pollie said. She roused herself with an effort, and stood on tiptoe to look at herself in the old glass over the mantel. "Of course, I look hideous—red eyes and red nose."

## CHAPTER 2.

### The Choir Boys' Gift.

"I HOPE I am not intruding now. I saw your old friend going across the garden, and—" Miss Macgruder, standing in the open French window, hesitated. "Oh, really, Mr. Lonsdale, I did not know that you were here! I do seem to be unfortunate, don't I, always interrupting Miss Green's tete-a-tetes?"

"You can come in," said Pollie. "You're not interrupting anything. Look at me! I am a sight, aren't I? Been crying. Of course, you saw it at once. Been weeping bitterly."

Miss Macgruder looked up into Mr. Lonsdale's face as they went out into the sunlight.

"She is so very odd; but quite nice, poor thing!" she said.

"Poor?"

"Oh, I can't help pitying her! I always feel so sorry for her, brought up as she has been. And you know"—Miss Macgruder paused—"it is so sad; there is no doubt but that she is a little—not quite—you know what I mean, not—not exactly—"

"I am sorry, but I do not quite understand."

"Well, I mean she is a little—here—not—not quite—"

Miss Macgruder touched her high, narrow forehead.

"You mean that she is insane?"

"Oh, really, I never used the dreadful word! But she is odd; she always was as a child."

And her father let her grow up so wildly; no restraint or anything, you know. And she is so self-willed. Quite a dear, though, of course. And so pretty, don't you think?"

"Very," he said—"very."

Miss Macgruder looked rather annoyed.

"Well, pretty in a way, though fair women go off soon," she said. "At least, I have always heard so. However, one can't help feeling sorry for her, after all she has gone through. Such a terrible disappointment, you know."

"I know," he said. He did not want to discuss the lovely girl he had just left with this woman. He had thought her beautiful. He had admired her when he first saw her. In his eyes she was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. Yet it seemed to him that since he had seen the tears in her eyes and on her cheeks, since he had known that in the midst of her pleasure and gaiety of to-day she could still grieve for one three years dead, he felt a new admiration and a new respect for her.

She had a heart, a tender, loving heart. He looked at the woman beside him, and wondered if she, too, had a heart. He thought not.

There were no signs of tears on Pollie's radiant face half an hour later. She had made up her mind that for her father's sake there should be no cloud on to-day's sunshine, if she could help it.

"My darling, I have been looking everywhere for you," he said.

"Oh, someone came to see me!" Pollie said. "I'll tell you all about it presently, daddy."

He nodded. It was some trifling matter, of course. Someone, perhaps, came to her with some tale of trouble, to enlist her charity. There was nothing unusual in that.

He watched her while she threw herself heart and soul into the amusements of the children. The school children worshipped her, and fought fiercely with each other to obtain a position near to her. The choir-boys—and some of them were almost young men—looked at her with sheepish admiration. Of course, she was the prettiest girl in the village, and in all the villages around. No one ever thought of denying that. If anyone had denied that, he would have had to fight the entire choir of St. Peter's.

"I saw you win the race, Peter," Pollie said.

"Yes, miss," said Peter, blushing.

He was a small boy, with a turned-up nose and red hair. It was believed that he carried tales about the other choir-boys to Mr. Macgruder. It may have been false; but certainly Mr. Macgruder knew a good deal more about the goings-on of the village boys than he had any right to know in the ordinary course of events, and suspicions fell on Peter, rightly or wrongly.

"You got too much start," said Pollie, "and Coosha was right to set you back."

"Yes, miss; and I won, all the same," said Peter.

The next minute Peter was jostled out of the way by Jim Ribbing. Master Ribbing was



seventeen, but did not look his age; he was dark and short, thick-set, and not handsome. But he was the best fighter in the village, and greatly respected in consequence.

"Me and the others—the rest, please miss—" he said.

Then he paused and blushed.

"You should say the rest and me," said Pollie. "That's bad grammar."

"Thank you, miss!" Jim shifted his weight over to the other leg. "Us all—me and the rest, has—that is, we want you, miss, to accept of—" One of the others nudged him and muttered something in his ear. "Hold your row! I'm speaking, ain't I?" said Jim.

"Won't you sit down?" Pollie said politely.

"I'd as soon stand, miss," Jim said. "It's like this. Me and some of the others—Peter Rankin, and Bill Hurst, and Mat Worsley, and—and some of the rest—wants you to be so kind as to accept of something."

"It is very nice of you," said Pollie.

"Yes, miss," said Master Ribbing.

"And I thank you all very much, I am sure," said Pollie.

"Yes, miss; we thought you would," said Jim Ribbing.

Pollie paused. There was no present visible, and she felt awkward.

"And I am sure I shall value the—your gift always, and keep it in memory of to-day."

How beautiful she was! Master Ribbing stood staring open-eyed at her, entranced. He forgot everything except the radiant loveliness of the girl before him. True, she was four or five years older than he was; true, she was the daughter and heiress of Sir Francis Green; true, he was only the son of Bill Ribbing, who carted coal and wood from Northurst to Wylwood—but what did that matter? Love levelled everything. He was wishing from the bottom of his heart that someone would annoy her, so that he could defend her with his two fists.

"It was very nice of you all to think of me," Pollie said, "and I shall always remember your kindness."

"Ain't you going to give her the present?" Peter Rankin whispered, in a hoarse voice.

Jim Ribbing woke up.

"Eh?" he said. "The present? 'Old your row! Wait!"

He fumbled in his pocket, and turned red. He went from one pocket to another, and brought out an assortment of articles—yards of string, a knife, some marbles, some filthy scraps of paper, a crushed packet of cigarettes, which he hustled out of sight as quickly as he could.

"You've been and lost it!" muttered Bill Rankin angrily.

"No, I ain't!"

"Yes, you have! You was given it to mind, and now you've done it!"

"I ain't!"

"I tell you you 'ave! Wanted to take such a lot on yourself, didn't you?" said Bill Rankin.

"It does not matter," Pollie said, anxious to

make peace. "It doesn't matter, really! Jim will find it soon; and then—"

"I've got it!" said Jim Ribbing triumphantly.

He brought out a piece of paper, rather filthier than the rest, and unrolled it, and took out a cheap silver Mizpah ring, which he eyed with pride.

"Is that for me? Oh, how lovely!" Pollie said. "I shall always wear it, and treasure it, and—"

"What a very absurd thing to give!" said Miss Macgruder. "Really, Miss Green, I shouldn't accept it!"

"Why not? I think it is perfectly beautiful!" Pollie said.

"Tink so, too!" said Coosha. "Some people jealous, I tink."

"If you mean me—"

Miss Macgruder put her nose into the air.

"I shall always value it very, very much," Pollie said to Jim Ribbing, "and I shall always wear it."

She put it on her small finger, and held out her hand to admire the effect.

"Perfectly absurd!" said Miss Macgruder.

"When you must have boxes full of jewels that the du—"

"Hold yo' row!" said Coosha fiercely. "Yo' shut up!"

"Are you speaking to me?" said Miss Macgruder.

"Certainly! Nobody else. Yo' shut yo' face, ma'am!" said Coosha. "Dere are tings in dis fambly that we don't mention. Dat's one ob dem."

"Oh, really?"

"Yes, reelly!" said Coosha. "Dat's de trufe. If anybody got any sense, dey'd know de same ting!"

Pollie turned away quickly. Yes, she had boxes full of the magnificent presents that the Duke of Hammersford had given to her long ago. But she never opened the boxes—she never looked at those things, that would only bring other days so forcibly back to her mind.

She knew that she never would wear them—never. But that silly little cheap silver ring that those boys had bought for her with their scanty pocket-money, she would wear that, and be proud of it—as proud as though it was of the finest gold, set with perfect diamonds.

"You, Ribbing, come to me to-morrow evening," said Miss Floretta Macgruder. "I have been wanting to speak to you for some time past. You have been idling your time!"

"I ain't, ma'am."

"Don't contradict me, sir! I say you have! A great, big, good-for-nothing, that's what you are! And I consider that you have been guilty of a gross piece of impertinence in giving that ridiculous ring to Miss Green! Had you bought a bunch of flowers, there would have been nothing against that; but a ring—perfectly ridiculous! Don't you think so, Mr. Lonsdale?"

"I think it was well and kindly meant," said Mr. Lonsdale; "and I think that Miss Green is very pleased indeed with the present."

Which little speech won him a place at once



in the hearts of the choir-boys, and made Miss Floretta Macgruder rather regret that she had taken his part against her mother.

The hot sun was sinking now behind the trees on the distant hills. The elder people had taken their tea out in the cool shade of the big trees on the lawn, while the younger ones had crowded into the big tent, and revelled among the cakes and ices and other unaccustomed luxuries to their hearts' content. And now it was time for home.

Pollie stood at the gate saying "Good-bye" to her guests as they filed out into the road.

"Good-bye! It has been so perfectly delightful! We have enjoyed ourselves so much, dear Margaret!" said Miss Rosina Diddey.

"A perfectly delightful day!" said Miss Floretta Macgruder.

"That it was marred by one or two, to me, unpleasant exhibitions, dear Margaret," said Mrs. Macgruder ponderously, "is not due to any fault of yours."

The rector hung behind. He wanted to say something suitable to the occasion.

"A charming day, and a charming little hostess!" he said gallantly. "My dear child, I—" He tried to pat Pollie's cheek in his affectionate, paternal manner, but she turned her head quickly, and he patted the empty air. "Coming, my dear—coming?" he said hurriedly. "Good-bye!"

And he hurried out.

"Good-bye, Miss Green!" Mr. Lonsdale held out his hand. "It was kind of you to ask me, a stranger, here. I shall long remember my first day in Wylwood, and your hospitality. I hope that we shall be friends."

"I know we shall," Pollie said frankly.

"I think that is almost a promise," he said. "At any rate, it is one that I shall remember."

And then he, too, passed out with the rest. They were all gone now. No, not quite. Jim Ribbing was skulking in the background. Now he came forward.

"Good-bye, Jim!" Pollie said.

"I suppose you're wild with me?" he said sullenly.

"Me wild? Why, no, I'm not!"

"Giving you that there ring. She said it was rotten," he said.

"She—"

"Miss Floretta said it was cheek of me," he said sullenly.

"Oh, no, it wasn't. You must not take any notice of what she says."

"I don't. I hate her!" he said fiercely.

"Hush, Jim!"

"So I do. She said I hadn't got no business to give you a ring."

"I am very glad indeed to have it!" Pollie said. "I am wearing it, you see."

"Yes, but you won't wear it after I'm gone."

"I shall. I shall always wear it."

"I don't believe it."

Pollie laughed.

"Then you must wait and see if I don't."

"You only say that."

"But I mean it!"

She wondered why he didn't go, and wished he would, as she was anxious to get back to her father.

"I suppose you don't think much of me? I ain't much—I know that," he said.

"I think you are a very nice boy, Jim."

"Boy! I'm seventeen. Not much of a boy! Been earning my living two years now," he said.

"You are a boy compared with me. I am very old," Pollie said.

He looked up at her.

"You ain't old. And as for looks, there's none of 'em—not one—to come near you! Old! You ain't half so old as Miss Floretta!"

"Not quite so old, perhaps, but—"

"If I was to bring you some flowers, you wouldn't take 'em," he said.

"Why not?"

"I don't know, but I don't suppose you would. I ain't good enough to take flowers from."

"Why not, Jim? I don't understand you."

"No, I suppose you don't. Only—" He paused. "If—if you was to find some flowers on—the seat under the willow-tree of a morning sometimes, you'd know 'oo they was from, wouldn't you?"

"From you, Jim?"

He nodded.

"They wouldn't be much, and you'd chuck 'em away, I suppose?"

"No, I wouldn't," Pollie said.

He grunted.

"Yes, you would. You only tell me. I know I ain't much. Well, I'd better go. You're waiting for me to go, I know."

He passed through.

"Aren't you going to shake hands with me, Jim?" Pollie said.

"Me? You don't want to shake hands with me," he said.

"Yes, I do."

"Oh, that's what you say!" He held out his hand. It was not overclean. "The seat under the willow wouldn't be a good place. Others would see 'em—Coosha, for instance; and she'd take 'em, I dare say, or someone would. If there was a better place—"

Pollie laughed.

"There's the sundial," she said. "If you look at the base, you will see there are a couple of bricks missing. It makes a nice little place to put things in."

"And you'd look there to see if there was anything every morning?" he asked eagerly.

"Of course."

Jim Ribbing flushed hotly.

"Straight?"

"Yes, of course," Pollie said.

"Under the sundial."

He looked back into the garden where the sundial stood in the centre of the lawn.

"Good-bye, Jim!" Pollie said.

"Good-bye!" he said gruffly.

He went out, with his shoulders up, slouching away in the trail of the others.

At the turn of the road he paused and looked



back. He could not see her; but she was there somewhere, and he kissed his hand.

They were all gone at last. The lawn was in a terrible mess; it would take old Hankin a week to put it right again. But that did not matter. Coosha was in the big tent. Pollie peeped in, and saw her sitting before a plate heaped up with enough cake and tarts and delicacies of the kind to feed a family.

"Ho, dat yo'?" said Coosha. "Come in here. Plenty lef'!"

"I don't want anything," Pollie said. "But I see—"

"Oh, dat's all right!" said Coosha. "I making bay while de sun shine. I ain't greedy, but I like a lot—dat's me!"

Sir Francis was sitting in the library, in the same old chair in which Mr. Lonsdale some hours ago had found Pollie weeping. He was tired. He had done his share; he had worked nobly, and now he was taking his rest.

"Is that you, my darling?" he said.

"Yes, daddy!"

Pollie came in through the French window and kissed him.

"It has been a splendid day, and a happy one for you, little girl!"

"Yes, dear—very happy!" she said.

"They've all enjoyed themselves. I think some of the youngsters were tired out, though," Sir Francis said.

"Poor little things!" Pollie said.

"But they had a good time. They will remember your twenty-first birthday, my dear. By the way, who was that who came to see you?"

Pollie started violently.

"I—I almost forgot," she said. "It was a lawyer, daddy."

"A lawyer, my dear?" Sir Francis said. "A lawyer?"

"Yes. He—he came to tell me something. Oh, daddy, Walter—Walter left me—"

"My dear little girl, what is the matter?" Sir Francis cried.

"I can't help it—I can't help crying! I didn't mean to. But—but I will never touch a penny of it! I told him so—I told Mr. Banneckburn. What a ridiculous name it is, isn't it?"

"Very," he said. "But tell me, my darling, what did he come here to tell you?"

Pollie slipped down on the floor at his knees.

"He came to tell me, dear, that before he died Walter made a will, leaving me a great deal of money. He told me how much, but I forget. I was to have it when I was twenty-one; and to-day he came to tell me. But I can't touch it, dear—I can't take the money. I couldn't bear to take it!"

Sir Francis smoothed back the rippling, shining hair, and looked down into the tearful, earnest face.

"You shall do as you think best—just as you please, my darling," he said.

"You are so good to me—always so good!" Pollie murmured.

## CHAPTER 3.

### In the Agony Column.

IT was a week after the birthday party, and Pollie Green sat meditating quietly in her room.

Her thoughts wandered back to Bruce Hardaker—the man whom, through all, she had always loved.

"If—if he cared! If he remembered!" she whispered to herself, and her eyes filled suddenly with tears. "If Bruce had really cared, he would have found some way, sent some word all these years—all these—I won't think about it. I'll read the paper. P. Green, be sensible. 'If he is fair, but not fair to me, what care I how fair he be?'"

"Let's see. Births, marriages, and deaths. Agony column— Oh, that's fun, as a rule! 'Algy darling, meet me old place, seventh-thirty, Thursday.—Bix.' I wonder who on earth Bix is? What a name! 'Clara. Ever the same in my eyes, but others notice your hair is getting thin. Use Biggar's Hair Inducer.' Oh, a beastly advertisement! What a sell! They ought not to be allowed. Oh, here's a genuine one, though, and my own initials!" she laughed. "Let me see, 'P.G.' Why—"

The colour suddenly fled from her face, her eyes grew big, and she drew her breath in sharply.

"It—it can't be true!" she whispered. "Oh, it can't be true! At last, after all these years; after this long, long silence!"

And then suddenly she covered her face with her hands and broke into a passion of tears.

Three years ago Bruce had gone out of Pollie's life, and it seemed to them both that it was for ever.

She was on the eve of marrying his Grace the Duke of Hammersford, and he—with his way to make in the world, and a hopeless love to live down and forget—was going abroad.

There had been no talk between them of meeting again. There had been no hope for the future in either his heart or hers.

The future had seemed so certain to them both, as certain as anything can be in this world.

And then, within a few days—hours almost—of his going, on the very eve of her wedding, the thing had happened that had altered all her life, and the young bridegroom lay stricken down by a sudden and violent death.

And since then she had waited, hopefully, patiently at first—waited to hear a word from the man she loved, and none had come.

A year passed, and still silence; and yet a third year, and still no word from him—no sign.

She had her pride, yet sometimes her longing was so great that it seemed as if pride must give way before it.

She could easily find out where he was, in what part of the world a letter might reach him. She knew the firm in whose service he



was. They could put her into possession of his whereabouts.

A score of times she decided to apply to them, and a score of times pride stepped in.

He must know! Such a man—a man so prominent as the Duke of Hammersford could not die a sudden and tragic death without all the world hearing of it. However far away he might be he sometimes sees the English papers; and surely there was someone left in the old country who would write to him now and again.

Yes, he must know that Hammersford was dead, and that she was free; and, knowing, it was he who should write to her, and not she who should seek for him.

So pride told her, and pride was victorious, and the days and the weeks and months went by, and she tried to live down the longing in her heart, tried to forget, yet could not.

Sometimes her father had seen the sad, wistful look in her eyes that once had been so merry, and he had never quite understood; but he had not questioned her.

There had been some little love affair in bygone days between his little girl and young Bruce Hardaker, he knew, but he did not think that it had been very serious.

She had never been quite the same merry, light-hearted, laughing, free-of-care Pollie that she had been since the night when the Duke of Hammersford was found lying dead on the floor of his chambers with the empty gun by his side.

It was the memory of that that oppressed her, he thought, and he thought it kinder not to sympathise, but to try and help her to forget.

But now the silence was broken at last, and strangely broken. Yet she could not doubt but that the message she read was meant for her:

"P.G.—Have just heard of your great loss. With all my heart longing to see you again. But lately returned to England, and do not know your whereabouts. If your heart is still the same, communicate in this column, making appointment in London. Now as in the old days.—B."

She read it again and again, unbelieving at first, and then with growing conviction. "P.G." Who could "P.G." be but Pollie Green? And who could "B." be but Bruce—Bruce Hardaker? And all fitted in so perfectly. Her great loss. Her loss of the man who would have been her husband—the man for whose sake she and Bruce had parted.

"But lately returned to England." Oh, she had no doubt, no doubt at all it was Bruce. Yet it was strange that he should communicate with her in this way. Surely he would know that she was at the old home—home again with her father!

And yet he had been so long absent, so many things might have happened during the three years he had been away.

She could understand his doubt and perplexity, his natural shrinking from writing to her, knowing nothing that might have happened—that, thank Heaven, had not happened!

"Now, as in the old days." Now! He loved

her still, then? She had never doubted that. Only wondered at his long, strange silence. But the silence was broken at last, thank Heaven—at last, after these long years of waiting!

What should she do? She sat with the paper in her hand, and her eyes fixed on vacancy. She must tell her father, and ask his advice; he would know best what she should do.

Should she tell him now, or wait? Should she answer the advertisement at once, making the appointment that Bruce asked for, and then tell her father what she had done?

Pollie twisted her hands together in indecision.

Her father would not mind. He would make no objection. He had always liked Bruce, had always spoken of him affectionately and kindly. No he would make no objection. It would not be like deceiving him, and making an appointment with someone he did not approve of.

"I will answer the advertisement first," she decided, "and then tell him everything, and he will let me go."

But now another difficulty stared her in the face. He asked her to make an appointment in London, and she knew so little of London. It was three years since she had seen the great, smoky city. What place could she name?

She sat with her chin resting on her hand, and a frown on her fair face.

The Royal Academy? She had been reading a book lately in which the lovers met by appointment at Burlington House. It had been very romantic. Yes. No. She remembered suddenly that the Royal Academy was only open during a few months of the year, and she could not remember which months of the year it was open. It would be absurd to make an appointment there if the place was shut up.

Some railway-station, then? No. It would be horrible to meet him amidst all the bustle and confusion and crowds at a railway-station after all these years.

"Oh, I wish I knew!" she groaned. "I wish—I wish I wasn't such a duffer! Oh, of course! How stupid I am! Of course!"

She clapped her hands together, with sudden relief. Why should they not meet in the very place where they had parted three years ago—in Elizabeth Gibbs's little house in Pimlico?

There would be no horrible waiting in some public place, no prying eyes to watch them, and see their meeting.

It would be far, far the best.

During the next ten minutes Pollie Greer destroyed at least ten sheets of notepaper. It seemed such a simple matter to answer the advertisement, and, in reality, it was so hard. It seemed such a cold and formal way of corresponding with him.

If he could only know how full her thoughts had been of him all these years, and how hard it was to have to speak her first word to him through the public medium of a newspaper!

Pollie sighed deeply as she tore up the tenth slip of paper.

Then she heaved a little sigh of satisfaction.



She had done it at last; and, on reading it through carefully, she could not see how she could improve on it.

"From P. G. to B.—Your message has made me so happy. Have waited and hoped to hear for so long. I shall be at Elizabeth's, 2, Mugeridge Street, at seven o'clock on Friday. Have never changed, never forgotten.—P."

At last it seemed to her as though a sudden burst of sunshine had come through clouds that had been so sombre and heavy for so long—sunshine that warmed her heart, that brought the happiness and joy back to her eyes, that made her radiant with youth and beauty and joy.

Friday—that would be in three days' time. To-morrow the advertisement would appear in the paper, and their meeting would be on the next day. She would not tell her father now; she would wait till her advertisement appeared, and then she would show it to him, and tell him everything. And he would let her go; perhaps he himself would come with her.

She would go to the post-office in the village at once with her letter. She must not forget to take some money to pay for the postal-order she would enclose.

#### CHAPTER 4.

##### Pollie's Journey for Bruce.

"GOING—going to London, daddy?" Pollie cried.

"My darling, I must. It is about"—Sir Francis paused—"your business, sweetheart. Look! I will leave Mr. Bannockburn's letter with you. You will see that my presence is needful. But I shall not be long away. Now, I must hurry, darling. The trap is waiting."

He took her into his arms, and held her closely. Any parting between these two was a wrench, even the parting of a few hours. She was all his world; he all hers.

And then he was gone; and even as she stood looking after him, and waving her hand, Pollie remembered that she had not told him yet.

It was not long ere Pollie found herself wishing that she had. There had been no need for any concealment. He had always liked Bruce; he would be unfeignedly glad to see Bruce again—would welcome him here as though he were his son. He often spoke of Bruce with kindly remembrance.

Why had she said nothing? Of course, she could not dream then that this business would take him away from her.

The following morning brought Pollie two things—a copy of the daily paper containing her advertisement, which she had specially ordered the day before, and a letter from her father—a brief and loving letter, in which he deeply regretted being obliged to stay away from home.

"I find that this business will take longer than I anticipated. Several documents are necessary, including a copy of your birth certificate. I shall do my best to get home to-

morrow—Thursday—my darling, even though it may be late at night, but I very much doubt whether I shall be able to. I shall wire you some time in the afternoon, when I know decidedly whether I shall be able to get away from London or not."

And if he did not come to-day, what then? What should she do? Pollie wondered.

She could not miss this appointment that she had made with Bruce—oh, she could not miss seeing him now, after waiting for so long! No, her father would not wish her to.

But he might be home to-night, and then she could tell him everything. Even if he was not home to-night, he might be home in the morning.

Pollie consulted the time-table.

She found that, in order to keep her appointment, she need not leave till the two o'clock train.

That was a slow train, however, and would only enable her to reach London just in time. If she took a cab, she would be at Elizabeth's within a few minutes of the appointed time.

The expected telegram came late that evening. Sir Francis found it was impossible to get home that night. He had an appointment to keep early the following morning with his solicitors, and then he would be free.

Pollie eagerly searched the time-tables, and then her heart fell.

There was no train from London after ten o'clock in the morning that could bring her father here before it was time for her to start.

But she must go. She could not let this chance for meeting Bruce again slip by. She must go. Her father would not blame her when he knew.

She would leave a letter for him, in which she would tell him everything.

Pollie made all her plans. She would stay the night at Elizabeth's house, and return home early the following morning.

So she wrote a long letter to her father, telling him everything.

The journey to London occupied many hours. It was a very slow train, the slowest train Pollie ever remembered to have travelled in. It crawled sluggishly from station to station.

"If the engine-driver only knew," she thought, "I am sure he would hurry a little. Oh, shall I never, never get there?"

But she arrived at last.

For the first time for three years she was in London again.

Pollie looked up eagerly at the clock on the station wall. It wanted but ten minutes to seven. She had ten minutes to get to Elizabeth's to keep her appointment; but if she was a little late he would wait. Oh, yes, he would wait!

Her heart was beating rapidly as she got into a cab, and gave the driver Elizabeth's address.

At last, after three long years of waiting, she was going to see him again. What would he say to her? What would his first words be, and hers to him?

How rapidly her heart was beating!

London, how well she remembered it! How



quickly the time had slipped away since she saw these crowded streets last!

The three quiet, uneventful years had passed, and now she was back in London, and in a little while—a few minutes now—she and Bruce would meet again, at last.

### CHAPTER 5. Disappointment.

POLLIE was trembling with agitation, and her heart was beating so violently that she felt scarcely able to breathe, when the cab stopped at last before the door of Elizabeth's little house.

For a moment she stood on the pavement after the cab had driven away.

There was a light in the little front room—the room she had never entered since that night, years ago, when she had said good-bye to Bruce Hardaker, for ever, as she thought; and yet they were to meet once more—to meet again to-night.

Suddenly, as she watched, the shadow of a man's figure fell upon the blind—his shadow. It was there already, waiting for her.

It was Henry Gibbs who opened the door to her.

He was in his shirt-sleeves, and his face wore the same vacant expression as of old.

"Lor', if it ain't Miss Margaret!" he gasped. "And 'Lizabeth out, too! Not that she'll be long, miss, if you'll step inside. And there's a gent waiting—"

"I—I know," Pollie said.

She wondered if her face was very white. She wondered if Henry could hear the loud thumping of her heart.

"Oh, you know! He said 'e'd be waiting for a young lady, and I s'pose—"

"Yes; for—for me," Pollie said—"for me, Henry."

"Lor', now!" he said. He stood aside for her to enter, and then closed the door. "Maybe you'll go in to 'im—'e's sittin' there in the front room—or shall I tell 'im—"

"No, no!" she said. "I will go alone." She knew that she wanted no other eyes to watch the meeting between Bruce Hardaker and herself. That was what she had dreaded most—to meet him for the first time, in the presence of others.

"Then I'll step back into the kitchen, and go on reading the evening paper; and if you should want anything before Elizabeth comes, perhaps you'll ring the bell."

He shuffled off down the passage, his old slippers making a dismal flapping sound on the oilcloth, and Pollie stood waiting till the door had closed on him.

Now! It had come at last—the long-awaited-for moment!

"You—you miserable little coward, you are shaking all over!" she muttered to herself. "I'm ashamed of you, Pollie Green! There's nothing—nothing to be nervous about—nothing—"

Her hand was on the handle of the door,

yet she still waited for a moment. The knowledge that he was there, that only this door separated them, the anticipation of seeing him again was so glorious that she waited an unnecessary moment before turning the handle of the door and then at last she turned it, and opened the door and went in.

A tall man, a perfect stranger, rose hurriedly, and turned towards her—a man she had never seen in her life before, young, handsome, even distinguished looking. But Bruce—where was Bruce? Why had he not come? Had there been some accident, something that had prevented him from coming? Had he sent this man to explain?

Her heart, that had been throbbing so madly in her breast, seemed suddenly to drop, like a weight of lead.

How bitter the disappointment was she as yet hardly realised. The shock of knowing that it was not Bruce left her numbed and almost unconscious of what was passing around her.

He had bowed slightly as she entered. The look of eagerness had vanished from his eyes, and had given place to an expression of keen disappointment, which in turn vanished to give way to a look of admiration that he could not conceal.

Ten seconds passed, and neither broke the silence.

"Perhaps"—it was he who spoke first—"perhaps you have brought me some message," he said, in a low, deep voice.

"Message! You!" Pollie had not heard aright, had not understood. "Yes; you—you have brought me a message. He is not ill? Nothing has happened? Oh, tell me, quickly! Surely—surely nothing has happened?"

"I am afraid that I do not understand," he said. "What could have happened?"

"An accident? You spoke of a message—"

"Yes; I thought perhaps that you had brought me one. I was expecting someone, someone who arranged to meet me here."

He looked round the little room.

"I do not understand why the appointment was made for this place. I have never been here before, and—and I did not know that my—my friend knew anyone living in this neighbourhood."

Pollie felt that all the strength had gone out of her. She dropped on to a chair, and sat staring at him with wide, wondering eyes.

"I thought when I heard you drive up that it was my friend who had come," he said; "and when the door opened, I expected to see her."

"Her—your friend! But—but where is Bruce?" Pollie cried. "I expected to find Bruce here—Bruce, not—not you."

"Bruce," he repeatedly dazedly—"Bruce? I don't understand. I came here because an advertisement that I inserted in the papers—"

"You? Oh, it was you! You, after all—" Pollie broke down suddenly into a passionate fit of weeping.

"Don't," he said gently—"don't—don't cry. I hate to see it. Don't cry, I think I under-



stand, and we have both—both made a mistake. I am very, very sorry. I can understand how bitterly disappointed you are. Believe me, I am deeply sorry. I would not knowingly have caused you a moment's pain and disappointment."

Pollie put her elbows on the table, and covered her face with her hands.

After all the anticipation, after all the joyful-looking forward, after all this waiting and hoping, after the almost certainty of seeing him again—it was all a mistake. He was still as far away from her as ever. All a mistake, and he was not here. Only this stranger, of whom she knew nothing, this man who was perhaps as disappointed as she was.

"Don't cry, please," he said beseechingly—"don't! If you knew how it hurts me!" He touched her arm gently, and Pollie looked up through her tears into his grave and kindly face.

"I am afraid I am a wretched coward," she said, drying her eyes. "Only after—after all—"

"I understand. I am deeply sorry. I bitterly regret the mistake that has caused you so much pain."

"And you?" Pollie said. "Of course, you are bitterly disappointed?"

"I expected to meet someone, who—who was once—who I thought—but—"

Pollie nodded.

"It was the same with me," she said.

"Bruce?" he inquired.

"Yes; I haven't seen him for three years."

"It is five since I saw—" He paused.

Pollie wiped her eyes. She was not going to make an exhibition of herself before a perfect stranger. Presently, when she was quite alone, she would weep her eyes and her heart out. Now she must pretend to take things less seriously.

"I think that you are very much to blame," she said severely.

He hung his head.

"I suppose I am. But—but will you tell me how?"

"How? Why, good gracious, why didn't you put your whole name to the advertisement instead of merely B.? B. might have stood for anything. I thought it stood for Bruce."

"It stood for Bertram. That is my name," he said. "But I see you are quite right. I am entirely to blame. If you could only know how sorry I am."

"Sorry! Of course you are sorry. You expected to see someone you—you cared for, and then the door opened, and I came in. How you must hate me."

"Believe me I do not. I feel most deeply and sincerely sorry for your disappointment. I wish I could make you understand that I would do anything on earth to prove it."

Pollie looked up at him. He spoke with an earnest ring in his voice that she liked. On second inspection, she liked his face. He looked a strong, capable, manly kind of man, a man

with a great, square, firm chin, and a pair of honest, loving blue eyes.

"My initials are P. G.," Pollie said. "When I saw P. G. in the paper, I naturally thought it was meant for me, and then, when I saw the advertisement was signed B. H., I, of course, thought—"

"Of course," he said, "I should have put 'B. H.' and then there would have been no mistake."

"What?" Pollie said. "B. H.?"

"Yes, my full initials—Bertram Hollister," he said.

Pollie uttered a low, hysterical laugh.

"It—it wouldn't have helped matters a bit," she cried. "His initials are B. H., too."

"Then it seems that we were doomed to meet," he said.

"I suppose so. And that girl—I suppose it is a girl—'P.,' I mean?"

"Penelope Grant," he said.

Pollie nodded.

"It is a much nicer name than Pollie Green."

"Oh, much!" he agreed promptly.

"Pollie Green is my name."

"Oh, is it? I beg your pardon."

"Don't mention it," Pollie said. "It was not your fault." Pollie dabbed her face with her handkerchief. "I suppose my eyes and nose are horribly red?" she said.

He looked at her gravely, and shook his head.

"Your eyes and nose are—are perfect!" he said.

"Who let you in?" Pollie asked.

"Let me in—"

"Here?"

"Oh!" He smiled. "It was a man—a small man, with a worried look and a pair of old slippers. He seemed surprised to see me. I think that he thought that I had come to tune the piano. He told me I could take the ornaments off it if I wanted to. As I did not seem able to make him understand, I showed him your advertisement, which I had cut out of the paper. But still I think he suspected me."

"You don't look like a bad character," Pollie said, looking at him seriously.

"I am not—not very bad, at least," he said.

"I believe there are worse ruffians about, though I feel a pretty black villain just now."

"Why?" she asked.

"Because I have made you cry."

"Oh, that was nothing: I am always crying! I cry when I am pleased, or sorry, or glad, or disappointed, so don't take the slightest notice of me when I cry."

"But you were disappointed," he said—"bitterly disappointed?"

She nodded.

"Don't—don't talk about it!" she said, in a choked voice. "I am going to have a good cry about that later on. And I expect you feel just as badly as I do about—about what's her name—Patience—"

"Penelope," he said.

"Tell me about her?" Pollie asked.

"Won't you tell me about yourself first?" he asked.



"Certainly not! I am a perfect stranger to you, and you would not be in the least interested."

"I should be—very."

"You are trying to be polite," Pollie said; "but it is quite useless. Tell me about Penelope. She was very beautiful, of course?"

"Oh, of course!" he said. "Yes—at least, she was five years ago, but five years makes a difference."

"So does three," Pollie said.

"It is three years since you saw——"

"Yes; and I was wondering if he would think that I looked very old and different, changed, and ugly?"

"He could not have thought that," Mr. Hollister said. "No man could think that."

"You don't know Bruce," Pollie said. "He might think entirely different to you."

"He would if he thought that you were ugly."

"You are not telling me about Penelope."

"Well, what is there to tell? Five years ago I got an appointment in Ceylon. We were partly engaged; not formally engaged, you know. I hadn't a sou to fly with, and her people had an idea that she could do better."

"I dare say she could," Pollie said.

"I am quite sure she could. At any rate, I asked her to elope with me, and she would not, and we quarrelled. It was my fault."

Pollie leaned back in her chair.

"I should think that you were rather bad-tempered," she said.

"I am not—at least, I don't think so. She, however——"

"It is cowardly to say it was her fault, and she is not here to defend herself!"

"It was not her fault; it was entirely mine. I thought, or tried to think, that she did not love me."

"Perhaps she didn't."

"I think she did. Then she told me that she did; but five years makes a great deal of change. It did not change me, however. I only landed in England a week ago, and my first thought was to find her. I went to the old place, and she was not there. Her people had moved away three years ago, and no one could tell me their whereabouts; and so, after fruitless searching, it struck me to insert the advertisement in the paper, which I did."

"And, of course, she never saw it," Pollie said.

"No; but you did."

"Oh, I did! I wish I hadn't!"

"That is not very kind. If you had not seen the advertisement we should not have met."

"No," Pollie said thoughtfully. "But I don't see how that is going to help either of us."

"It helps me," he said. "I have come back to England knowing no one; I have not a friend in the country. My people are dead. My dear old mother died four years ago. My father died when I was a boy. I have no brothers or sisters; no one in the world, and a man gets lonely."

"I am very sorry," Pollie said. "I wonder where she has got to? Perhaps she has got married."

"Perhaps," he said. "I had thought of that. It is not unlikely. And yet—somehow——"

"Of course not," Pollie said, "if she really loved you."

"She did; I believe from my heart that she did."

"Then if she was worth anything at all she has never married; she is sitting somewhere waiting for you."

"But I can't find her," he said. "What am I to do?"

"Better go on putting advertisements in, hadn't you?" Pollie said. "I should suggest that next time you put it differently—somehow like this: 'Penelope Grant.—If the owner of this name will communicate with B. H., she will hear of something to her advantage.'"

"But it might not be to her advantage. Supposing she didn't want to meet me again?"

"Bless and preserve us," cried Elizabeth, putting her head in at the door at this moment, "if it ain't Miss Pollie! Well, my dear—my dear, it does my eyes good to see your bonnie, pretty face again."

Elizabeth held out her fat arms, and gave Pollie a hug that almost drove the last vestige of breath out of her.

"And the gentleman?" Elizabeth added, turning to Mr. Hollister with a questioning expression. "That howl of an 'Bery wasn't sure whether he'd come to tune the piano or not!'"

"He came by mistake," Pollie said.

"By a mistake that has turned out very pleasantly for me," Mr. Hollister said.

"I am sure I don't know why," Pollie said.

Elizabeth looked from one to another, in surprise.

"Mr. Hollister and I have both made a mistake," Pollie said. "He came here expecting to meet Penelope Grant, and I came here expecting to meet—to meet Bruce Hardaker!"

"Lor! And is 'e in England, the 'ome of 'is birth again?" cried Elizabeth.

"I don't know," Pollie said.

"Then however did you expect to meet him?" Elizabeth asked.

"I don't know. I tell you it is all a mistake, and Mr. Hollister and I are both terribly, bitterly disappointed."

"I—I didn't know that I——" Mr. Hollister hesitated.

"Then if you are not, you ought to be!" Pollie said severely.

"Of course, I——" He hesitated.

"And is your pa in London?" Elizabeth asked.

"He was, but I expect he is at home again by now," Pollie said; "and it is much too late for me to get back home to-night."

"Then you'll stay the night here, my dear, and welcome," said Elizabeth.

"Thank you!" Pollie said. "I thought that you would ask me."

"And the gentleman will stop and have a little bit of supper," Elizabeth said hospitably.

"I don't see that there is any need——" Pollie began.

"I should like it, above all things," he said quickly.

Pollie looked at him.



"I expect you had late dinner, and you can't want any supper," she said.

"I should like to stay a little while, if I might," he said, with a beseeching look in his eyes.

"Oh, it is nothing to me!" Pollie said.

"You are not very kind to me," he said, in a low voice, when Elizabeth had gone out of the room to remove her hat.

"When you come to consider that through your advertisement I have been put to no end of trouble, an eighty-mile railway journey, and—a disappointment waiting for me at the end of it," Pollie said. "Besides, you are treading on my dress!"

"I am very sorry. Don't you think that as we have been so strangely introduced to one another——"

"We haven't been introduced at all!" Pollie said.

"No; but as things have turned out as they have, couldn't we be friends? I should value your friendship so much. I should like to think that, after all, I had a friend in the old country."

Pollie melted.

"I don't see why we shouldn't," she said frankly, "and I could help you to find Penelope."

"Yes, thank you; I—I suppose you could," he said.

"It was the very least I could do," Bertram Hollister said apologetically. A cab was standing before Elizabeth's door, and Mr. Hollister was waiting on the pavement. "After having caused you so much trouble, you will at least allow me to see you safely in the train on your homeward journey, Miss Green?"

"I don't see the slightest need for it," Pollie said.

"But it would give me a great deal of satisfaction and happiness," he said.

"Knowing that I was off, and out of London?" Pollie asked.

"No. I mean to be of even a little assistance to you."

"A most gentlemanly-spoken person," Elizabeth whispered. "Anyone can see with half an eye, my dear, that he's a gentleman bred and born, and handsome, too. He reminds me of Percival de Barringcourt in the play, 'The Sailor's Sacrifice; or, Murdered for Money,' when the hero ups and says, 'Death a hundred times, but never dishonour! First time I see the gent, last night, I thought——'"

"It was so good of you to have me!" Pollie said. "Good-bye, dear!"

"And I hope you'll come again, I do," Elizabeth said, as she gave Pollie one of her overpowering hugs. "It's like a spray of sunlight, as the saying is, seeing your bonnie face."

"There was really no need at all for you to take the trouble," Pollie said.

"It was no trouble. I looked forward to it," he said.

"I don't see why," Pollie said severely. "I

suppose you have heard nothing about Penelope?"

"Nothing," he said shortly—"nothing at all."

He was conscious of the fact that he was rather sorry he had ever told this beautiful girl beside him anything at all about Penelope.

After all, it was five years ago, and a great many changes might come about in five years. Penelope might have forgotten him entirely—might have married. Nothing was more likely. A girl with her looks and her money could never want for suitors. Two days ago such a thought would have meant agony to him; now he was conscious that he could contemplate the possibility with composure. He had never changed in his love and devotion to the girl for five years; and yet in one night——

It was certainly very strange. How pretty she was! How her long, dark lashes swept her perfect cheeks! How tender and yet humorous her delicate mouth was!

"Bruce Hardaker!" he muttered to himself. "Hang Bruce Hardaker! I wish he was at the bottom of the sea, or happily married! At any rate, I hope that he will never come back."

It was perhaps as well that Pollie could not guess at the thoughts that were passing through his brain. She liked him. There was much about him to like. He was frank, and honest, and open. That he was exceedingly handsome also, of course, weighed a little. It is so much easier to like good-looking people on short acquaintance than ugly ones. Moreover, he was friendless and lonely after having been away from his native land for so many years. This weighed more than all else with Pollie. It must be terrible to have no one in the world to care for you—to know that you may come or you may go, and no one is interested—that you are alone.

Pollie was not given to the reading of poetry, yet at this moment she thought of lines that she had once read—Byron's, she believed they were:

"'Tis sweet to hear the watch-dog's honest bark,  
Bay deep-mouthed welcome as we draw  
near home;

'Tis sweet to know there is an eye will mark  
Our coming, and look brighter when we  
come."

And there was no eye to mark his coming, no one watching for him—waiting for him. Perhaps the girl who had loved him had forgotten, or was married—perhaps even dead; and Pollie's tender heart became very sympathetic towards the man by her side.

They were at the station now. In a few minutes the train would be starting. He was very attentive, very thoughtful. He had placed a small barrowload of papers and books on the seat beside her, and was looking at her anxiously.

"Is there anything else that you want—anything that I can possibly get for you?" he asked eagerly.

She shook her head.



"I wonder"—his eyes and his voice were earnest—"I wonder if you and I will ever meet again?"

"I hope so—oh, I hope so!" she cried impulsively. "Why should we not? We have been good friends, haven't we? It was all a mistake, of course; but we are not angry with one another now. I—I think you would like my home if you saw it."

"I know I should," he said, with deep feeling—"I know I should."

"And if my father wrote and asked you to come—"

His face brightened; the look of eagerness and hope grew in his eyes.

"Do you think he would?" he asked.

"I know he would. Would you care to come?"

"Only give me the opportunity!" he said. "There is nothing in the world I should like better."

Pollie leaned out of the window. The train would start in something under a minute now.

"Oh, yes, there is something that you would like better," she said.

"What?"

"Why, to see the girl you love," she said, with a smile.

The girl he loved! For five years he had thought of her constantly, had looked forward to his meeting with her after his exile should be over, and now— Now suddenly it seemed to him that he did not care so much, after all.

He stood on the platform watching the train as it slowly left the station. He could just see the girl's golden head and a waving hand, and then she was gone.

"The girl he loved!" he thought, as he turned slowly away.

The girl he had loved, very truly and very faithfully, for so long. But did he love her now? Had he not been in love rather with the ideal than with the real? Had he not been in love with his memory of Penelope? It seemed to him that it must have been so. And now he had found someone who was not ideal, perhaps, but who was very sweet and lovable—someone who had the most beautiful face that he had ever seen in his life—beautiful far more than ever Penelope's had been.

He felt ashamed and disappointed with himself, and yet he felt a strange thrill of joy. Supposing she could grow to care for him? Supposing he should see her again? She seemed to want it. Why not? And, after all, Penelope might have been happily married for years now. He knew nothing to the contrary, and there was no engagement between them—there never had been.

Bertram Hollister had very thoughtfully thought of sending a telegram to Sir Francis to say what time Pollie would arrive. Pollie, with all her great love for her father, and with all her anxiety to see him again, would not have thought of the telegram in a hundred years. But now, as the train drew up at last at the little station, there was her father

pace up and down, looking anxiously at the long line of carriages with his dear, old eyes.

"My darling!" he said eagerly. He took her in his arms and lifted her bodily out of the carriage, as though she were a baby. "Pollie, my sweetheart, I had been getting anxious about you. Alone?" He looked at the carriage. "You have come back alone, darling?" he asked.

"Yes," Pollie's lips quivered. "Quite alone, daddy."

"H'm!" Sir Francis coughed. Something wrong, he saw. He had expected to see Bruce Hardaker; but he was not there. "By the way, my dear, who the dickens is Hollister?"

Pollie started.

"Holl—Hollister?"

"No; plain Hollister," he said. "I got a wire from him an hour ago telling me what time you would arrive, and so I drove over to meet you."

"How thoughtful of him!" Pollie said.

"Yes, very. But who on earth is he?"

"He—he is—is 'B,'" Pollie said.

"Is 'B,' is he?" said Sir Francis, with a look of mystification. "Is 'B'?"

"I mean, it was he who put that advertisement in," Pollie said.

"And what on earth did he do that for? What did he want with you—?"

"He didn't want anything with me. It was meant for someone else—for another girl whose initials are 'P. G.' Don't you see, daddy, it was all a mistake. I thought it was Bruce, and he thought it was Penelope Grant."

"And who on earth, my dear, is Penelope Grant?" said Sir Francis.

"The girl he is in love with, whom he hoped to meet again—the girl he thought he was going to meet when I turned up."

"Oh!" Sir Francis said. "Oh, so it was all a mistake. You both got muddled up over the initials. Foolish things, initials, to take a long railway journey on. And so this Hollister—I wonder if he is any relation to Jack Hollister, who used to be in the 5th?"

"I don't know," Pollie said. "But he is very nice. He is a gentleman, and I think you would like him, daddy. And, besides, he is very sad and lonely."

"Oh, is he, poor fellow?" said Sir Francis. "And why is he so sad and lonely—eh?"

"Because he hasn't a friend in the world—in England, at least—only this girl he is in love with; and he doesn't know where she is. If he did, of course, he would not have put the advertisement in the paper. And—and, daddy, I think that if you were to invite him down just for a day or two, you would like him, and he would appreciate it awfully much."

"My darling, if you think I ought to ask him down, of course I will."

"He was very kind to me. He did every thing he possibly could. No one could have been kinder," Pollie said.

"Then that settles it. By George! I'll write to him as soon as we get back."

"My dear old daddy!" Pollie said, slipping



her hand through his arm and pressing it tightly.

"Yes, I will write the moment we get back, my darling," Sir Francis said. "Jack Hollister left a son. I wonder— But, no; that is improbable. But it is not a common name. And here we are home again, and— Oh, I forgot to tell you, the money—you—your inheritance, my darling, is—"

"I hate to think that I must take it! Need I?" Pollie asked.

"You must, my dear, whatever you may do with it afterwards. All is settled now, and the money is standing to your credit."

Down the road the tall figure of the new curate was coming towards them.

This money, that she did not want, that she hated to touch, what a godsend to the poor people among whom he had worked, for whom he cared so much!

Sir Francis pulled up, and held out his hand to Mr. Lonsdale.

"You are just back from London, Miss Green?" Mr. Lonsdale asked, looking up at her in the dogcart.

"Yes, just back; and I wonder if one day—soon—you could spare me a little while? I want to talk to you, Mr. Lonsdale. There is something I want to say—I want to ask your advice about."

"I am at your service at any time," Mr. Lonsdale said. "I will come very willingly whenever you wish."

"To-morrow?" Pollie asked.

"With pleasure!"

"What the dickens is that boy grinning at?" Sir Francis asked testily.

Pollie looked up. It was Jimmy Ribbing who was ambling along the footpath. In his buttonhole he wore a huge peony, that seemed to be about the same colour as his face. He pulled off his hat, and blushed till the scarlet extended to the tips of his very prominent ears.

"Confounded young jackanapes!" said Sir Francis. "What's he want to go about wearing a flower in his buttonhole for, I should like to know?"

Pollie said nothing; she sat in silent amazement. Jimmy Ribbing, in turning away, had pulled the flower out of his buttonhole and had pressed it to his lips. Jimmy Ribbing was certainly out of his mind, Pollie decided.

## CHAPTER 6. Friends!

"YOU asked me to come to-day, do you remember?"

It was Mr. Lonsdale, the curate, who spoke. He had not forgotten his promise to see Pollie, and as he advanced he wondered what this pretty, rich girl could want to see him about.

"Yes, I remember," Pollie said. "I wanted to ask your advice."

"My advice? You know it is yours for the asking," he said in a low voice. "You know that if I could help you in anything, how

gladly and willingly I would do it. What can I do? Tell me, what is there that I can do that will help you or promote your happiness?"

His voice seemed to quiver; there was a light in his dark eyes as they looked down into hers.

"It is about money," Pollie said.

"Money! And you ask my advice—my advice about money? Miss Green, I do not think you could have found another man in all England who knows less about money than I do."

"But you know what money can do," she said.

"It is that that I want advice about. I have had some money left to me—a great deal of money, a very large sum. It is money that—that I cannot touch, that I could not bear to use for myself; but I thought that I might do some good with it in memory of the one who left it to me—some good work, something that you would understand and know about."

"I have been thinking of what you once told me of the misery and poverty that you have seen, and I thought—thought that I would like to try and help. I would like to do something. Do you think I could?"

"Do you mean that you wish to go there—to work among them—that you yourself wish to go among the poor?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"I cannot leave my father."

"No, I suppose not." He spoke quietly; his voice had changed, the enthusiasm had gone out of his face. "You have the money to give away, Miss Green, and you would like it spent on some charitable object. Yes, I understand. Others have said the same thing to me; they are willing to give what they did not need. That is easy; but they will not go and try and do good with their own hands. That is different; it is hard, and calls for unselfishness. Forgive me, I have not the right to speak to you like this."

"I understand, and I think you are right," she said. "Yes, it is not real charity, I know. I am giving something that I cannot take—something that I can never look upon really as my own, something that I could not spend on myself. It is not charity. I do not try and cheat myself into believing that I am good and charitable. I know that I am not. I am selfish—terribly selfish. I love my home and my father, and I can't—I can't leave them and go among the poor. Other women do, I know; but they are good women, far, far better than I am."

"I would not have you go. I could not bear the thought that you should go into those dark places!" he cried. "I could not bear it, and know that it was I who had sent you. Your life is made for sunshine and happiness. It is not right that such misery should ever be known to you. Yes, I will help you spend your money. There are a thousand ways. It is easy to spend money for the good of the poor."

"You think hardly of me," she said. "I know; I understand. I have fallen in your estimation, Mr. Lonsdale."

"You!" he cried. "You fallen—you who are to me"—he paused; his pale face had



flushed, his dark eyes were glowing, the words came from his lips passionately—"you who are to me what no woman has ever been! You who—" He paused, stricken suddenly by silence. He had betrayed himself. "Forgive me," he said in a low voice. "Forgive me of your charity. I will never offend again."

Pollie held out her hand to him. Her face was flushed, and her eyes were moist.

"I have nothing to forgive. You—you have done me a great honour. I shall never forget, and we will always be friends, won't we?"

"Yes, I hope so—always friends," he said slowly. "I understand that. Friends!"

John Lonsdale's face was flushed. His eyes were bright with excitement and enthusiasm when he left Pollie that afternoon.

"My father is not very rich, but we have all that we need," Pollie said; "and this is money that I feel I have no right to. I could not touch it, or spend it on myself."

"It is money that was left to you by—by the man who was to have been your husband?" Lonsdale asked.

"Yes."

There was a silence of some moments.

"I think I understand; and you wish to spend it on some good work. You want this money of his to be devoted to the cause of charity, Miss Green?"

Pollie nodded.

"I should like to think that I was doing something to help those you have told me about—those who suffer so; men and women and little children—the children most of all. Will you do this for me, Mr. Lonsdale? Can you help me?"

He nodded.

"Yes, I will do it." He thought for a moment of what the doctor had said. "In six months, if you stay here, you will be dead." "But what does that matter?" he muttered to himself. "In six months a great deal can be done. I could leave everything in order; the work could be carried on by others."

## CHAPTER 7. A Blow.

**B**REAKFAST had already commenced when Pollie went into the breakfast-room. Her father was at the head of the table.

He tried to smile at her as she came in, but his face looked strangely drawn and rigid, strangely unlike his usual happy, cheerful expression.

"Daddy"—she paused and looked at him, and then at the letter he held—"what is it? It is about Bruce?"

"Yes, about Bruce. My poor girl!"

"Dead?" she whispered, and her very lips went white.

"No, not dead—worse," he said softly—

"worse, my darling!"

"Worse than dead?"

Pollie looked at her father with frightened eyes.

"Daddy, I—I don't understand," she

whispered. "Worse than dead? Bruce? Oh, tell me! Worse than dead? I don't understand! How can that be?"

Sir Francis slipped his arm round her.

"My dear little girl, you must be brave. I know that—that during the past three years you have thought of him constantly; I have known that all the time, my darling, though I have scarcely ever spoken of him to you. I, too, wondered at the reason of his silence. I could not understand it, dear. But now—now I understand. My darling, Bruce Hardaker is not worthy of another thought of yours. He has proved himself unworthy of your—your friendship and mine, dear."

"Unworthy? Oh, daddy, no! No; there is some mistake!" Pollie cried.

"I fear not."

Sir Francis held out the letter to her, and she took it with trembling hands.

"I—I can't read it," she said. "Read it to me, daddy."

"It is from Panton & Christie, the people who employed him, and is in answer to my letter of inquiry. They say:

"Dear Sir.—We greatly regret that we are unable to give any information as to the whereabouts of Mr. Bruce Hardaker, who until June 19th, —, was in our employment. In that month of that year Mr. Hardaker suddenly and mysteriously disappeared, in company with another of our employees, a chemist who worked in our laboratory. At the same time a sum of money—a considerable amount, to which no one but Mr. Hardaker could have had access—also vanished."

"We may add that every possible effort has been made by our firm and the police to trace the missing men, and there is at the present time a warrant out for the arrest of Bruce Hardaker and Pietro Bonassi, which we should be glad to hear has been put into execution."

"Apart from the very considerable financial loss, we have suffered greatly through this occurrence. We had entire faith in Mr. Hardaker, and would have vouched for his honesty as for our own. Moreover, we looked on him as an especially skilful engineer; and we had great faith in his future. In fact, we may say that it was our intention to offer him a partnership in this firm, and we naturally feel it keenly that we have been so misled and our trust so abused."

"We are, dear sir, yours faithfully,

"PANTON & CHRISTIE."

"Daddy, what does it mean?" Pollie whispered. "I—I am silly. I don't quite understand. What has he done?"

"He has proved himself a thief, a villain!" Sir Francis said. "Heaven forgive him! My darling, he has played the part of a scoundrel of the basest kind—a man who has victimised those who placed implicit trust in him."

"Daddy, I can't believe it! You know him, dear. You know how impossible—"

"I cannot hear a word in his defence!"



Sir Francis said sternly—so sternly that Pollie quivered, and looked up at him with frightened eyes.

It was not like him to speak to her like this, in that hard tone of voice.

"Remember," he went on in the same stern voice, "this happened two years ago. Had he been innocent of wrongdoing, would he have hidden himself for all this time? Would he not have come out into the open and courted every inquiry? I am bitterly disappointed! I am sorry for my own sake and for yours, my darling. I knew that you thought more of him than was perhaps good for your happiness and peace of mind. But that is ended now. You will think of him no more. Such a man as Bruce Hardaker has proved himself to be is unworthy of one thought of your pure mind."

"Daddy, I—I can't realise it, it is so hard to believe!" Pollie said. "Oh, when I think of it I cannot believe it! He seemed to me to be the very soul of honour! For him to be a thief—"

She shivered.

"And why should he have stolen? For what?" she asked. "What had he to gain? He did not care for money. He spent so little. He had his work. His prospects were—"

"It is no use speaking, or even thinking, of it now," he said. "The fact remains, whatever his reason, he was a thief. He stole from men who trusted him. There is nothing meaner, nothing more contemptible than this—to abuse the faith and trust of others. It is hard on you, little woman, to—to find that your idol had feet of clay; to find that one in whom you believed so thoroughly, whom you hoped to see again, is unworthy—unfit. Forget him, darling; he is not worth remembering."

He stooped suddenly, and kissed her; then turned away and entered the house, leaving her in the garden alone, because he thought it kinder.

Bruce a thief! Bruce in hiding! Bruce ashamed to be seen in the light of day! Bruce, in whom she had believed so implicitly! Bruce, who in her eyes was far above all other men; stronger than they, incapable of their weaknesses!

The very sunshine about her seemed to mock her.

"Here in this very garden, once he—he had—I won't think! I won't remember!" she cried aloud. "Oh, it must be true! And yet it seems so impossible. I wonder if I shall ever realise it—ever believe it? I can't—I can't! Bruce a thief; Bruce, whom I love!"

Though the flowers were nodding in the bright sunshine, and the air was heavy with the drone of the bees and the scent of the roses, though the summer was all about her, and the blue skies smiled on her, she felt cold, chilled through and through. The warmth and the life seemed to have gone out of her; all the happiness had fled.

Bruce a thief! Bruce a fugitive from justice! The man she had loved so patiently and faith-

fully all these long years; the man she had looked forward to meeting again, never to come back to her! For if he could not come in honour he must not come at all.

"I shall understand it presently," she whispered. "Now it seems so impossible—so impossible!"

She walked slowly across the smooth lawn till she came to the old sundial, and there she stood, leaning against it, her thoughts very far away.

## CHAPTER 8.

### The Old Love and the New.

EARLY in the afternoon Pollie stood on the platform of the little railway-station, waiting for the train that was bringing Mr. Hollister. It was early yet, and she had some minutes to wait. Poppy, the fat little white pony, had done the distance in far better time than Pollie had expected, and now she was walking up and down the platform, waiting for the train that was not yet signalled.

The thought that Hollister would soon be here brought her some strange relief. She was worried and troubled, filled with doubts and suspicions. Never before in her life had it seemed to Pollie Green that so many dark clouds had gathered about her head at one and the same time. Of Bruce she could not bear to think. It must be true, and yet she could not believe it. For Bruce to have sunk so low; for Bruce, who was the soul of honour, who had always in her eyes seemed to be a man who put honour before all else—to sink to become a thief! A man who had robbed those who had trusted him, and who believed in him! No; it seemed impossible. She could not believe it.

She watched the four shining rails, till they merged into one bright point in the far distance, with dry, hard eyes.

"I will not believe it!" she muttered. "I can't! Oh, if I could hear one word from him! If I knew for certain that he was still living!"

She walked to the far end of the little platform, and stood leaning against the fence.

"I do believe in you, Bruce!" she whispered. "Nothing shall change my belief in you! I will believe in you always. There was some mistake; it was not you. I will not believe—"

"Did you come here to avoid us, Margaret?" Pollie started, and turned, to see Floretta Macgruder and Mr. Lonsdale.

"I did not see you—I did not know that you were here," Pollie said.

"And yet it looked so very much as if you had come here to avoid us," Miss Macgruder said. "If I have offended you, I—"

"I tell you that I did not know that you were here, and I did not come here to avoid you," Pollie said.

"Dear me, how sharply you speak! I feel



"quite sure that in some way I must have offended you," Miss Macgruder said.

"You have not. I—I am not very well to-day," Pollie said.

"You look very far from being well, Miss Green," Mr. Lonsdale said. "You look white, and your eyes are heavy."

"I suppose you have been taking too much violent exercise in the sun?" Miss Macgruder said.

"I suppose so," Pollie said listlessly.

"Have you heard the news? At least, no; I know you haven't," Miss Macgruder said. "No one knows it yet, except ourselves, and I can't tell you how deeply we feel it."

"Is it bad news?"

"Very bad. Mr. Lonsdale has made up his mind to leave us!"

Pollie and John Lonsdale exchanged quick glances. She understood. He was going back to London to take up his work afresh; with the help of her money, he was going to try and make the lives of those whom he loved so well happier and brighter than they had been.

"It is very unkind of him," Floretta said. "We have all grown to—to like him so much!" She gave him a quick, upward glance, and then dropped her eyes. "We shall all miss him so when he is gone, and father, I am sure, will not find anyone else to suit him half so well."

"It is kind of you to speak of me like this," Lonsdale said, in his deep voice. "It will be good to go and know that I leave good friends behind me who one day may welcome me back again."

"Who will miss you very, very much," Floretta said, trying to blush, and casting her eyes down. "Who will—will think of you a great deal," she added, in a very low voice that only he could hear.

But he was not thinking of Miss Macgruder at this moment. He was watching the lovely face before him, and realising that one of the hardest things for him would be to go and not see this girl again.

But it was she who was sending him, and he was going gladly to do her work and his.

Floretta looked up and saw the direction of his gaze, and her face hardened. She was wasting her wiles and her artifices on this man, who was so unconscious of them, who seemed to have no eyes for anyone except that detestable Pollie Green.

"Oh, and Margaret, that reminds me!" she said suddenly. "I am going to scold you very much. You are a very naughty girl indeed! Of course, I know it is only fun—it could, of course, be nothing else than mere amusement to you; but it is so ridiculous to see that silly boy—"

"I don't understand you!" Pollie said quickly.

"I think you do!" Miss Macgruder laughed, and shook her finger at Pollie. "It is so naughty and mischievous of you, but you really should not do it; it unsettles the foolish boy so."

"Will you tell me what you mean, please?" Pollie cried.

"Oh, my dear, you know, of course, what I mean! Those ridiculous flowers, that is what I am talking about, and those little notes. I took one from him yesterday. Really, you should have a little more pride, if you will forgive me for saying so!"

"I suppose you know what you are talking about?" Pollie said slowly. "But if you think that I do, you are quite wrong. What silly boy? What notes?"

"Of course, my dear, if you pretend ignorance, I must pretend, too, and pretend to believe you!" Miss Macgruder said; "However, it is scarcely a matter that I want to discuss before Mr. Lonsdale."

"Then why did you mention it at all?" Pollie said. "And, since you have mentioned it, Miss Macgruder, I must insist that you explain to me what you really do mean!"

"Insist! That is hardly the word to use, is it?" Miss Macgruder said.

"I don't want to quarrel with you," Pollie said, "but I mean to find out what you are driving at!"

"Driving? Dear me, I don't drive! And, really, I prefer not to discuss the matter further; it is rather painful to me. I am sure Mr. Lonsdale agrees with me that a—a rather delicate matter is better not discussed on a railway-station."

"I think Miss Green has the right to know what you meant, Miss Macgruder," he said coldly.

"Of course I have the right!" Pollie said. "You make insinuations about me and some—some silly boy; you say things that I do not understand, and yet refuse to give me an explanation!"

"As you both seem to be against me," Miss Macgruder said, "I prefer to say no more. You, at any rate, Miss Green, know full well to what I am referring, in spite of your very cleverly assumed ignorance! A young lady who sends flowers and affectionate notes to a—a—we will say gentleman"—she laughed harshly—"to a young gentleman—"

"Do you mean to say that I have?" Pollie cried. "How dare you suggest?" Her eyes flamed.

"I am certainly not going to quarrel with you here. It is low and vulgar, and I am sure I don't wish Billings, the porter, to hear me quarrelling with anyone. As you seem in such a bad temper to-day, Miss Green, I will say good-afternoon!"

And Miss Macgruder turned rapidly away.

Pollie's face was hot and her eyes were blazing, as she looked after Miss Macgruder. But, after all, what did it matter? Floretta Macgruder had a notoriously venomous tongue; everyone knew it. She was not worth troubling about, and certainly just now Pollie had too much to worry about and think over than to waste time and thought over Miss Macgruder.

"I suppose you do not believe these—these suggestions that she makes about me?" Pollie



said, looking up at Lonsdale, with her honest blue eyes.

"I believe nothing ill of you, Miss Green, now or ever," he said simply.

"Thank you! I am glad. I—I should like to stand well in your thoughts."

It was very simply said, and it was so evidently honestly meant that for a moment his dark face flushed.

"You will always stand well in my thoughts," he said. "Be sure of that. You know why I am going to London, Miss Green?"

"Yes; I know you are going to do the work that I should do. You are going to save me from going."

"I am going back to those who need me, to carry to them your help. And now, good-bye! The train is coming in." He held her hand tightly for a moment. "I may come to say good-bye before I go?" he asked.

"I should be hurt and sorry if you did not," she said quickly.

And then he turned away to join Miss Macgruder, who was watching them from a distance, with no amiable expression on her face.

"You are all alike!" she said shrilly, and with a sneering laugh. "She takes you all in! Oh, if you could only see through her as a woman can!"

She could not for the life of her suppress this little outburst of spite against Pollie Green, whom she hated as all narrow-minded, jealous, and ill-favoured women of middle age hate those who are younger and more beautiful than they are.

"Don't you know that Miss Green has the name for being an arrant flirt? There is not a man, or even a boy, in the neighbourhood who has not at some time or another fancied himself in love with her."

Lonsdale smiled quietly.

"One can hardly wonder at it," he said.

Miss Macgruder's pale eyes flashed with anger.

"Wonder at it! She is positively shameless!" she said. "I suppose you know when I spoke to her that I was referring to her abominable flirtation with a wretched lout belonging to the village, a mere boy, who attends my Sunday-school—James Ribbing?"

"I did not know, nor do I wish to—"

"The idiotic wretch is always hugging flowers that she sends to him!" she went on. "It is a positive scandal! And such an ugly little wretch as he is, too! He takes her flowers every day. I have had him watched, and I know beyond the shadow of a doubt. He has been seen to take flowers to the Manor House, and return with others, and to the others there is usually some ridiculous note attached. Perhaps you may not believe me, Mr. Lonsdale. I own that it is difficult to believe that a young woman of Miss Green's position should be so dead to all shame, but the fact remains. And if you do not believe me, you may ask Markwell, our gardener, who has followed Ribbing several times."

Lonsdale bit his lips.

"I know nothing, and wish to know nothing!" he said.

"I suppose not. You prefer to blind yourself to her shortcomings, just as other men have done! But—"

She broke off suddenly as the train steamed into the station.

"Another friend! Really, Miss Green is to be congratulated! And how very pleased he seems to see her. He, he, he!"

Miss Macgruder laughed unpleasantly, and John Lonsdale's face burned for a moment.

Before the train had come to a standstill Bertram Hollister swung himself out from the first-class carriage, and sprang lightly on to the platform.

"This is kind of you!" he said, taking Pollie's hand. "Something that I scarcely dared to hope for. But what is the matter? You don't look well. You look altered since I saw you last. Your cheeks are white."

He looked down at her anxiously.

"I am a little troubled—worried," she said, with a catch in her voice. "And—and I am very, very glad that you have come!"

Pollie did not notice that Bertram Hollister's greeting was a little warmer than their slight previous acquaintance quite justified, and that the look of pleasure in his face was perhaps a little too pronounced.

"You are worried and troubled," he said. "I should not have thought that worry and trouble could ever come into your life."

"But, it has," she said. "Still, I ought not to talk to you about such unpleasant things immediately on your arrival."

"I should like to feel that you are talking to me on the matter that is nearest to your heart always," he said.

Pollie looked at him quickly.

"And what about the matter that is nearest to your heart," she said. "Have you seen her yet? Have you heard anything of her?"

"Her?"

"Why, of Penelope Grant," Pollie said.

"Oh!" Hollister's face changed. "No," he said briefly, "I've heard nothing of her."

"And all your enquiries, your searches for her are fruitless?" Pollie asked. He coughed, and turned his head away.

"To tell you the truth, I have not just lately been seeking for her," he said. "I believe that she must be married and settled down somewhere. Perhaps she has gone out of the country. At any rate, it has struck me as ridiculous to believe that after so many years she could still have the same feelings for me as she had when I left England."

"If she loved you then, she must love you now," Pollie said.

Hollister did not answer. He seemed uneasy. The sudden turn of the conversation to Penelope Grant seemed to take the enthusiasm out of him.

"Hallo! Is this yours? What a jolly fat little pony! By George, though, it is rather



rough on her to expect her to tug a heavy weight like I am over these roads!"

"Oh, she can do it easily enough!" Pollie said.

"Goodish-looking chap, that parson," Hollister said, as Pollie bowed to Lonsdale. "I seem to know his face, too," he added thoughtfully.

"Mr. Lonsdale has not been here very long, and he is going to—"

"Lonsdale, of course!" cried Hollister. "That's the man—John Lonsdale. He used to be curate at Chadwick-on-Sea six or seven years ago, and left there to go to London."

"Chadwick is not very far from here," Pollie said.

"No, I know that. I used to spend some time there once. It was where"—he paused—"where I first met Miss Grant. She lived there in those days."

"And did Mr. Lonsdale know her?" Pollie asked.

"Oh, yes, of course! He was curate there, and the curate knows everyone, I suppose."

"Then perhaps he might—"

"Oh, no; not likely! Besides, I have been thinking. Perhaps after all these years—"

"Oh, I am sure—sure she would not have changed, not if she really cared for you!" Pollie said.

His face did not take on the look of joy and relief that she expected her words would raise in him. On the contrary, he looked dejected and miserable.

"Do you really—really want to see her again," Pollie asked.

"Oh, yes, of course—of course I do! Why should I have advertised if I didn't?" he said. It seemed to her that there was a want of enthusiasm in his voice.

"I should like you both to meet again," Pollie said. "I will tell you what we will do one day. We will drive over to Chadwick—it is only about six miles—and then you can show me where she lived, and tell me all about her."

"I shall enjoy driving with you immensely," he said. "And—and forgive me, I had meant to ask before. Your friend, the one who"—he paused—"I mean the fellow you thought—expected to meet that night—have you heard anything about him? Has he written, or anything?"

"No," said Pollie quietly. "He has not written, but I have heard of him."

"And—and perhaps you will meet soon?" he asked.

Pollie shook her head without speaking, and Hollister's face lightened up wonderfully.

"You mean that he has married, or something of that kind?"

"No, I do not know. Perhaps he has. I cannot say. At any rate—Oh, Mr. Hollister, please do not speak to me about him! I have heard of him, and we shall never meet again. That is all I know."

Her voice broke for a moment, and she turned her head away.

And perhaps it was as well, so that she should not see the sudden gleam of joy that had come to his face.

The little, fat white pony jogged homeward at a good pace.

"It was kind of you to come," Pollie said presently.

"It was kinder of you to ask me. To me, it seems almost like coming home, to come here to you, although I am such an utter stranger to you. Still, when a man has knocked about the world, and has no friends—not one left—it is something for him to know there is at least one door open to him, one welcome for him, in the land of his birth."

"I am glad you feel like that," Pollie said.

"I do, and I shall never cease to be grateful to you and your father for offering shelter to a homeless wanderer."

"I hope that you will stay with us a long time," Pollie said, "and that when you leave us it will be to come back soon."

"You mean that?"

"Of course." She turned her face to him.

"I never say anything I don't mean. I can't make polite conversation, you know."

"Thank Heaven for that!" he said feelingly.

Sir Francis stood on the steps. He believed in the good old English custom of greeting a guest right at his own hall door.

"I am very glad to see you," he said, shaking hands warmly with Hollister.

"And I am very glad to be here," Hollister answered.

The two men took one another in at a glance, and both were satisfied.

Ten minutes later Pollie was waiting in the hall for Hollister.

"I am going to show you the garden," she said, as he came down the stairs.

"There is nothing I should like better." And together they passed out on the lawn.

"What a pretty old place this is!" he exclaimed. "Hallo!" He started.

"Coosha," Pollie said severely, "you must not do that. One of these days you will hurt yourself, falling out of trees like that."

Coosha, who had suddenly landed on the ground immediately before them from the branches of a chestnut-tree, picked herself up.

"Bery sorry; speck I give yo' a jump," she said to Hollister. "Speck yo' de Mister Hollister dat I hear plenty chat about lately—eh?"

"I expect I am," he said.

"Bery pleased to meet yo'," said Coosha affably. "Bery nice-looking young man," she said audibly to Pollie.

Pollie flushed.

"Coosha, I think if you—"

"Oh, yes, I know all 'bout dat! Yo' want me to run off, don't yo', so yo' can hab an interesting chat wid yo' ole friend Mr. Hollister, whom yo' only seen once before in yo' life, Pollie Green! All right!"

"You must never take notice of anything, Coosha says," Pollie said as soon as Coosha had gone.

For half an hour or longer Pollie and Hollister walked slowly up and down the garden. Considering that Hollister had gone out to look



at the garden he saw wonderfully little of it, and a great deal of the beautiful profile beside him.

"And now, what about Miss Grant?" asked Pollie suddenly. "You make me so anxious for news of her. By the way," went on Pollie, "when shall we go over to Chadwick?"

"Chadwick!" His face fell. "Oh, there's no hurry!" he said. "At least, I mean that I am quite ready to go at any time you like," he added.

"But you—surely you are anxious. You might hear news there."

"Yes, yes, of course, I might hear news," he said.

"Of Miss Grant, I mean."

"Yes; but—" Hollister paused. It had not dawned on him lately that he was not so anxious to hear news of Miss Grant. It was strange how he had kept the image of that girl in his heart during all the long years of his absence from home, how faithful and constant he had been to her, and now how changed all had suddenly become to him! He wondered why he glanced down at the lovely face beside him, and wondered why no longer; he knew why.

"Tell me about her," Pollie said.

"There is so little to tell. I have not seen her for so long. The years make a great change, and—and she may be different now from what I remember her to be." He did not speak like a lover passionately eager to see his ladylove again.

"I thought you cared so much for her," Pollie said disappointedly.

"Oh, I—I did!" he stammered. "Of course I did. I thought the world of her. But I have been realising since that it is very likely that she is married. I was mad to think that she could have waited. She had no reason to believe that I would ever come back again. She was entirely free, and I was. There was no engagement, it was not as if we were engaged—bound to one another."

He was silent. He turned his face away from her.

"One—one cannot control one's feelings always," he said at last. "I did love her. No other woman seemed equal to her in my eyes. I made, I think, an ideal of her—"

"Because you loved her."

"Yes, because I loved her."

"And it will be the same with her," Pollie said. "You may be sure that she still loves you, and thinks of you, and perhaps prays for you to come back to her, and you will find her presently, and then you will make her very happy."

Bertram Hollister did not answer. The programme did not please him at all. He looked down into the glowing, eager face beside him, and then he realised that he never wanted to find Penelope Grant again, that his love for her belonged entirely to the past, and now was gone, never to come back again.

Because another love had come into his

heart to turn the old love out—another love that was making the blood tingle in his veins now, and was longing to cry aloud those three words that are ever nearest to a lover's tongue—"I love you!"

And it was to the girl beside him that he longed to say them!

## CHAPTER 9.

### In the Bollington Woods.

"MY goodness, if dat Polhe Green ain't gone and pick up anoder young man!" Coosha muttered. "Huh! Speck dat Pollie Green don't want my society to-night. Always de way. Where dere's no young men about, it's 'Come, Coosha, let's go for a walk!'—Coosha bery great favourite den; and when de young man turn up, Coosha, yo' not wort' a hang, yo' no good, yo' go and fry yo' face. Clear out! Two's company, trees none. Dat's de sort ob talk dat makes me sick. Dere's no end to de young men dat Pollie Green get hold ob. Dere's Bruce Hardaker. Where de dickens him gone? More dan I can make out. Speck him tired, and gone and got married to some oder girl. Den dere was de pore ole dook. Bery good sort ob man dat dook. Pity him die. Den dere was de long parson chap, and now dere come along dis new feller. Don't tink I like dat new feller ober much. Bery politeful and all de rest, but him seem to be making de pace altogether too quick. Well, I tink ole Bruce Hardaker de best ob de lot. Wonder where him gone? Speck him married, or dead, or suffing."

Coosha whistled to a disreputable yellow mongrel dog that was her especial friend and companion.

"Wonder if Bill Jones am going out to-night?" she muttered. "Tink I go and see. Dis respectable life make me tired."

Bill Jones was the village ne'er-do-well. He was a man of about fifty years of age, without much harm in him, except that he was a confirmed poacher. Poaching was the very breath of life to Bill Jones. If he had suddenly found himself the possessor of ten thousand a year, and with everything that money in reason could buy, he would probably have put on his old clothes and called to his lurcher, and gone off for a night's enjoyment—poaching.

He had been hauled up many a time, and had suffered several terms of imprisonment, but he accepted the reverses of fortune philosophically. The delights of poaching were well worth all the pains and penalties.

Bill Jones lived by himself, in an old, tumble-down cottage, on the borders of Sir William Bollington's estate. And Bill Jones was a particular thorn in Sir William Bollington's side.

Now, although it was a secret that no one knew, Coosha and Mr. Jones were the best of friends; and when Coosha found time hang particularly heavy on her hands, she often made a night excursion into the Bollington Woods with Mr. Jones.



Her yellow mongrel dog had been given to her by him, and the four of them—Mr. Jones and his dog, and Coosha and hers—generally showed a very good bag as the result of their night's sport.

Taking a roundabout path, so as to avoid the village, Coosha arrived at the cottage, and tapped on the door.

Coosha's tap was peculiar. She tapped one, then paused; then tapped twice, and paused again; finally she tapped three times rapidly.

"Thought you might come," Bill Jones said. "I been getting ready. Sha'n't want the dogs to-night," he added. "I see you got Slinker with you. We'll leave 'im 'ere, tied up. Going rabbiting," he added.

Coosha nodded, and her eyes sparkled at the sight of the neatly-prepared snares on which Mr. Jones had been working—cunningly contrived little affairs that only Mr. Jones could make with perfection.

"A couple o' ferrets, and the wires, and we ought to do well," he said.

"Slinker bery good behave dog. Speck he might come, too?" Coosha said. "I tole Slinker he might come, and I don't like to break my word."

"Oh, all right! Let him come. Only if he kicks up a row, I'll do for 'im!" said Bill Jones pleasantly.

"All right!" said Coosha. "If yo' do for Slinker, I'll do for yo'! Yo' kill Slinker, den I kill yo'!"

Mr. Jones smiled and showed a bery bad set of teeth, and, with this amicable understanding, they started.

It was not a new experience to Coosha. She knew the lay of the land almost as well as the accomplished old poacher did. There was a good deal of climbing to be done, in and out of steep ditches, until they were well inside Sir William's preserves. After that the greatest caution had to be observed. Sir William kept four keepers, and these men were about the woods all night. They had to crouch low in a ditch to allow one of these keepers to pass, which he did within three yards of them; then, when the sound of the rustling branches and his footsteps had died away, Coosha and Jones went on their way again.

It was half an hour from the time they left the cottage when they reached the rabbit-warren which Bill Jones had particularly marked for the night's sport.

It was in a clearing on the side of a somewhat steep, but not a very high, hill, at the top of which ran a right-of-way footpath through Sir William's estate, which same footpath was the cause of many and bitter quarrels between Sir William and the villagers.

On a moonlight night it would have been impossible to poach this warren, as Mr. Jones knew, because, except for the tall and rank weeds and thistles that grew here and there, there was no cover at all where they could hide if a keeper came along.

"I reckon we got about a hour and a 'arf

before the moon rises," he muttered to Coosha, "and I dare say by then we'll 'ave got all we want."

Coosha sat on the ground while the poacher lighted a dark lantern. It was risky even showing the light for a moment, but to work up here without a light was utterly impossible.

There were the rabbit-runs to be located, the snares to be set accordingly, and then, when this was done, the ferrets to be dropped into the most likely holes. But Jones worked rapidly, and everything was done in a few moments.

Coosha had four snares under her supervision, and the man took charge of the rest.

It was just as he had anticipated. The warren had been left severely alone for a good many months. Almost as soon as the ferrets were sent to earth, the rabbits began to bolt, and squeak after squeak proclaimed the fact that they had made acquaintance with the wire snares.

It was hard work for upwards of an hour. Rabbit after rabbit had to be taken from the snares, the snares reset, and Coosha found that her hands were pretty well full looking after the four snares under her command.

"Tink we done pretty well for dis one night," she muttered. "Speck we must hab got tirty rabbits if we got one."

Jones grunted. He was well satisfied. The sack that he had brought was pretty well full.

"Forty-two," he muttered hoarsely. "We may as well make a 'arf-undred of it, and then I'll have time to get over to Ringford with 'em before daylight."

There was a dealer at Ringford who relieved Mr. Jones of his spoils at about a quarter the proper market value, as Coosha knew.

So the snares were set again, and after a few more squeaks the poacher proceeded to pack up.

"We ain't been worried overmuch with them fellers to-night, miss," he muttered. "We—Ush! 'Old that dawg!" he breathed. "Lay low!"

There was a sound of cracking underbush and heavy footsteps above them. The sound came nearer and nearer, and Coosha, crouching low against the damp earth, with her arms round Slinker, held her breath.

Jones groaned in the bitterness of his spirit. They had waited just a few minutes too long. The moon was already rising, and before very long its white light would reveal their presence on the bare hillside, unless the keeper above went away soon enough to enable them to take cover.

The man on the path above them was walking slowly, very slowly, and now suddenly he stopped dead.

The intense darkness had lifted a little, and, looking up, Coosha could distinctly see the dark shape of a man standing almost immediately above her on the hilltop.

"Wis' to goodness dat idiot go along," she thought, "wasting his time standing dere! Tink I'll speak to Sir William about his laziness."

Gradually the landscape was brightening. The



moon was rising, and Jones, lying flat against the weeds and thistles, groaned in fury against his ill-luck.

Why on earth didn't the man move? He was standing as still as though carved out of a block of coal. Once Coosha, whose hearing was very acute, thought that she could detect the sound of a sigh. But this was hardly likely, as gamekeepers do not usually sigh, as she reflected.

"Dat chap struck dumb and silly, I speck," she thought. "Why to goodness don't he move off? Never see such a stuck idiot, standing dere doing nothing! 'S-sh!' she whispered. For the motionless, silent figure seemed to be getting on Slinker's nerves, and he was showing signs of uneasiness. "Dat's all right! Yo' keep quiet!" Coosha breathed in the dog's ear. "Dat's only a harmless idiot dat's been and lost him way."

Slinker settled himself down again.

The moon was coming up now. It was getting lighter and lighter. Every moment was adding to their danger, and still the man above them never moved. Once or twice he changed his position, and that was all.

"Wonder if dat idiot waiting here to see de sun rise?" Coosha muttered. "Wonder if him—"

She paused suddenly. The moon was now clear in the sky, and was shining directly down on the dark figure above her.

It was not a gamekeeper. The man carried no gun; he was not wearing a gamekeeper's dress, no stout leggings and heavy boots. Besides, Coosha, who knew Sir William's gamekeepers well by sight, knew at once that this tall figure belonged to none of the four. Then who was he, and what was he doing here?

The man's face was turned away from the moonlight; but as Coosha watched he shifted his position, and gradually his face came into the direct rays of the moon.

"I—I out ob my mind!" Coosha gasped. "I gone mad, or suffing! What—I—I speck it am a ghose! Speck him dead, and dis him ghose come to haunt me! Dat's it; it am a ghose!"

Coosha cowered close to the earth, for the bright moonshine had revealed a face that was very familiar to her—the face of Bruce Hardaker!

He was as white as death. This was probably owing to the effect of the white moonshine, but Coosha never gave the cause a thought.

She was sure that it was a ghost. There was not the slightest doubt in her mind, and Coosha, who was afraid of nothing that lived and moved in the ordinary way, lay flat on the ground, shivering with terror.

It was the ghost of Bruce Hardaker. There he stood, above her in the bright moonshine, which revealed a haggard and worn face. It was Bruce Hardaker; but how altered, how different from the man she had known! The real Bruce had been smart in appearance. Though never a dandy, he had dressed well.

His clothes, though plain, had always been good and well-fitting. This man wore the clothes of a tramp; they hung on him in rags. He was unshaven; his face worn, haggard.

## CHAPTER 10.

### Discovered by Gamekeepers.

THE sound of a movement behind her caused Coosha to turn her head. Something was happening. She heard a smothered oath from Jones, and then the sound of a low, gruff voice.

Coosha understood in an instant. They had been discovered by the gamekeepers, and Jones was a captive in their hands. But even in this moment of anxiety she looked up quickly again, and saw that the figure above her had suddenly vanished.

"I knowed it!" she gasped. "I know it to certain suah him a ghose! Now hi—"

"Got you!" muttered a voice in her ear, and a heavy hand was laid suddenly on Coosha's shoulder. "Hallo, it's a gal!"

"Beg yo' pardon," said Coosha, as she vainly wriggled in her captor's grasp, "I am a young lady!"

"Why, it's the black gal from—" shouted the gamekeeper. "Here's a go, Dick! It's the young black person from Sir Francis Green's!"

"Anged if it ain't the rottenest luck!" said Jones, as he was dragged to his feet. "Some feller come along and stood there for about ten minutes, and I thought it was one of you chaps, and so we laid still; but I expect 'e wasn't nothing more than a poacher himself."

"He wasn't," said Coosha solemnly; "dat was a ghose."

"Well, you ain't, anyways," said the keeper, who had his hand on Coosha; and now we'll just trouble you to come along up to the 'ouse and see what Sir William's got to say to you!"

Jones groaned.

"It's the rottenest luck, 'anged if it isn't! Looks like us being in trouble, miss!"

It certainly did look like it. The three gamekeepers, with their prisoners and a huge sack of rabbits, and Jones's carefully prepared little wire snares, marched off through the wood in the direction of the house, from the lower windows of which lights were gleaming out into the now brightly moonlit night.

"Bery unplesen' situation dis," Coosha muttered to herself. "'Speck dere be some pretty bad trouble for somebody, and 'speck dat somebody likely to be me. Look here," she added aloud, "I don't 'low no familiarity, me and yo' neber been introduce, and dere's no reason we should walk arm-in-arm, young man."

The gamekeeper, who had Coosha safely in his custody, smiled, but made no reply.

"Yo' take yo' hand off me dis minit, a' once!" said Coosha.

"That's all right," said the gamekeeper, "it ain't fur now."



"Yo' bery impuden' young man," said Coosha, with a sniff. "I speak to yo' master 'bout yo' manners presenly, by-me-by." She stole a glance at her companion in misfortune.

William Jones, having been apprehended, and knowing that escape was out of the question, and also knowing full well what he was going to get at his journey's end, took matters philosophically. There was no need for worry and anxiety now, so with his hands in his pockets, he trudged along whistling to himself.

Seeing Coosha looking at him, he winked at her.

"Sorry I arst you to come and see me catch rabbits to-night, miss," he said.

Coosha stared.

"But yo' neber arst me; I come to yo' house, and—"

Jones glared at her.

"Old yer row!" he whispered, under his breath. "If you keep your face shut, I'll get you off."

"Yo' won't do nothing ob de kine," said Coosha. "I'm as much in dis as yo' are."

By this time they had arrived at the house, and the gamekeepers conducted their prisoners up the front steps, and rang a peal on the bell, which was speedily answered by a footman in livery.

To-night Sir William Bollington had been giving a little dinner-party, and from the drawing-room came the sounds of music.

"Great pity to worry de ole boy to-night," said Coosha. "S'pose we call again in de morning. Besides dat, I ain't got my visiting dress on."

Jones grinned. The gamekeepers frowned, and pushed Coosha into the room, the door of which the footman opened.

It was a large and not very pleasant apartment, sparsely furnished with a writing-table and about a dozen uncomfortable-looking chairs.

They had not very long to wait before Sir William came in. He was a tall, portly old gentleman, with white hair, and a very red face. Usually a genial, good-tempered old person, the mere thought that he had to deal with poachers banished every vestige of geniality from his face.

"Good-evening!" said Coosha affably. "Bery sorry to trouble yo' dis time ob de night, but dese men don't seem to hab no consideration at all. I told dem dat we'd better look roun' in de morning, but—"

"What's this?" said Sir William sharply; "what is this young person here for, Dawkins?"

The head gamekeeper touched his forehead.

"Sorry to say, Sir William, we caught 'er and Jones 'ere in the act of poaching, and took these 'ere rabbits and snares from 'em, they being in their possession."

"Poaching, you—" Sir William glared at Coosha. "Are you not—"

"Yes, I am," said Coosha promptly, "and bery much annoyed by de rude manners ob dese men!"

"Are you not staying at Sir Francis Green's house?"

"Yes; I'm 'is adopted daughter," said Coosha.

Sir William sat down at his table.

"Now, Dawkins, what is the charge?" he said.

"Passing Inver Coppice, about—" began Dawkins.

"Yo' shut up yo' row!" said Coosha. "Yo' lebe dis to me. It was like dis 'ere: To-night, habing nothing to do—"

"I'd like to say," said Jones, interrupting, "that the young lady ain't got nothing to do with it. I'll admit the poaching all right. I was at it; it was a fair cop, but the young lady only came to look on; she didn't 'ave nothing—"

"Dat's a most abominable lie!" said Coosha stoutly. "I done de poaching same as he did."

Sir William bit the end of his pen.

"Dawkins, what is the charge?" he repeated.

"I was saying, sir—" said Dawkins.

"We don't want none of your chin music, ole pimple nose," said Coosha. "Let me tell de story, and I swear it am de trufe! To-night—"

"I were a-going a-poaching," said Jones, "and on my way I met this young lady, and I said to 'er, 'I'm going to catch a few rabbits, miss,' I said—"

"Dat man ain't got no regard for de trufe," said Coosha. "It was nothing ob de sort; 'im telling lies to get me off, and I ain't going to be got off, neider. "Look 'ere, old gentleman—"

"Will you be silent?" said Sir William.

"Sha'n't!" said Coosha. "Be silent yo'self; dis matter interferes wid me, and I've got de right to talk, and I'm going to talk, and nobody 'ere ain't going to prevent me, neider."

She glared round as she spoke.

"Dawkins?" said Sir William.

"I was going to say, Sir William. Passing by Inver Coppice this evening, I—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Coosha. "De way yo' keep on repeating what yo' said before makes me tired. Dis was de trufe—"

"Was this young woman poaching?" roared Sir William.

"She were!" said Dawkins solemnly.

"Yo' bare-faced old idiot!" said Coosha. "I was doing nofing ob de kine. I was looking at Bruce Hardaker."

"Is the person she mentions in custody also?" Sir William asked.

"No, Sir William; there wasn't no one else, only these two, and these snares which we—"

"You most remarkable liar!" said Coosha; "dere was Bruce Hardaker dere, and if yo' say him wasn't, I don't know, I'm sure, where yo' tink yo' go to one ob dese days."

"I ask you to believe me, Sir William," said Jones earnestly, "that this young lady 'adn't got nothing to do with it at all. I said to 'er—I said, 'I'm going to catch a few rabbits for dinner to-morrow—'"

"For dinner?" Sir William glared at the pile of rabbits. "You seem to have a large appetite, Jones!"

"I can do my share, I am thankful to say, sir," said Jones.



"So I should think; fifty rabbits for a man's dinner! Upon my soul, you impudent rascal, I shall make it hot for you!"

"I 'ad an idea you was going to, sir," said Jones meekly.

"I tink yo' bery bad-tempered ole person," said Coosha. "What de use flyin into a rage 'bout a few rabbits—eh?"

"Turn that creature out!" said Sir William fiercely.

"That's right," said Jones, "you turn 'er out; she 'asn't got no right 'ere at all!"

"But, begging your pardon, Sir William, she was poaching along with Jones. I caught the two of em, and these 'ere snares and all in their possession."

Sir William frowned. It was very evident that this girl, a protegee of Sir Francis Green, could not be a poacher by profession; it was some adventure she had embarked in, and Sir William knew that he could not offend his brother justice of the peace by sending Coosha to prison on such a charge.

"What de chap wid de red nose hab remarked," said Coosha, "am puffleckly correct. I was poaching 'long wid Bill Jones, anyting dat Bill Jones say to de contrary am a most abominable lie!"

"Jones," said Sir William, "you admit this charge of poaching?"

"Yes, sir—certainly!" said Jones.

"Very good, you will have to go to prison."

"I admit de charge, too," said Coosha.

"I wish you would be good enough to be silent," said Sir William.

"Sha'n't!" said Coosha. "I admit de charge, so I shall go to prison, too!"

"Turn her out!" said Sir William. "I will not be pestered with her. I shall see Sir Francis Green in the morning about you, young woman."

"You go and eat coke!" said Coosha politely. "Why the dickeus don't yo' say I got to go to prison, too!"

"Turn her out!" roared Sir William.

"Den turn Bill Jones out, too," said Coosha. "He ain't done no more nor no less dan I hab; we done it togeder, de pair ob us."

"I swear," said Jones solemnly, "the young lady never had a 'and—"

"They were both at it, Sir William; I took snares from this young woman's possession, same as I did from Jones's," said Dawkins, the keeper.

"And I tell you to mind your own business!" roared Sir William. "Confound it, am I not going to be obeyed? Turn 'em out! The pair of 'em—turn 'em both out! Look here, you villain," he added, turning to Jones, "I'm going to let you off this time. I don't know why, I'm sure! I'm hanged if I know why! It is, I suppose, because I can't very well let off your black accomplice unless I—"

"Am you 'luding to me by dat remark?" shouted Coosha. "How dere yo' call me brack accomplice? Cause I take one or two ob yo' rotten ole rabbits, dat's no reason why yo' should use dem insulting epitaphs at me, yo' ole sinner!"

"Go!" roared Sir William. "Go at once, the pair of you! Dawkins, turn 'em both out! And you, Jones, beware! Next time it will be ten times worse for you; but I'll have you, sooner or later, I know that, or I shouldn't let you off now."

Jones grinned.

"I expeck we'll meet again, sir," he said amiably.

"Go, and be hanged to you!" said Sir William. "Dawkins, turn 'em out!"

"Very good, sir!" said Dawkins, in an aggrieved voice, "only they was both—"

"I don't want to hear any more about it; and as for you, young woman, I'll call round and see Sir Francis myself in the morning."

"Bery pleased to see yo', I'm sure," said Coosha. "Any time yo' passin, drop in, and take us as we are. Bery plesen' ole bird, after all. As for yo', Bill Jones," Coosha added, "I'm bery surprised at yo'. Fancy yo', a respectable poacher, tellin' such wicked stories!"

"I only done it," said Jones, "to—"

"Dere ain't no excuse for yo'," said Coosha severely. "Yo' akted bery badly—behave."

"Think yourself lucky, the pair of you!" growled Dawkins, who was in no very good humour at the result of his capture.

Coosha walked back as far as Jones's cottage with him, and then went on to her own home. She walked slowly, and gave herself up to thought. Now that all the excitement was over, she had time to think about what she had seen—the strange and unexpected appearance of Bruce Hardaker. Bruce, whom no one had set eyes on for years, suddenly appearing so mysteriously, and as suddenly vanishing, in Bollington Woods.

"Bery remarkable ting," Coosha muttered; "can't make it out at all! I 'spect it was a ghose. 'Speck Bruce must be dead, or suffing; but if it was a ghose, it was de ghose ob a bery bad suit ob close dat he hab on. Can't make it out at all."

## CHAPTER 11.

### The Lost Found.

A FULL fortnight had passed. Bertram Hollister still stayed on, and each day found himself more deeply in love with his pretty hostess than ever. There had been no more talk about the visit to Chadwick-on-Sea which Pollie had promised him, and Hollister discreetly held his tongue. He was not at all anxious to revisit those scenes that would only remind him of another and earlier love—a love that he told himself was quite dead, and well-nigh forgotten now. He did not want to rake up the ashes of the past. The present contented him too well for that. Penelope would, of course, have married long since. Such a pretty girl as she was would not have to look in vain for another lover, and Bertram Hollister set his conscience at rest. He had been faithful for years to a memory rather than to a reality. He had really loved an ideal rather than a living woman; and now he had awakened to real



love, to the passionate throbbing through his veins, that made him lie restless at night, picturing one fair face always in his mind's eye, seeing it always before him—tender, gracious, winsome, the loveliest face he had ever seen in his life.

Bertram Hollister did not think of leaving. He had not the slightest desire to leave. He was willing to stay on indefinitely. All he wanted was to be near Pollie, to see her daily, to hear her sweet voice, to touch her little hand now and again. This meant to him perfect happiness, and always there was the hope in his heart that one day a greater happiness might be his, the happiness of making her his own.

That he was very deeply in love with her Pollie herself never guessed. She had never thought of love in connection with Bertram Hollister. He had his own love story, just as she had hers.

Mr. Francis was unobservant, and he did not read the young man's secret. Coosha naturally did not. The one and only person who entirely realised that Hollister was in love with Pollie was John Lonsdale.

Loving her himself, as he did, Lonsdale was quick to read the love in Bertram Hollister's eyes, and Hollister, on his part, guessed Lonsdale's secret.

Pollie's financial affairs in London were now satisfactorily settled up. She had made a brief journey to town with her father, and had signed several papers that had been prepared for her signature, and then she had come back again, glad to have the weight of it off her mind.

And in a month's time John Lonsdale was to return to London, and take up his work anew. At the risk of his own life, as he knew full well, he was going to carry Pollie's charity into the dark, squalid houses of the very poor. He knew what it meant to him. He remembered the doctor's words. But he faced the inevitable unflinchingly, and with a smiling face and resolute heart.

"My rest and change here have done me good. It may mean several months more to me," he thought, "and I will make the best use of those months, the very best use of every hour of every day of them."

Miss Floretta, the vicar's vinegary daughter, slumped and sighed and made big eyes at him in vain.

"Positively, I do not know how we shall manage when you are gone," she sighed. "It is dreadful to think that in a short month you will have left us!"

"It is kind of you to speak so," he said.

Miss Floretta sighed and cast down her eyes, then looked up at him suddenly, and dropped her eyes again.

"I—I sometimes—almost wish you—you had never come!" she said. "I mean, because if you had never come we should not have missed you so as we shall miss you. It—it will be so different when you have gone; my poor walks will be so lonely!"

"Believe me, I shall remember our companion-

ship during this rest and holiday that I have enjoyed here," he said.

"Rest and holiday! Why, you have worked quite hard, far harder than Mr. Merton worked when he was papa's curate. He did nothing! A little horrid, fat man, with a wife and four children! I could never abide him!"

Bertram Hollister was standing leaning over a gate, smoking a pipe and watching the distant landscape, while his thoughts were entirely occupied by Pollie Green.

He was conscious of a small feeling of shame that Penelope was banished so entirely from his mind, and her place occupied so entirely and fully by Pollie. But why should he blame himself? Why should he be faithful all his life to what, after all, was no more than a memory? Penelope and he had parted years ago, hoping and praying that they might meet again, and yet without any positive certainty that they would.

For years he had thought of her, and of her only; he had set himself to work to find her on his return home, and had utterly failed; he had even gone to the lengths of advertising, and all to no purpose. Surely he had the right to believe that Penelope was perhaps happily married. She might even be—No; he could not bring himself to think of the sweet girl he had once loved so devotedly as being no longer in life. He hoped with all his heart that she was alive and well and very happy; he hoped that one day they might meet as good friends.

It was strange that Pollie's history and his should be so much alike. That man—how he hated him in his heart!—Bruce Hardaker, might never come back. He prayed and hoped that he never would. But he realised that he had a hard task before him. He had to teach Pollie to do two things—to forget the man she loved, and to learn to love him. He sighed to himself, and then started.

"I am so sorry!" Pollie said gently. "I heard. I am afraid you find it terribly dull here."

"Dull?" he said. "Dull here? I was never so happy in my life!"

"It is kind of you to say that, Mr. Hollister, but I happened to hear you sigh," she said, with a smile. "When one is very happy, I don't think one sighs like you did then."

"I was thinking," he said.

"I know." She nodded. "I have been horribly selfish and unthinking, but we will go to-day. I had meant to ask you to come this afternoon with me."

"Go to-day?" he echoed.

"To Chadwick, of course," Pollie said, "to see if we can find out anything about Penelope."

Bertram Hollister flushed. Nothing had been farther from his thoughts than to go to Chadwick and seek for some clue of his lost sweetheart.

"We will drive over immediately after lunch. We can be there in an hour. We shall have two or three hours to spare there, and then drive back in time for dinner; and I do hope," she



added earnestly, "that we shall discover something."

"I hope from the bottom of my heart that we sha'n't," he thought to himself; but he did not utter his thoughts aloud.

He could not well refuse to go with her. For one thing, he did not wish to cheat himself of the pleasure of a long drive by her side, and so soon as lunch was over the cob was brought round, and Pollie and he started off.

Pollie drove, and Bernard Hollister sat beside her, quite content at having nothing more to do than to watch her lovely profile, and to hear the sweet voice and the soft, merry, yet ringing laughter—the sweetest music he had ever heard in his life, he told himself.

"You will show me the house where she used to live," Pollie said, "and then we will drive all over the place. It is only a tiny place, after all, and if she has been there lately someone is sure to know, and will tell us. Oh, I hope—I hope, for your sake and hers, we shall hear something of her!"

Bertram Hollister closed his teeth tightly together. He hoped not, but Pollie was not to guess this. And so they drove on through the sunshine, past the wide-spreading green fields, until the little sea-coast village came in sight at last.

A quaint, old-world little place, nestling at the foot of a green hill, with the blue sea before it, bordered by a stretch of silvery sand and the tumble-down, picturesque old jetty, beside which a few brown-sailed fishing-boats lay moored.

It was all so familiar. It brought back to him those days when long ago he had seen this same scene, and his heart had been beating high with the old hope of seeing the girl he loved, who lived down there in one of those old, red-roofed houses from which the blue smoke was now curling up lazily into the sunny air.

They drove down the rather steep hill into the little place, and the wheels of the trap jolted over the rough cobblestones of the narrow streets.

To-day, as five years ago, and perhaps fifty before that, it was all the same. The red-brown nets hanging from the handrail of the old wooden bridge that spanned the noisy stream that ran through the middle of the village; the white-haired old fishermen who leaned over the bridge smoking their pipes in lazy enjoyment of the autumn time of life; the flaxen-haired children, with the young life leaping hotly in their veins, happy and careless, noisy and dirty, and none the worse for a little wholesome dirt on their chubby faces; and then the row of staid, old-fashioned, red-bricked houses, mellowed by time, the high Georgian doors, the prim windows looking out on to the street, and the gleam of the sea beyond the narrow street; and then—a slight young figure in white stepping out from the dusky shadow of one of the high old doorways—a sweet little face, shaded by a broad-brimmed hat.

"How pretty the girl is!" Pollie said; and then instinctively she looked at the man beside her, and understood in a flash.

The lost was found. It was Penelope Grant's grey eyes that were gazing at them in wonder and in joy; and then, as they saw the girl by Bertram Hollister's side, in sudden dread and terror.

Poor little soul! How her heart was beating now as the man she had loved so well and for so long came towards her through the sunshine!

## CHAPTER 12.

### The Tea-party.

POLLIE sat stolidly staring at the pony's ears. This meeting between the lovers so long parted was not for her or for any one else's eyes to see.

"Poor thing!" she murmured. Probably she was referring to the pony, who was being tormented by flies. Pollie flicked the flies away with a whip, and sighed.

How happy they were together again after these years of separation! How nice it must be to see the person one loved again! Pollie sighed again.

"Miss Green——"

"Oh, er—oh, yes!" Pollie said, starting violently. She looked down.

"Miss Green, this is Miss Grant."

Bertram Hollister's voice had altered strangely. Somehow Pollie thought he did not look exactly as he ought to have looked. She expected to see an expression of radiant happiness.

It was not there. Pollie felt vaguely troubled. Meanwhile, the pretty girl was looking up at her with troubled, questioning eyes.

"I—I am so glad!" Pollie stammered. "Not glad; that is—— I mean, of—of course, we were very much surprised, you know," she added, wondering inwardly if her mind had suddenly become unminged.

The troubled look in the girl's eyes seemed to deepen. She noted Pollie's confusion, and attributed it to the wrong cause. The joy seemed to have gone out of the pretty grey eyes, and they had become wonderfully sad.

"We were very surprised to see you, and so glad, of course," Pollie said. "It—it's a lovely day, isn't it? Of course, you will have such a lot to tell Mr. Hollister, and he will have such a lot to tell you, and I—oh, I've got to do some shopping!"

"Shopping?" Hollister asked wonderingly.

"Of course. Fish! I always buy fish when I come to Chadwick. Everyone buys fish at Chadwick. It—it is famous for its fish. It's such a good place for fish," Pollie went on quickly. "At—at home we can't catch any fish at all."

"There is no sea there!" Hollister said wonderingly.

"No; and that's why we don't fish. I'll go on as far as the jetty, and wait there, and then—I shall see you again," Pollie said to the girl.

"Idiot!" she said to herself as she touched the pony with the whip. "P. Green, you are an idiot! What on earth did you run off the line like that for? What ails you, my dear? You needn't lose your head suddenly because two



people are happy. Oh, dear, I wish— But it's no good wishing. I suppose everything will be all right some day."

"She is very, very pretty!" Penelope Grant said thoughtfully. "But is she not a little stranger?"

"She was surprised, naturally," Hollister said. "And you," the girl whispered softly—"and you, Bertram?"

"Yes, I was surprised, too," he said.

"And glad?"

"And glad," he said—"of course, glad!" He looked down at her. "You do not look a day older, Penelope," he said.

"I am—I am— How many years is it, older?"

"A good many years," he said. "Years usually bring changes. They seem to have brought none to you."

"None," she whispered. "And to you, Bertram?"

"Oh, to a man change must come! It is the natural law of things, I suppose."

The girl's eyes filled suddenly, and she turned her head away. And this was the meeting that she had prayed for, had lived for, and longed for! This was to the man to whom her heart had been faithful with its every beat for all these long years! He had forgotten her. His love for her was dead. He loved that beautiful girl who was here just now, who had been so strangely upset at this meeting.

"He—he must have told her about me, and I suppose she is just a little sorry for me, perhaps," the girl thought miserably.

"And you are still Penelope Grant?" he said. "You never married?"

"No, I never married," she said wearily. "And you—you are engaged?"

"Me? No, I am not engaged," he said.

"To that pretty girl, Miss Green?"

"No; I am not engaged to Miss Green. I have known her only a little while," he said.

He did not see the sudden brightening of her grey eyes, nor the flush that came into her face.

"Bertram, are you glad—glad to see me again?"

"Of course I am glad. I have been looking forward—you hardly know how I have looked forward—to seeing you again, Pen!"

"And you thought of me during all those years?"

"Always," he said, in a low voice.

The old fascination of her sweet presence was making itself felt again. The sound of her voice awoke old memories: seemed almost to reawaken the old love. And then he looked down at the sweet face, and for a moment Pollie's more beautiful face grew dim and indistinct.

This was the girl he had loved so fondly, the girl whose face had been for so long pictured in his mind. This was the girl who had filled his thoughts and his heart, whom he had come all those long, long miles to find!

And, meanwhile, Pollie, having entirely forgotten to purchase fish, sat in the little trap by the jetty and flicked flies off the pony's ears, and thought of their happiness and of her own

sadness, and wondered if one day there would be the same happy meeting for her with the man she loved.

"Of course, by this time she must think me a perfect fool!" Pollie said to herself. "So I am. Fancy losing my head like that!"

The girl with the grey eyes was approaching the pony-trap. She looked a little nervous and timid.

"Won't you—won't you put up the pony, and come in and have a cup of tea, Miss Green, before you drive home?" she said.

"I should like to," Pollie said. "How happy she must be!" she thought as she looked down.

"I wonder if she loves him, and if he loves her better than he ever loved me?" Miss Penelope Grant thought as she looked up. "How pretty she is! That is our house, that red-brick house at the corner. The stable is just behind. The groom is there, and he will take the pony," she said. "She is very pretty—beautiful!" Penelope murmured as Pollie drove towards the stable. "I think the most beautiful face I have ever seen!"

"It is," Hollister said enthusiastically; "and she is as sweet as she is beautiful."

Pollie gave the pony into the charge of the groom, and came round to the front of the house, and joined the others.

"It is so strange that we should find you here, after all!" Pollie said.

"After all?"

"I mean after—" Pollie began.

Bertram Hollister interposed quickly.

"Let me see! Did I ever meet your aunt, Pen?"

The girl shook her head.

"She came to live with me when father died," she said, with a little break in her voice. "She is"—she paused, and for a moment the sadness vanished from her face, and a gleam of fun came into her eyes—"she is very kind and good to me, but she—but you must not think that she is really ill," she added hurriedly, in an undertone.

They were delightful large rooms, old-fashioned rooms, with old-fashioned furniture that was redeemed from heaviness by the pretty chintz coverings and the fragrant bunches of flowers on the table.

Pollie looked round with approval. It was just the sort of home that she could have pictured for Penelope Grant.

"Miss Green—my aunt, Miss Drinkwater!"

Pollie turned quickly, as an enormous lady of middle age rose from her armchair.

"How do you do?" Pollie said politely.

"At any moment I may drop dead!" said Miss Drinkwater, in a deep voice. "Penelope told you, I suppose, our—our sad secret?"

"She—er—I—" Pollie stammered.

"It is well for everyone to know it," said Miss Drinkwater. And then, in a deep voice, she added: "At any moment I may drop dead!"

"I—I am very sorry to hear it!" Pollie said.

"It is a great affliction, but I bear up."

"This is Mr. Hollister," Penelope said. "Mr. Hollister—my aunt!"



Miss Drinkwater turned, and held out a fat hand to Bertram Hollister.

"You look healthy," she said, in an envious tone of voice. "I should not think that your heart was affected. You have a great deal to be thankful for. Consider my own sad case!" She sighed deeply. She was a tall woman, and immensely stout. "It is a great trial, but I bear it with fortitude."

Miss Drinkwater took out her pocket-handkerchief, and began to weep. Pollie sat on the edge of a chair, feeling as uncomfortable as she had ever felt in her life. For some moments nothing could be heard but the audible weeping of the afflicted lady.

Then came a jingling of cups, and a maid entered and laid the tea.

It was a substantial meal. No waferlike pieces of bread-and-butter and minute scraps of cake, but a good, solid, heavy, sit-down tea, with a dozen different things on the table.

During the whole of the meal Miss Drinkwater discussed her ailment. But Pollie noticed that everything within reach of Miss Drinkwater's fat arms disappeared as though by magic. Cakes, tarts, sandwiches melted away very quickly.

"I think I told you," Miss Drinkwater said. "It is very sad. I am greatly afflicted. At any moment— Four lumps, please to remember this time, Penelope. Last time you gave me but three. Sudden excitement is, you know, highly dangerous for me."

"I think I put in four last time, aunt," Penelope said timidly.

"You must not contradict me, child. Remember what the doctor said. Any sudden emotion, such as is produced by contradiction— Mr. Oliver, will you pass the seed-cake, if you please?"

"Mr. Hollister, aunt," Penelope said.

It was a large seed-cake; but it grew smaller and smaller, till it almost reached the vanishing-point, and then Miss Drinkwater sat back in her chair.

"Food is distasteful to me," she said. "After all, what is the use of eating, when at any moment—"

"Will you have another cup of tea, aunt?"

"No more, Penelope. The little I have had suffices me. I eat"—she turned to Hollister—"I eat like a bird, just a peck here, and a peck there."

"A bushel here, and a bushel there," Pollie thought, but she was too polite to say anything.

Miss Drinkwater waddled back to her chair.

"It is very hard," she said complainingly; "it unsettles one so. What is the use of my commencing a piece of fancy work? Who knows, I may never be able to finish it." She sighed, and wiped her eyes, and went on: "And this poor child! Think of her terrible position! With no relative in the world but myself, afflicted as I am, what is to become of her when I am dead and gone?" She dabbed her eyes, and sniffed. "When I am dead and gone, as I may

be at almost any moment, think of her position. Fatherless, motherless, auntless, who will there be to protect her, to look after her comforts? Think of her, in this big, lonely house, alone—alone in the world!"

The mental picture was too much for Miss Drinkwater; she broke down utterly, and sobbed convulsively.

"Aunt, you shouldn't worry yourself with these dreadful thoughts," Penelope said tenderly. "You must not; you will make yourself ill."

"I am ill—I am very ill. It does not matter if I am more or less ill. Nothing matters. I have made all my preparations. Everything is in order. Those—those" sniff, sniff—"those who come after me will find my poor little belongings all in order. Yes. I have swept"—sniff—"and garnished"—sniff—"and set my house in order. Oh, dear! You will forgive my emotion, Miss Grimes? I am thinking of this poor child, left alone, uncared for, unprotected." Sniff, sniff, sniff.

"Do you—you—er—take anything?" Pollie asked politely.

"Nothing. I am beyond help," said Miss Drinkwater, with intense satisfaction—"entirely beyond help. I trust, Penelope, that when I pass away, you—you may be spared the shock—"

"Aunt, don't!" Penelope whispered.

"I must. It is right that you should be prepared. I am not so selfish as to wish you to suffer a sudden shock by my decease. Miss Grimes, will you kindly come here?"

Pollie rose wonderingly.

"Give me your hand."

Pollie did so. Miss Drinkwater clasped it in her huge fat one, and pressed it to her side.

"Speak the truth. I can hear anything," she said, in a hollow voice. "You feel—what?"

"I—I don't know," Pollie stammered.

It seemed to her that she felt a sack of flour, tightly packed. But she supposed that this was not what Miss Drinkwater meant.

"Of course you do not know. How should you? It is my heart. Now—now you can understand the danger—"

"Oh, quite!" said Pollie. "It is awful!"

"Awful indeed! But I am resigned, I am prepared to go. I only think of this poor child, left—left—"

It was a melancholy entertainment. Pollie felt sincerely sorry for the pretty girl, who bore with her elderly relative's whims with such patience.

"I have something to ask you, Miss Drinkwater," she said.

Miss Drinkwater raised a fat hand.

"Spare me," she said—"spare me anything of the nature of a sudden shock!"

"I—I only—"

Pollie hesitated.

"Consider my feelings, my delicate state of health," said Miss Drinkwater.

"It is just what I am thinking of. You



"perfect quiet," said Pollie—"perfect quiet and rest."

"I do. I am glad you understand."

"And I was thinking how nice it would be for you to be alone, not to be worried or—or bothered about anything—simply alone."

"Ah!"

"And so I want you to let Miss Grant come home with me for a—"

Miss Drinkwater uttered a sudden shriek, and fell back in her chair, with her eyes closed.

"That's done it!" Pollie muttered.

Penelope sprang up, and ran to her aunt's side.

Restoratives were applied, the smelling-salts held to her nose, her podgy hands were chafed, and presently, with a deep sigh, Miss Drinkwater opened her eyes.

"I thought it was death!" she whispered.

"I thought death had at last come. Forgive me, Miss Jones—"

"Green. Though, of course, it doesn't matter," Pollie said amiably.

"Miss Green, forgive me. My weak state of health is alone to blame. I am stronger now. I—I think I can bear—"

"I was saying," Pollie said, "I want you to let Miss Grant come home with me for a week or two. It'll do her good—that is, of course, if she will come."

Penelope flashed a glance of gratitude towards Pollie. To go home with them, to be in the same house as Bertram, to see him each day, to—

Miss Drinkwater uttered a deep sigh.

"My niece is her own mistress. If it pleases her to leave me—"

"No, no, aunt! If you would rather I stayed," Penelope cried—"if you could not manage without me, dear, I will—"

"Nonsense!" Pollie said sharply. "She would be much better without you. What she needs is perfect rest and quietude. I understand this case, I had a—third cousin, she was just the same. The doctor said, 'Let her be quite alone, and she will live for many years.' I begged to be allowed to stay with her; but she was firm. She is alive now, and well. And that," Pollie added, "was thirty-five years ago."

"Indeed?" said Miss Drinkwater. "This is very interesting."

"It is," Pollie said. "I wept, but it was no good; I had to go. And she was all the better for it."

"And how old were you at the time, Miss James?"

"Green, thank you," Pollie said. "About—about fifteen, I suppose. I was quite young."

"You would have been, thirty-five years ago," Miss Drinkwater said thoughtfully—"yes. And she is alive now? Well, I would be the last, the very last, to stand in Penelope's light. I would not deny the dear child one moment of innocent pleasure. But I think it but right to say, to remind you, that in the midst of your gaieties, in the midst of your pleasures, the

dread and awful summons may come. Child, do you wish to go?"

"I—I should like to, if—if it would—"

"Go, then," said Miss Drinkwater—"go!" She waved her hand and sank back in her chair. "I shall have a bad night, but I do not complain. I have learned to suffer in silence and solitude. Go, go, child! Do not think of me. I—I will bear up alone—alone!"

Miss Drinkwater wept bitterly.

"But if you don't want—" Penelope began.

"Go and put your hat on, and pack up something," Pollie said. "I quite understand this case. Your aunt is better alone. I remember the case of my own uncle. He—"

"I think you said third cousin just now," Miss Drinkwater said.

"Of course. But we always called him uncle for short," said Pollie. "You can't go about calling a person 'third cousin,' can you? For instance, you wouldn't say, 'Third cousin, please pass the salt,' or anything of that kind. No we always called her—"

"Him," corrected Miss Drinkwater.

"Yes, of course," said Pollie hurriedly. "We always called him Aunt Jane, it sounds so much nicer."

Considering that she was a young lady, and was going to spend some days under the same roof that sheltered the man she loved, Miss Penelope Grant was a surprisingly short time in arraying herself and packing up the things she would need.

In scarcely twenty minutes she was down again, looking, as Pollie thought, the picture of youthful beauty in a silver-grey dress, and with her pretty face shaded by a large black hat.

"The box can be sent on by train," Pollie said. "It'll be a bit of a squeeze in the trap. But it isn't very far, and it will be all right."

"We part," Miss Drinkwater said—"we part, dear Penelope, perhaps to meet no more in this world."

"Oh, aunt, don't!"

"Perhaps to meet no more in the flesh. Perhaps when you look upon me again, it will be but the useless, lifeless clay that you will see, the poor husk, when the spirit has fled. But you will know, dear child, that in my last moments—boo, hoo!—in my last moments I—I thought of you, I prayed for you. Be happy, enjoy yourself, and I—I will bear my agony alone."

"Cheerful old party," Pollie said when they were outside. "What's her trouble?"

"She—she thinks she has a bad heart."

Pollie thought of the huge tea, the mountains of cake and bread-and-butter, and jam, and tarts, and sandwiches Miss Drinkwater had tucked away.

"I thought it was consumption," she said thoughtfully. "You never know. But what resignation, what patience, what an angelic character!"

"And you really want to come?" She slipped her hand through Penelope's arm.

"Oh, I do! I—I am so grateful!" the girl whispered.



But Bertram Hollister, sitting on the very uncomfortable seat at the back of the trap with considerable difficulty, wore a troubled look on his face, that was not due entirely to the rather unsafe position he was occupying.

### CHAPTER 13.

#### Something Wrong.

THERE was something wrong between them. Pollie saw it, and wondered. She remembered the look of eagerness she had seen on Hollister's face that night, when for a moment he had thought that she was Penelope Grant. Why, if he had been so eager to see her then, if he had been so deeply in love with her then—why was he changed now?

Pollie puzzled her head and wondered.

And Penelope! During that evening Pollie glanced towards the girl, and saw that the pretty face was pale and troubled and sad—saw that the mouth was drawn down pitifully, and that the grey eyes were misty with tears.

"These two," Pollie said to herself, "have been in love with one another all these years—have been looking forward to seeing one another and now—I don't think some people know what they do want."

"No, go and sit down and talk to Miss Grant."

She was at the piano, and Hollister had crossed the room to her side to turn the leaves of her music for her. Perhaps she spoke a little louder than she had meant to in the moment of irritation; at any rate, her words carried, and reached the ears of the girl beside the fireplace.

She started, her face burned for a moment, and then turned paler than before. And then the pathetic little mouth was tightly closed, and a look of determination and courage came into the grey eyes.

Bertram Hollister went to bed that night, not to sleep, but to think and wonder. The Penelope of to-night was a Penelope he had never known before. She had talked rapidly, had laughed loudly, had joked with him. And he, blind that he was, had not seen that all her gaiety was on the surface only—had not seen that the laughter was but sound, and that neither the eyes nor the lips laughed.

"She doesn't care for me, that is very certain," he muttered aloud; and, in spite of the feeling of relief that she did not, he yet felt worry and aggrieved. It hurt his vanity to think that Penelope could ever cease to love him. "I wish she hadn't come. Yet it was like Pollie's kind heart to ask her. Poor little Pen! What a life for her with that awful woman! Poor little Pen! Bother! Why should I pity her? I dare say she is happy enough. At any rate, she doesn't love me; that is something. She'll find some better fellow, and marry him, and be happy, and— Bother! Why can't I go to sleep?"

Pen was up very early the following morning—even earlier than her hostess. The garden, fresh

from the dew, and fragrant with flowers, called to her and she went out into the early sunshine. "Hallo! Tink I had heard ob yo'. Yo' Miss Gran'?"

"Yes. And you?"

"Oh, I Coosha! I hope yo' bery well!" Coosha offered her hand, and shook hands gravely. "Yo' 'ceedingly nice-looking young woman!" she said.

Pen blushed.

"Yo' got de same colour hair as Pollie Green; yo' a blonde, I am a brunette—dat's de difference between us. How long yo' come for to stay?"

"I—I don't know," Pen faltered. "Not—not for very long!"

"Ho! Ain't you de young woman dat Mister 'ollister used to be in lub wid?"

Used to be in love with! The words sent a pang to the tender, aching little heart.

"I—I think so," she said sadly.

"Bery sorry for yo'," said Coosha—"berly sorry! Dat young man not wort bodering yo' head about. Him fall bery bad in lub wid Pollie Green now."

Pen was trembling from head to foot. She turned her face away so that Coosha should not see the stricken look in her white face.

"Yes; dat young man bery ridiculus in lub wid Pollie Green; him follow her 'bout like a little poodle dog. Bery ridiculus dat behaviour, I tink. Neber mind, don't yo' worry yo'self; dere plenty betterer-looking young men dan dat one. I don't tink much ob him myself. Dere a bery pertickler nice parson here dat bery much betterer-looking dan dat ole Hollister. I tink yo' might do worser dan marry de parson."

"I—I don't want to marry anybody!"

"Ho, dat settle de question, den—yo' going to be de old maid?"

"Yes, I—I suppose so!" Pen said miserably.

"Bery good; den when dat Hollister marry Pollie Green, yo' be de auntie," said Coosha.

"Course, I don't tink Pollie Green pertickler in lub wid Hollister. But she got to marry someone; and her young man, 'im turn out a bad lot. Broke into de 'ouse and stole de spoons and de forks. Ho, a bery bad lot dat young man hab turn out, for certain sure, and, nacherally, Pollie Green won't hab no more to do wid him, so bery likely she marry dat ole Hollister one ob dese fine days, I tink."

Coosha rattled on under the belief that she was making herself very agreeable; and constituting herself very pleasant and cheerful society.

Pollie came down presently into the garden, and, seeing the two girls together, came towards them.

"Oh, Coosha has introduced herself" she cried. "Where were you last night, miss?"

"I out 'long wid a gen'man," said Coosha, "on pertickler business."

Pollie frowned.

"Who! were you out with?"

"Gen'man de name ob Jones. We went rat-hunting 'long wid de dogs. Cotched forty-two rats. Bery agreeable and amusing ebening."

"You disgraceful child!" Pollie said. "You



"ought to be ashamed of yourself, Coosha! You are getting too old for that kind of thing. And then think of the poor rats!"

"Yo' bery ridiclus young woman!" said Coosha.

Pollie put her hand through Pen's arm.

"Why, you are shivering!" she said. "You aren't cold, are you?"

Pen shook her head.

"No, Only—only— Nothing! No, I am not cold," she said.

Half an hour later Mr. Bertram Hollister, glaring moodily out of his bed-room window, with a hairbrush in each hand, saw as pretty a picture as a man might wish to see. Two fair heads, two pretty faces, and two slender figures in white among the flowers. And Bertram Hollister stood looking till the tall holly-hocks hid them from sight; and then, with a groan, he went on brushing his hair.

## CHAPTER 14.

### Pollie Speaks Her Mind.

IT was very evident to Pollie, as the days slipped by, that in the case of Bertram Hollister and Penelope Grant the course of true love was running anything but smoothly. Penelope went about with a white, sad face, from which the roses seemed to have flown. There was a pitiful droop to the pretty red lips, and a tired, worn expression in the grey eyes. Pollie's heart ached for the girl, and at the same time grew hot with indignation against Hollister. She had always liked Hollister—had liked him very much until now. But now, with all her sympathy for Pen, she said a good many hard things of the young man to herself.

One morning Pollie walked through the wide, wild gardens. She was looking for Pen. Bertram Hollister had gone out, seemingly in an ill-temper, and Pollie wondered if there had been any quarrel between him and Pen.

"I can't make it out. I can't make it out," she muttered. "He was so eager, so anxious to find her. He loved her for so many years, and now, when they might be so happy—now—There seemed to be some misunderstanding, some coldness between them. I wish I could put it right. Poor little Pen! I—I wish I had their chance of happiness," Pollie added to herself. "I wish he—he would come back again."

She sighed deeply, then paused to listen. From the shabby old summer-house came an unmistakable sound—the sound of low, heartbroken sobbing. Pollie went forward gently and peeped in through the doorway. It was Pen. The girl was lying face downward on the old seat, her face buried in her hands, and as Pollie watched she saw the slender shoulders shake with the violence of the girl's grief.

"Pen—Pen dear, what is it?"

Penelope Grant started violently, and lifted a tear-stained, woebegone face.

"Oh—oh, I didn't know!" she gasped. "I—I thought—"

"Tell me, Pen, why are you crying? Why are you so miserable?" Pollie said, slipping her arm around the girl. "I thought you might be so happy. I was so anxious to find you. And—and now—"

"Anxious to find me!" Pen cried. "You—you—"

A fresh flood of tears came.

"Oh, please go!" she cried. "Don't—don't stay with me! I am so ashamed! I—I shall be better presently. And—and please, may I go home?"

"Go home?" Pollie cried. "Are you crying because of your aunt?"

Pen shook her head.

"No; not—not that. Only— Oh, please, don't ask me!"

"But I mean to," Pollie said. "I want to help you, if I can."

"You—you can't. It is you—you who—"

Pen broke off. "Oh, Miss Green, don't—"

"Miss Green?" Pollie asked. "Pen, have I done something to offend you?"

"No, no, but—but— Oh, I can't bear it; it breaks my heart! I—I loved him so!" Pen moaned. "All these years I—I only lived to see him again. I—I knew that one day he would come back, and—and now—"

"Now he has come back, and you are as miserable as you can be!" Pollie said indignantly. "Have you quarrelled with him?"

Pen shook her head.

"Well, what is the matter, then?"

"I—I can't tell you!" Pen gasped.

"Now, look here," Pollie said seriously. "I am a very determined person. I mean to know what is the matter. If you don't tell me, I am afraid I shall have to shake you 'till you do! I am not going to leave you until I hear everything. Can't you understand I want to help you, if I can?"

"B—but you can't: you—you are the last person on earth—"

"Oh, thank you! I didn't know that I was the last person on earth. I thought there were a few others knocking about."

"I—I mean the last person on earth to help me," Penelope sighed.

"Oh, I suppose I don't look reliable!" Pollie said. "But I mean well. Now, tell me. Don't be silly any more. Tell me all about everything, and trust me to help you, if I can. Is it about Mr. Hollister?"

"Ye-es!" Pen gasped.

"You have quarrelled?"

"No—oh, no!"

"Well, what is it, then?"

"You—you," Pen said, with a sob; "it—it is you!"

"Me?" Pollie cried. "Me? Why, what ever have I done?"

"Made—made him lo-ove you!"

Pollie sat staring at the girl open-eyed.



"My dear child," she said, "you are a very ridiculous person! Mr. Hollister does not love me—never did; never thought of me for a moment. He is a very decent chap; we get on well together; but love—Don't be absurd!"

Pen opened her grey eyes.

"But—but he does love you; I know he does!" she cried.

"Nothing of the sort," Pollie said sharply. "Didn't he go away, years and years ago, deeply in love with you? Wasn't he faithful to you all the years he was away? Wasn't his first thought, when he returned to England, of you? Didn't he try to find you—do everything he could possibly think of to find you? All the years he never thought of another woman—never cared a hang for any other girl; and now, because I tried to help him find you, so that you should both be happy, you get that absurd idea into your head."

"But don't—don't you love him?" Pen cried, in amazement.

"Love him? Certainly not! I like him; he's a decent sort. As to love—" Pollie paused abruptly. "No, I don't love him—never did, and never shall—and he doesn't love me. You have been simply making yourself as wretched as you can, all for nothing; and, seeing you look so miserable, I suppose he has come to the conclusion that you are unhappy because he has come back."

"Oh, Pollie!" Pen gasped.

"Oh, so it is Pollie now!" Pollie said. "You are beginning to be sensible, are you?"

"Oh, if you knew—if you knew how happy you have made me! I—I thought that he loved you, and you loved him, and—that you would marry him, and—"

"I said before, you are a very ridiculous person," Pollie said. "Now, if you take my advice—" She paused for a moment. Through the opening in the summer-house she could see Bertram Hollister's tall figure striding up the drive towards the house. "If you will take my advice you will just run in and bathe your face, and put some powder on your nose; it is very red, my dear, and young men don't like red noses—in girls, at any rate. And then—well, then come down to the morning-room. I shall be there."

"Pollie, don't—don't go yet! Let me kiss you!" Pen cried. "Oh, my dear, I have been a wicked girl to believe that he didn't love me any longer! I have been wicked to think that you brought me here to—to triumph over me!"

"You thought that?" Pollie cried.

"Ye-es," said Pen, holding down her face with shame.

"If I was the best-tempered person in the world, and the most angelic-natured, I think I should be inclined to box your ears," Pollie said. "Triumph over you, you silly little donkey!"

"I am so ashamed!" Pen sighed.

"So you ought to be. But I forgive you."

Now, cut along to the house. If you see Mr. Hollister, dodge him, for goodness' sake! Don't let him see your red nose. You never know, a red nose might part you for life. Be sure to dodge him!" Pollie called out after her.

Pollie walked back thoughtfully to the house. "Idiot!" she said aloud to herself; but she was not thinking of Pen at this moment.

Mr. Hollister was leaning against the wall, just outside the morning-room, smoking a cigar, and wearing a very moody look on his face. The position was getting unbearable to him. As an honourable man, he felt that he was treating Pen shamefully. As a man very much in love, he felt that he couldn't act in any other way than in the way he was.

He had loved her faithfully and devotedly for years, and now this other girl, with her lovely race, had come into his life, and the old love had grown faint and indistinct, like a dream after one's awakening.

"What am I to do?" he muttered to himself. "I couldn't be such a cad as to ask her while Pen is here. I must go away. Why did we ever try and find Pen? Poor little Pen!" He groaned. "I'm a brute!" he muttered. "Why—why couldn't I have found Pen when I first came home? If I had found her at once—" He paused.

The other girl was coming towards him, and, with the sunshine on her face and in her hair. Bertram Hollister thought he had never seen anything so beautiful in his life. The regrets and self-condemnation of a moment ago were gone. How could he resist loving this girl, the most lovely his eyes had ever seen? How could any man resist?

Pollie was conscious that her heart was beating a little faster than usual. There was something in Bertram Hollister's eyes that proved that Pen had some justification for her belief.

Pollie felt her face flushing, and was very angry with herself.

"Anyhow, I'll do it," she muttered, between her teeth—"I'll do it! Mr. Hollister, I want to speak to you."

"Yes?" he said eagerly.

"In the morning-room, please," said Pollie, with dignity.

He opened the door for her, and she marched in, with head erect, feeling more of a coward than she had ever felt in her life.

"Sit down," Pollie said grandly.

"Must I?"

Bertram Hollister looked at her.

"Certainly. You will be more comfortable. Besides you may faint at the news I am going to break to you, and then you will not have so far to fall."

Pollie sat down, and folded her hands, and looked at him gravely.

If Bertram Hollister loved her—and Pollie had an uneasy suspicion that he did—it was sheer nonsense, of course, merely a passing fancy. He had been for so long faithful to Pen that any other love that might come to him



could be no more than the passing fancy of the moment.

"I am waiting," he said patiently.

"Yes, I know. Well—" Pollie paused.

"I have been talking to Pen," she said abruptly.

Bertram Hollister started.

"Pen is a foolish young woman," Pollie went on. "Of course, loving her as you do, you may not agree with me."

He felt his face burning.

"I found her crying in the summer-house," Pollie said. "The summer-house," she added, "is a disgrace; you may have noticed it?"

"Yes, I have," he said.

"For a long time she would not tell me what she was crying about; but at last she did."

He felt his face growing hot.

"Yes?" he said, in a scarcely audible whisper.

"This is the part where you may faint," Pollie said gravely.

"I—I shall try not to."

"Pen had got a most extraordinary idea into her head. Above all things, I must not be interrupted," Pollie said quickly. "You quite understand me? If you attempt to interrupt me, I shall get up and go out. Very well, then. Pen had a most extraordinary idea in her head, and she has been worrying herself ill about it. She had an idea"—Pollie paused—"an idea that you were deeply in love with me, and that I was very much in love with you."

"She—" began Hollister.

"I don't want any remarks, please," Pollie said grandly. "I told her that you loved no one but herself; that you had loved her years ago, when you left England; that all the years you were away you thought of no one but of her; that when you came back to England, the very first thing you did was to try and find her; that you sought for her everywhere—"

"I haven't done," Pollie said. "I said that I knew the great wish of your life—the wish that you had had for years—was to make her your wife—"

"But—"

"And then I told her that I had not the very smallest idea of falling in love with you; that I thought you were a very decent sort; but love—Of course, never such an idea had ever entered my head; that, in fact, I—I—well, you know," Pollie went on, with suddenly burning cheeks. "There is only one person in the world I shall ever care for, and very likely I shall never see him again—at any rate, there could never, never be anyone else! So, you see, it—it was all a great mistake; but it was very real to poor little Pen—Mr. Hollister."

He had grown white. He sat silent and rigid, making no attempt to speak.

He understood; she had devised this, so that she could give him his answer even before he should have asked her what was in his heart;

she had done this to save—he understood—to save Pen, and to save himself.

"Of course," Pollie went on, in a lower voice, "it was all so absurd, but it was all so real to her. She loves you; she has been so loving and faithful all these years, never thinking of anyone else; only living, only counting the days and weeks and the months and years, till you came back to her again."

"Oh, you ought to be glad that there is a girl with such a true heart as little Pen—a girl who loves you so much! You will be very, very happy with her in the future, won't you?" She rose suddenly, and held out her hand to him. "And—and you will make her happy," she added earnestly, "won't you?"

Bertram Hollister gripped her hand with a pressure that was painful.

"I will do my best," he whispered, "to—to be worthy of her! Thank you! I shall never forget—"

"I—I always said you were a decent sort," Pollie gasped, beaming down on him. "Hush! I think—Leave go my hand! She is coming!"

As the door opened, and Pen came in, Pollie slipped out through the French window into the garden, and walked rapidly away.

"There," she whispered—"there! That's over, thank goodness! They will be very happy—very, very happy, and I"—she stooped and picked up a small snail that had strayed into danger on the footpath, and put it gently down on the flower-bed, an action that proved that she had not the faintest idea of gardening—"and I—Oh, I shall be an old maid!"

## CHAPTER 15.

### A Caller for Coosha.

GENERAL BURGUM, Coosha's guardian, who for years had lived in India, wired that he was calling on Sir Francis in order to take over the charge of his ward.

When he arrived at the house he was in a very bad temper—for four reasons. One was because he hated railway travelling, another was because he hated the country, the third was because he had come to make arrangements about Coosha's future, and it worried him; and the fourth was because he was always in a bad temper.

"Rotten hole!" he said. "Filthy roads, beastly trees everywhere! Why the deuce can't everybody live in town—eh?"

Not even the sight of the gardens pleased him.

"Stinking flowers!" he muttered. "A lot of beastly, damp trees! I'll get my rheumatism back, as sure as I'm a born sinner! And what I am going to do with that confounded nigger brat, hanged if I know! But I've got to take



her away. Can't leave her here, quartered here, all her life. Green's a fool to have put up with her so long. Wish some confounded idiot 'd take her off my hands altogether!"

"Well, my dear, here I am—here I am!"

The sight of Pollie's pretty face made General Burgum forget his bad humour for a minute or two. No one could look on Pollie Green without a feeling of pleasure.

"We are very glad to see you," Pollie said.

"Don't believe it for a moment! Crusty old beggar no one's glad to see. Can't think what you live in this rotten place for—eh? Where's the—the—"

"Coosha?"

"Yes. Forgot her hanged name for a moment. Coosha! What a name! Why didn't they call her Ann or Jane or Mary, or anything? Hang it, what am I going to do with her—eh?"

"Do with her?" Pollie asked, in sudden alarm.

"Do with her—yes, do with her?" he said irritably—"do with her?"

"You aren't going to—to take her away?" Pollie gasped.

"Ain't I? You're wrong. I am; that's what I came for. No, hang it, I can't leave her quartered here all her life! Green's been very kind, nice fellow—very kind; but, hang it, I've made up my mind! I'm taking that young woman back to London to-night!"

"Oh, oh! But—you—you won't?" Pollie cried in distress. "Poor Coosha! You—you can't!"

"Can't I—eh? Won't I—eh? You see! Yes, confound it, that's what I'm here for! Wouldn't have come all these beastly miles for nothing, would I? No. I've got to do my duty. My duty is to look after that young woman. I'm going to. Don't want to hear another word. I'm adamant—adamant, madam!" General Burgum blew out his cheeks. "Get everything packed—everything packed. She goes to-night!"

"It'll break her heart!" Pollie said.

"I'll break her neck if I have any of her confounded nonsense!" roared the general. "Heart, indeed! Pooh, pooh, madam! Stuff and non-sense! I tell you"—he banged his fist on the table—"I tell you, she goes to-night!"

General Burgum felt himself under a deep obligation to Sir Francis Green. Sir Francis Green had taken Coosha off his hands for something like four years, during which time the general was exceedingly glad to be rid of his charge. Now, when a gentleman like General Burgum feels under a debt of gratitude to anyone he shows it by getting into a very bad temper, and being very testy and difficult to put up with.

"Horrible old grouser!" Pollie muttered. "He can't mean to take Coosha! It will break her heart! Poor Coosha!"

It was not often Coosha excited pity, but this evening Pollie could have wept at the mere thought of her. Coosha in some London lodgings, penned up, pining for fresh air; Coosha growing thin, and—No, not pale.

Coosha couldn't do that. Coosha slowly pining away, and perhaps dying, in her uncongenial surroundings, longing vainly for the fresh air and the sunshine and the free, wild life she had been used to, longing most of all, perhaps, for her—Pollie Green.

Pollie wept at the bare thought, and then went to try and find Coosha to break the news to her, but of Coosha there was never a sign to be seen.

"Where on earth has she gone to?" Pollie muttered. "Mrs. Sinkinson, have you seen Coosha?"

"No, I ain't, and don't want to!" said Mrs. Sinkinson, who was not romantic.

"Coosha is—is going to leave us," Pollie said.

"Good job!" said Mrs. Sinkinson. "Perhaps there will be some peace in the place."

"You have no heart!" Pollie said.

"Maybe," said Mrs. Sinkinson, basting the joint; "but I've got nerves, which is worse."

In the drawing-room Sir Francis, in an agony of anticipation, was talking to General Burgum.

Pollie came in at that moment and drew her father aside.

"Have you persuaded him, daddy, to let poor Coosha stay?" she asked anxiously.

Sir Francis looked worried.

"My dear, General—er—General Burgum is a somewhat difficult—that is to say, a decidedly difficult person to persuade. He has an idea it is his duty to take Coosha away. I am sure he does not want her, but—but when a man like that gets an idea that to do something is a duty he will do it, no matter how unpleasant it may prove to himself and everyone else. I am hoping, my darling, that after dinner I may—" Sir Francis paused. "I think, my darling, that if we had two or three bottles of the '74 port we might possibly get him to listen to reason."

"He shall have six if he will let Coosha stay!" Pollie said.

"No, not six, my darling. The stock is getting very low, and it will be impossible to replace. I think one may possibly put him in a better frame of mind."

Mrs. Sinkinson, half roasted by the kitchen fire, came to the door. She had the usual wisp of colourless hair across her perspiring forehead, her nose was decorated with a large black smudge, her sleeves were rolled up. She looked hot and angry. Poor woman, she had much to contend with!

"Dinner!" she said briefly. "An' you'd best hurry, because what with all them saucepans going at once I couldn't get the plates proper warm." She raised her hand, and wiped the black smudge from her nose right across her face, and shook the wisp of hair out of her eyes.

A few minutes later, General Burgum was grunting over his soup, and expressing his opinion of it in a low, growling undertone.

"Hogwash! The stuff's lukewarm! Pah! Living in the country this is! Gimme London!"

"I am afraid," said Pollie, "that you will find Coosha very troublesome."



"Better not try it with me!" he growled. "I know 'em—know how to manage 'em. Commanded a Sepoy regiment once. Bah! Better not try any tricks with me!"

"He's a hateful old pig!" Pollie thought. "Poor Coosha!"

He growled and grumbled over his fish.

"Beastly stuff's cold, and not half boiled! Not that infernal railway journey before me!"

It was one of the most uncomfortable meals Pollie had ever sat down to. Certainly it was not well cooked. Mrs. Sinkinson considered she had done her duty when the food was no longer raw. There was an excuse for her, perhaps, as she waited at table as well.

"No gals for me!" she said. "I don't want no gals worriting. Leave me to myself, and I can manage."

"Avo a pertater?" she said to the general, thrusting the vegetable-dish over his shoulder and round under his face.

"Er—what? What's that?" he gasped, starting back.

"Pertater," said Mrs. Sinkinson.

"Take 'em away! Never touch 'em, beastly things!" said the general.

"Better'n you eats 'em!" said Mrs. Sinkinson, holding up.

"What does the woman say—eh?" the general asked Pollie.

"I said," shouted Mrs. Sinkinson, "as your betters eat 'em! And if it's because you don't eat 'em so's you don't get fat, you'd better try somethink else!"

"Mrs. Sinkinson," said Sir Francis hurriedly, "the—the joint. I think you—"

"Oh, ah, the joint! And if I didn't forget all about it!" said Mrs. Sinkinson. "And like as not the cat's been at it all the while, me leaving it on the table."

Mrs. Sinkinson re-entered with the joint.

"Just caught it getting on the table, but it ain't touched it," she said as she put it down before the host. "Law, fancy me forgetting all about it like that! If I was you," she said confidentially, "I'd cut it there." She put her finger on the joint to indicate the place. "Now, I've clean forgot the 'orseradish."

She hurried out of the room.

"Mrs. Sinkinson," said Sir Francis, "is a very worthy woman. Ahem!" He paused. "She is—is hardly a servant."

"Relation?" asked General Burgum.

"No, no; a villager. Left by her husband in reduced circumstances."

"Don't wonder her husband left her under any circumstances," said the general.

"He died—," began Sir Francis.

"Don't wonder," said the general. "Enough to make him."

"Leaving her with three young children to bring up, and as she had practically nothing, we thought—at least, Pollie thought—"

"I ain't 'ad time to scrape it up," said Mrs. Sinkinson, coming into the room with the horseradish in its natural condition on a plate; "but

brought it up, as I thought them as likes it can scrape off all they want."

So the dinner went on. Mrs. Sinkinson was a little more outrageous than usual. She did not like General Burgum, as was evident by the fact that each time she passed him she pulled a face behind his back.

"Yes," said General Burgum, referring to Coosha, "she'll pack up and come. I've got my duty to think of. I ought to see her grow up."

"She—she has grown a good deal since you saw her last," Pollie said timidly.

"I've got to see to her future. And how can I do that if she ain't with me?"

"But she is happy here, and will miss—"

"Pooh! Miss! everyone misses something or other at some time or other. Besides, I've made arrangements. I am engaging a woman, sort of housekeeper, sort of governess, and thingumbob, all combined. Good, capable person; been a matron in a lunatic asylum. I'd like to see Coosha trying tricks with her."

"But—but—" Pollie said.

"I'm going to take her," General Burgum said, banging his hand down upon the table. "I'm going to—"

"Pudden?" asked Mrs. Sinkinson, handing a plate over his shoulder.

"Stuffing! No; never eat the stuff—never—Ow! Yow! How—"

With a yell like the bellow of an infuriated bull, General Burgum suddenly rose into the air. He rose with such violence that the pudding and the plate it was on were shot upwards, and Mrs. Sinkinson, took attack, as she explained afterwards, was hurled flat against the wall. Meanwhile, General Burgum, having risen several feet into the air, came down again with a crash that set every glass on the table dancing.

"What is it—is it?" roared the general. "What"—he glared at the seat of his chair, but there was nothing there to account for his sudden activity; then he looked suspiciously at Mrs. Sinkinson—"what's this mean—eh? What's this mean?" he roared. "Who did that?"

Sir Francis rose, and came round the table anxiously.

"My dear general—"

"Dear general, sir, be hanged, sir! I—I've been stabbed, I tell you—stabbed, wounded, sir—abominably wounded! I—I tell you something stabbed me! Hanged if I know"—he looked at the chair, passed his hand over it, then life! the chair, and looked underneath—"hanged if I know! Couldn't have been a pain, sudden illness of some sort," he added nervously, turning white—"sort of—of seizure! Remember Tom Criakwell—dead now—sitting at dinner, just like I was sitting there, then suddenly had a seizure! Most extraordinary thing! Sprang up, screamed, fainted, created consternation. 'Pon my soul— Hanged if I can make it out! He was never the same man after. Died and was buried. Within four months widow married



a man in the Woods and Forests Department." The general wiped his forehead with a table-napkin. "Never had anything like it in my life," he muttered. "Must have it seen into. Consult first-rate man on my return. Don't like it! Hanged if I like it! What's that—eh?"

"Pudden!" said Mrs. Sinkinson. "You got some on your left shoulder. I were going to wipe it off."

"Jam-pudding on my shoulder?" The general turned red. "Confounded jam-pudding on my shoulder! This comes of living in the—Yow! Wow! How—"

Once more the general leaped wildly into the air.

"Lor' save and preserve us!" shrieked Mrs. Sinkinson. "I never see such a excitable old person! Fair takes my nerves!"

"I insist—I swear," shouted the general—"I swear some demon, some—" He paused, dashed at the chair, and wrenched it up and flung it aside, just in time to see the disappearing end of the long steel spike that Coosha was manipulating from the cellar beneath.

As he looked, the spike disappeared, and then the general exploded.

"Green, you—you saw this—this outrage. Who—"

"I am afraid—" said Sir Francis. "Yes, I—I saw. She is—ahem!—very high-spirited, very full of pleasantries, like—"

"P-p-pleasantries!" stuttered the general. "You—you call this a—a pleasantry—this—By the living George, sir, do you know that I am shockingly wounded? Do you realise—"

"I am very sorry indeed. I cannot understand—"

"You—you would if you had been sitting here. Pleasantries! Where is she—where is she? Produce her at once! I say pro—"

At this moment the door opened, and Coosha, with a particularly innocent and pleasant expression of countenance, advanced into the room.

"Coosha, your—your guardian is here" Pollie whispered.

"Yes, you—you black viper!" shouted the general. "Your guardian is here—"

"Don't tink yo' bery politeful to a young lady," said Coosha. "How yo' do, guardian? I hope yo' bery well, as it leabes me at presen'!"

"Do—do you know what you've done, you—you daughter of black sin, you? Do—do you know you've wounded me abominably with your infernal—"

"I beg dat yo' 'scuse me," said Coosha politely. "I don't quite understand what de conversation am about—"

"I was sitting on that chair—" roared the general.

"Oh, I hope dat yo' haben rose up 'cause I come into de room!" said Coosha. "Please yo' sit down again. We don't hab no ceremonies in dis house."

"I tell you I was sitting on that chair, when you—when you—I understand that it was you—"

thrust that abominable wire— But—but I will make you regret it, young woman! I'll alter your ways, I promise you!" The general blew out his cheeks and gobbled to himself. "Mrs. Sturgeon, the lady I have engaged, will—will put some common-sense into your head, I'll warrant! Ha, ha! We'll see if you'll play these pranks in future!"

"Dat ole gentleman hab a fit presen'ly, by-me-by, sure as his name am Bungum."

"Coosha," Pollie said, "the—the general has come to take you away—"

"What's dat? Come to—to— What's dat yo' say?" Coosha gasped.

"Come to take you away, Coosha!" Pollie said tearfully. "But, oh, Coosha, it is very, very wrong of you to—"

"What de dickens yo' talking 'bout, Pollie Green? I tink yo' talking out ob de back ob yo' neck! Take—take me away from dis place?"

"Yes," said the general, "take you away from here, miss, and have you taught manners, be gad—manners and behaviour! Take you to London to-night! That's why I am here."

Coosha stood staring first at one and then at the other.

"I—I don't tink I quite understan' dis business," she said. "Yo'—yo' going to take me away from—from dis place, away from Sir Francis and Pollie Green, and—and eberyting?"

"I am; so make up your mind to it, young woman!" the general said grimly. "I am going to take you back to London with me to-night. So the best thing you can do is to go and pack up what you will need to take with you; the rest of your belongings can be sent on afterwards."

Coosha stood looking about her in a helpless manner.

"I don't tink," she gasped, "dat I quite understan' what yo' say! Yo'—yo' going to take me 'way from Sir Francis, 'way from his house, 'way from Pollie Green, to—to London?"

"I am!" said the general.

"Oh, Coosha!" Pollie sobbed.

"My poor child," Sir Francis said, "the general is your guardian, and he feels that he should now have you more under his immediate observation. We have asked him to let you stay, but—"

"But I won't! That's flat. I have my duty to perform," said the general.

Coosha turned to him slowly.

"Let me 'stinkily understan' what yo' intention am," she said slowly. "Yo'—yo' going to take me 'way from dis house to-night to London wid yo'?"

"Certainly! And in London you shall be put under the care of Mrs. Sturgeon, an excellent woman, who has had a lifelong experience with—ahem!—with refractory characters, and—"

"Now, yo' listen to de remark dat I hab to make!" said Coosha. "If yo' take me 'way from dis house, do yo' know what I do?"



"You'll behave yourself," he said.  
 "I shall take de big knife, and I cut yo' throat de bery first night dat I get de opportunity!" said Coosha.

## CHAPTER 16.

### Coosha Departs.

"EH? What?" gasped the general.  
 "I cut yo' throat, and cut yo' head off! And I do de same to dat ole Mrs. Turgeon. Den I get de knife and I stick him in yo' chest, and I wiggle it round and round like dis!"  
 "Coosha," Pollie gasped, "put that knife down!"

"Bery sorry to disoblige," said Coosha, "but I ain't going to do nothing ob de kind. I going to take dis knife 'long wid me, to settle dat ole beast de first opportunity!"

"Be-be George," gasped the general, "the black fiend looks as if she would do it!"

"I am very much afraid," said Pollie, "that she will!"

"You—you mean to say—to say she'll murder me?"

"I should not be at all surprised if she did," said Pollie, in a matter-of-fact voice.

"'Pon my soul!" gasped the general. "Put that knife down, will you? Confound you!"

"Sha'n't!" said Coosha. "I take dis knife to make a wiggly-waggly hole in yo' tumnick de first opportunity!"

"Put it down!" roared the general.

"Yah!" yelled Coosha, brandishing the knife, and making a fiendish face at him. "Yah! I hab yo' life, sure as de gun, yo' ole sinner—I hab yo' life! Yah! Hoo! Yah!"

"Put it down—put it down!" bellowed the general. "Good James, look at her! She'll—'Pon my soul, it's positively dangerous—positively dangerous! Be James, look at her! Order her, Green! You—you are master here. Tell that black virago to put that knife down!"

"Ain't brack potato!" roared Coosha. "I'se a young brunette lady. And I hab yo' life, sure as—"

She made a jab at the general, who skipped nimbly aside, and then retreated to the back of his chair.

"Green, order that demon to put that knife down!"

"Sha'n't—sha'n't do it! I kill yo'! I stick dis knife into yo' in de railway train! Yah! Yo' wait! Yo' bery sorry by-me-by dat yo' drobe me to do dis! Yo' 'ceedingly sorry when yo' dead!"

"I'm afraid," said Pollie seriously, "that Coosha is very determined. Coosha, won't you put that knife down?"

"Bery sorry. I kill dis ole gentleman first.

den I bery glad to 'blige yo' in de matter, Pollie Green."

"B-b-but," gasped the general, "such absurd nonsense— Young woman, put that knife down!"

"Yah!" howled Coosha, making a dart towards him. "Yo' come and take me 'way wid yo', will yo'? Yo' try dat game, I—I hab you' life!"

The general, despite his weight and his years, made good time to the farther side of the table.

"Stand off—stand off!" he yelled. "Green, order her to stand off!"

"Coosha," said Sir Francis, "you must cease this behaviour at once!"

"Nobudy sha'n't take me 'way!" yelled Coosha. "Let anybudy try dat trick—let 'em come and try it!"

She stood in the middle of the room, brandishing the knife, and looking as wicked as it was possible for her to look.

"'Pon—'pon my honour—'pon my soul," gasped the general, "what an awful—"

"Hold yo' tongue, yo' ole red-nose!" screamed Coosha. "Don't yo' talk; de sound ob yo' voice make me tink I kill yo' now, dis minit!"

"Good—good James!" said the general. "Is she often like this?"

"Often!" said Pollie, with a deep sigh. "Poor Coosha!"

"Poor—poor Coosha! I'll 'poor Coosha' her!"

"I ain't going—I ain't going! I kill ebrybudy first!" shrieked Coosha, dancing up and down with passion. "I tole yo' dat I ain't going—"

"Silence! Stop that! Enough, I say!" said the general, in a voice of authority.

"Hold yo' row! Yo' go to de doose!" roared Coosha.

"If you don't behave yourself," bellowed the general, "I'll get my cane, and—"

Bash!

A plate flew through the air. Luckily for the general, he saw it coming, and dodged. It was followed the next moment by apples and oranges, nuts, fruit table decorations—anything and everything Coosha could lay hold of.

The general danced up and down, dodged and ducked, and bellowed to her to stop.

An orange hit him on the nose, an apple caught him under the eye. Not for many a year had the general shown such activity; he hopped, and he dodged and ducked, and swore that if he could get near enough to Coosha she would bitterly repent it to the very end of her days.

In vain Sir Francis called to her; in vain Pollie entreated.

Coosha devastated the dining-table.

"I'll teach dat ole beas' to come poking his nose in here!" she yelled. "I teach him; Dere, dat's a good one—cop him on de ole red nose, make it redder. Ho, yo' take me 'way, will yo'? Ole Turgeon, dey bery handy wid satisfact'ry characters. Oh, ho, let him try! I get de knife all ready for him!"



"I'll make you smart for this in London, young woman!" said the general fiercely. Coosha looked at him with hate and scorn in her yellow eyes.

"I ain't going to London!" she said defiantly.

"Aren't you? We'll see!" said the general.

"You hab made up yo' mind?" asked Coosha.

"I came down here to fetch you, and I don't go back, I don't stir from this house, without you!"

Coosha stood staring at him for a full minute without speaking.

"Bery good," she said slowly—"berly good. If yo' hab come for me, I 'speak I must go 'long wid yo'."

"Ah, ha! Coming to your senses, are you?" said the general.

"I 'speak dat about de meaning ob it," said Coosha.

"You'd better go and pack," said the general, rubbing his nose, which was very tender owing to the attentions of the orange Coosha had flung.

"Bery well," said Coosha docilely.

Not for a moment did Pollie believe that Coosha meant to go. She expected that Coosha would efface herself—hide somewhere, perhaps go and take shelter somewhere in the village, and wait in hiding till the general was gone.

But, much to Pollie's surprise, Coosha reappeared presently with a parcel in her hand, and with her head decorated with her largest and most striking hat.

In the flush of victory the general even forgot his aches and pains.

"When they see they've got a man to deal with who ain't taking nonsense from them they soon come to their knees. I know how to deal with these niggers, male and female. In a month you won't know that gal.

"So you are ready, are you?"

"Yee, sah, I am quite ready," said Coosha, so meekly that Pollie knew beyond shadow of a doubt that some dark plan had hatched itself in Coosha's mind.

"Very good—very good. Then we will go. The train leaves at nine. Just got time—eh?"

"The carriage will be at the door in a minute," Sir Francis said.

The farewell would have been affecting had not Coosha been so callous. Pollie wept. Even Sir Francis wiped his eyes furtively. But Coosha never turned a hair.

The carriage came round to the door. The general, Sir Francis, and Coosha got into it, and, with a last wave of the hand from Coosha, the carriage drove off.

Half an hour later there was a sound of wheels, and Pollie rushed out.

"Oh, daddy, isn't— isn't she here? Has she really gone?"

"Yes, poor child," Sir Francis said, as he stepped out of the carriage.

"Really gone? Poor Coosha! It won't seem like the same house without her. Poor girl—poor little thing! She will break her heart, I am afraid. I wish Burgum had left her."

He sighed deeply.

"I declare," said Mrs. Sinkinson, "if there ain't a blessed hatmuspheer' of peace come over the place a'ready!"

An hour passed—two, three. Pollie's certainty gave way to doubt. Coosha had not come back. Pollie lay in bed listening.

She could not get the idea into her head that Coosha had really gone. She could not sleep. She rose presently, and slipped on a dressing-gown, and put her little white feet into slippers, and then stole quietly along the landing to Coosha's room. The moon was shining in through the window, but the room was bare and empty. There was no Coosha. No, she had not come back.

## CHAPTER 17.

### Bruce Hardaker Returns.

SHE had gone, then—really gone. With a feeling of bitter disappointment, Pollie turned away. She almost expected to find Coosha here. She had felt so certain that Coosha never meant to go. But she had been wrong; Coosha had gone.

"I shall miss her—I shall miss her every day, and every hour of the day. Poor Coosha!" Pollie whispered.

She stood for a moment at the window looking out into the moonlit garden. Her thoughts were full of Coosha.

She was thinking what Coosha's life would be with that horrible old general, with—Pollie started suddenly, and a laugh rippled from her lips.

There was a movement in the garden—the dark shadow of a quickly-moving figure. It was Coosha, of course. Coosha, after all, had evaded the general, and come home again. Yes, she was coming towards the house.

But it was not Coosha. Pollie held her breath. It was a man—the tall figure of a man. He was standing in the moonlight now. Now he raised his face towards the house. A choking, gasping cry came from Pollie's lips, for the face on which the moon shone down was the face of the man she loved—the face of Bruce Hardaker.

It was Bruce himself standing there, with his face upturned, and his eyes eagerly and anxiously scanning the house. And Pollie, standing in the room, watched, scarcely daring to breathe or to move, as though in fear lest the spell should be broken, and she would awaken suddenly to find it a dream, a vision conjured up by the imagination, an unreality.

His face was white and thin and wan, his clothes the clothes of a beggar—a tramp, ragged, hopeless, and worn. There were deep lines of care engraven on his face—lines that she had never seen there in the old days.



He looked like one who had been through intense suffering—had known want and starvation; one who had suffered far more than it falls to the lot of an ordinary man to suffer. And as she watched, her heart swelled with pity and love—pity too great for words.

Now he was moving—he was going. A few moments, and he would pass from her sight into the blackness of the shadows, and she would see him no more. But she could not let him go like this in silence.

"Bruce—Bruce, stay! It is I—it is Pollie! Stay"—she leaned from the window—"Bruce!"

He had started violently at the sound of her voice. He seemed to hesitate.

"Bruce—Bruce, don't go! I have waited so long!" she cried hoarsely. "Bruce, I had waited so long for your coming! Stay—stay, now!"

"You have waited for me, Pollie?" he said.

"For you—all these years!"

"Heaven bless you for your truth and constancy, my darling!" he said huskily. "Bless you for it! But—but you must wait no longer. I can never come back into your life now, dear—never again. I came to-night, hoping, yet dreading, praying for a sight of your sweet face. It was the utmost—all that I could hope for. And now that I have seen you, and heard your voice again, I must go."

"No, no, not yet! Wait!" she whispered eagerly. "Bruce, wait! I—I will come down to you! Wait!"

"It is better not," he whispered. "Pollie, if you knew, perhaps you would not wish to touch my hand again. Do you know?"—he came a step nearer to the house, and his voice sank to a whisper that she could scarcely hear—"do you know that I am a hunted man, a fugitive from justice, a thief—"

"I know—I know! But because I know you, too, Bruce, I do not believe it!"

"You believe in me, in spite—"

"In spite of everything," she said, "I believe in you!"

He lifted his hand and raised his ragged hat from his forehead.

"Thank Heaven!" he said reverently.

"Bruce, wait—I am coming down! I must—must speak to you!" she whispered. "Promise me you will wait!"

"I will wait," he said quietly.

Her heart was beating wildly. She shivered, and a feeling of faintness came over her as she stole down the stairs in the silent house. He was waiting there, waiting outside—Bruce, waiting there for her coming. She was going to him at last.

"Pollie, you should not have come down to me. I should not have waited, but the temptation to see your dear face again, to hear your voice— But it must be only for a moment—no more. Pollie, I—I am not fit for you to speak to."

He looked down suddenly at the rags that covered him, and when he lifted his head again his face was red with shame.

"You never thought to see me like this," he went on. "You never thought that I would come to this."

"Bruce, Bruce, what does it mean?"

"It means"—he held his breath for a moment—"means that I am hunted! There is a warrant out for my arrest! It means that they say that I am a thief, that I stole from those who trusted me—the meanest, most despicable creature on God's earth!"

"But you did not do it—you could not do it, Bruce!"

"I did not do it," he said. "But it is only my bare word—my word that I cannot prove. Who would believe the wild story that I should have to tell? I realise how impossible it will ever be for me to lift my head again, how impossible to face the charge, although I am innocent. But—but there is no time to talk of this now. I came, hoping to catch one glimpse of your face. I have been here, not once, but a score of times, sneaking here in the darkness, dreading lest I should be seen. To-night in the wood I was seen and followed. They thought I was a poacher. I hid, and escaped them. It—it is not like the old days, Pollie."

Her tears were rolling down her cheeks.

"Bruce, Bruce, there must be some way of proving—"

"None," he said—"there is none on earth! I am the victim of a plot, so cunning, so infernal, that I cannot see one ray of light."

"Who plotted against you?"

"Less against me than against the firm we both served," he said. "He plotted to get their money—the money he knew was in my possession—and arranged so that the suspicion should fall on me. A man—a chemist named Bonassi—it was he who dragged me down to this, he who wrecked my life, who has made me what I am—a wanderer, a creature who dreads the daylight, who steals out at night like a beast of prey. I owe it all to him!"

"Tell me everything—everything, Bruce!"

"Not now; there is no time now. I did not mean to stay so long. I must go. Thank Heaven for the sight of your face again! Sometimes I thought that you and I would never meet again. Pollie, I—I heard of his death. I was sorry. He was a fine fellow—a good man. Now I must go. It is—"

"Bruce, wait!" She held out her hand to him. "Bruce, Bruce, why don't you take my hands? Why do you hold away from me?"

"Because I am not fit," he whispered—"not fit to touch your hands, Pollie, such a wretch as I am!"

"Have you forgotten," she whispered, "that once you—you loved me?"

"Forgotten?" he echoed. "Once—once I loved you? Do you think that my love for you has ever changed? Can't you know it has been the sweetest and the most bitter thing in my life—my love for you, knowing that I could



never hope to see you again—even knowing that I was not fit—

"You are—you are, because you are innocent! Have you forgotten that—that I loved you?"

"In the old days."

"And now," she whispered—"now, dear—to-day, the same as then, to-morrow, always! Bruce, Bruce, don't go! Come with me—come to my father. Ask him to help you, dear. He will—I know he will."

"He could not; he could do nothing. How could he? And he would not believe. He could not? And he would not believe. He would not have the same blind, unquestioning faith that you have. I—I have given up hope long ago. For a time I tried to hope that the day would come when I might clear myself; but now I know how impossible it is. That one man, and him alone, can clear my name, and he would never do it. He hates me; and even if he had to suffer himself, he would rather that I, although I am innocent, suffered with him rather than I should go free. Dear, I must go now. I ought not to have come. I ought not to have cheated you out of words that—that you must forget."

"Words? What have I said?" she cried. "You mean, when I told you that my love was the same to-day as when we parted—that it will never change?"

The light of eagerness and hope sprang suddenly into his weary, haggard eyes. Then, with a gesture that reminded her of the old Bruce, he threw his head back and looked at her.

"I would not forgo my rags and your love for all the riches and all the honours of this world!" he said. "To know that you still love me will give me strength to go on living. I need that strength, Heaven knows, sometimes! Sometimes I have found it hard to live; but now I shall remember what you have told me to-night, my darling—my darling!" He held her hands and pressed them convulsively between his thin ones. "Good-night! Good-bye!"

And then he would have turned; but she held him fast.

"Bruce, dear, because you love me, and I love you, you will let me—" She stopped in confusion, remembering his old pride. "Dear, it would make me so happy—and I have so much—just to help you, Bruce—just to—"

"Not from you, Pollie," he said quietly—"not ams from you, my darling. Let me at least keep my self-respect. It is all that I have left now besides your love."

"But for my sake!"

"For my sake, don't ask me, dear," he said gently. "Good-bye!"

"Bruce, Bruce, you will come again? Don't leave me! I can't bear you to leave me like this! Bruce, promise me you will come again. It will be something for me to think of, to look forward to. Promise—promise."

"I promise," he said. "I will come again one day."

"Soon?"

"Soon," he said.

"Bruce, I have waited so long for you!" she whispered. "It is so hard to let you go again like this! Bruce, for my sake, dear? It can be no shame to you to take help from one who cares so much as I do."

"Don't ask me, Pollie!" he said hoarsely. "Dear, don't ask me! I am used to it now—the hunger and the rags. They don't hurt, dear. It's the other thing—the want of hope. And I think to-night you have brought just a little hope back again into my life." He held her hands tightly. "Heaven bless you, my darling, my own true-hearted girl!" he whispered. "Heaven bless you for your faith in me!"

He let her hands go, and turned away. Yet once more she called him back.

"Bruce!"

She held up her face to his.

For a moment he hesitated, then stooped and kissed her on the lips.

He was gone into the darkness. But she stood there, where he had left her, her heart beating with love and pity for him.

"He will come back again," she whispered. "He promised, and he will come, and—"

"Ahem! I bery sorry to interrump yo' toughts, but I—"

"Coosha," Pollie cried — "Coosha! Oh, Coosha!"

"Yes, dat's my name," said Coosha. "I see yo' talking wi' a young man, so I bery politeful, and stop away till de young man hab took him hook. If I don't make any mistake, Pollie Green, dat young man was Bruce Har—"

"Yes, yes! But, Coosha, you have come back—"

"Of course I hab," said Coosha coolly. "Yo' didn't tink I going 'long wid dat ole image? Only, to tell yo' de solemn trufe, Pollie Green, I really am remarkably hungry. I hope to goodness dat ole Sinkinson hab left something in de larder!"

"Tell me about it—tell me," Pollie said. "Oh, Coosha, I am so glad—so glad, dear!"

She put her arms round the girl and hugged her.

"H'm!" said Coosha. "Dis display ob affection am bery satisfactory. I really tink, Pollie Green, dat yo' must hab a heart, after all."

"I—I believe I have," Pollie said. "Oh, Coosha, I was looking for you, and—"

"H'm! I don't tink!" said Coosha. "Yo' didn't go bery far to look. An' I really am surprised at yo', Pollie Green, habing meetings wid a young man dat don't dress in de best ob taste, to say de least ob it, dis time ob de night. Now, spose we go and see what dat ole tref hab left in de larder?"

Through the door which Pollie had left open behind her she and Coosha entered the house, and went down to the kitchen.

"I tell yo' all 'bout my troubles when I have sutuffing to eat," Coosha said.



"But, Coosha, your feet——"

"Don't boder 'bout my feet; dey de only ones I got," said Coosha.

"But your boots——"

"Oh, hang my boots! Dey done der best. I hab walk a bery long way to tell yo' de trufe, an' I'm 'bout done up. Don't boder 'bout anything till I hab got my tea."

Pollie helped Coosha to spread the table with everything that the larder contained. Then Pollie sat and looked with open-eyed astonishment while Coosha slowly but steadily worked her way through three parts of a leg of mutton, half a cold beef-steak pudding—evidently several days old—a dish of cold potatoes, vast quantities of bread-and-butter and cheese, and a few other odds-and-ends, such as stewed fruit, half a rice-pudding, and a fragment of an apple-pie.

It was not until Coosha had worked as much destruction as about three able-bodied men could have done that she desisted, and lay back in her chair with a grunt of satisfaction.

"De pangs ob hunger am awful tings to bear," she said.

"Yes; but——"

"Don't 'but.' I bery near starving wid hunger and thirst." Coosha lifted a huge jug of milk and buried her black face in it. "I bery much better for dat little snack," she said.

Pollie sat silently waiting for Coosha to explain.

"So yo' hab been talking to dat Bruce Hardaker again?" said Coosha.

"Again? I have not seen him until to-night."

"Course not! I bery sorry for dat young man. He look as if he could do wid a snack like I hab had himself."

Pollie's face grew sad. If only she could know that Bruce's hunger was appeased as Coosha's had been! But he had been too proud to take help from her.

"Coosha, you said that you would tell me about——"

"'Bout dat ole image?" said Coosha. "Oh, I not bery much to tell. We hab a bery piesen' little chat in de train. He told me dat he got a woman out ob a mad lunatic 'sylum to look after me, and said if I didn't behave myself dat I'd hab to wear a strait-waistcoat—which I don't tink suit my complexion at all. Den I told him dat I thought he was the ugliest old beast dat I eber see; and he say dat he would skin my liver one ob dese days. So we hab a bery piesen' time! I know jolly well dat old beast not go 'way from here 'less I go wid him."

"But you are back again, Coosha?"

"Course!" said Coosha. "I been as far as Thorpeover wid him, to keep him company on his way to London."

"To Thorpeover?" cried Pollie. "It is twenty miles!"

"Seem like twenty tousan!" Coosha said.

"Tell me all about it at once," Pollie said.

Coosha cleared her throat.

"I got into de train wid de old image," she said. "Most 'busive old person dat I neber had de pleasure ob listenin' to. We chatted 'bout de madhouse lady dat was so kind as to be going to look after me, and put me in de strait-waistcoat, and him mention de fack dat he hab a bery usefule cane dat he make me de acquaintance ob when we get to London."

"The brute!" said Pollie.

"I mention that fack to him," said Coosha. "Him got into a tearing, howling rage. Him most abusive, an' use de worst langtauge dat I eber listen to. Him say——"

"Hush!" said Pollie.

"Bery good. To proceed, as de saying is. I got on de side ob de carriage pretty close to the window, and listen to all de remarks dat he hab to make, wid a most amiable smile on my face. Den I tinks to myshelf, in 'bout tree minutes we get to Thorpeover; and suddenly I ecch at de door-handle, tear open de door, and utter a piercein' shriek dat froze de blood, and jump out—only I not jump on to de ground. No fear! Not such a born fool! I got hold ob de handle at de side and swing myself out ob his sight. Den I scramble 'long de foot-board ob de train. And all de time dat old beast ringin' de bell like mad. Presently pretty quiek de train began to go slowly. It goin' to stop. Only I don't quite wait till de train stop. I jest drop on to de ground, get through a hedge, and make off for de road."

"Den I hide for a time, and watch all de commotion. I hear dat old beast yelling dat I had committed suicide, and dat I am dash all to pieces on de railway-line—like him hope I am, I 'speak—and dey go rushing up and down wid lights, and shoutin' and yelling, and kicking up no end of a fuss. An' all de time I near come to die ob laughin'."

"Den presenly de guard come along an' say: 'Bery sorry, sir, dere no sign ob a young female woman dat you mention.' And de old beast yell dat everybody am fools and born ijuits, and his language am sometin' fearful; so de guard an' orders lose their tempers, and tell him to go to——"

"Coosha!" said Pollie.

"London," said Coosha, "an' make him complaint dere. And de train go 'long, after a bit, and den I just get up and walk home."

"Twenty miles!" Pollie said. "You poor, tired thing!"

"Certingly!" said Coosha. "I bery much to be pitied. I bery tired, and I tink I go to bed. 'Speck dere be a telegram in de morning from dat old beast."

Pollie saw Coosha to bed. She helped her to undress, tucked her up snugly, and kissed her. She was glad from the bottom of her heart to have Coosha back again. Life, without Coosha to be a perpetual worry and trouble to her, seemed to Pollie to be scarcely worth living. But Coosha was back again.

And then Pollie went to her own room, and



lay down on her bed. But not to sleep; nor were her thoughts of Coosha.

She was thinking of a man, haggard and worn—a man with hopeless eyes, a man who seemed to have left youth behind him, though he was yet far from old—and she wondered what this crime could have been—this crime of another—for which he was being made to suffer; and she wondered if there was justice in heaven or on earth. And then at last, in the grey gloom of the early morning, she fell asleep.

“Accident last night. Coosha, on way to London, fell out of train. Trust not greatly injured. Making all inquiries. Up to present not discovered her. Will wire when further information.—BURGUM.”

Sir Francis read the telegram.

“We must write to the general at once,” he said to Pollie.

“I don’t think I should. Let him wait. He behaved vilely. If he is being worried, it won’t do him any harm,” said Pollie.

“My dear,” said Sir Francis, “but he may be anxious. In all probability, he is.”

“Hope he am. Hope him tink him get hang,” said Coosha. “Him bery bad old person—most ’busive old wretch!”

Coosha was eating her breakfast as though she had not tasted food for months. Coosha was gifted with a healthy appetite, and food in her neighbourhood had a habit of vanishing like snow in summer.

“Papers,” said Mrs. Sinkinson, coming into the room. “Thought you would come back,” she said, eyeing Coosha. “Bad rubbidge always comes home to roost.”

“Yo’ got my permission to go and fry yo’ face,” said Coosha pleasantly.

“When I heard as ’ow it was going,” said Mrs. Sinkinson, addressing the teapot that she placed on the table, “I said to myself, it’s too good to be true, I says.”

“Don’t ’speck dat yo’ would know de trufe if yo’ was to meet it in de road,” said Coosha. “Yo’ most abominable, bad, wicked woman, and I wish yo’ was dead!”

“Coosha, Coosha!” said Sir Francis.

“Bery sorry; no one can’t help what dey was,” said Coosha. “Wish dat ole woman was dead! Wish dat old beas’ Burgum was dead, too! Him bery much happier dead, I tink.”

“The way she talks of death and killing people,” said Mrs. Sinkinson, “is fair ’orrible! It gets on my nerves.”

“You hop it!” said Coosha. “We sick ob yo’ remarks, ole beetleface!”

“Flesh and blood,” said Mrs. Sinkinson, as she made towards the door, “can’t never abide nor stand it! Beetle-face, indeed! Sinkinson ought to be alive to hear that remark!”

“’Speck he tink himself bery much betterer off where he am,” said Coosha. “Got a twis’ in yo’ face?”

“This is rather funny,” said Hollister, reading aloud from the paper. “Last night, as the train from Galehampton and Wickington was running at about forty miles an hour, just a little north of Thorpeover, a young lady, traveling in the company of General Burgum, K.C.B., D.S.O., F.Z.S., was seen to suddenly fall from the train. The door of the carriage, it is believed, must have been insecurely fastened, and the unfortunate young lady, who was leaning against it at the time, was precipitated on to the track. The gallant general made a desperate and heroic effort to save her, but to no purpose. It was only by a miracle that he himself escaped, in his gallant endeavours to effect a rescue—”

“Dat a most abominable lie!” said Coosha, with her mouth full of toast. “All him do was to sit and use de worstest language dat I eber hear!”

“The train was speedily brought to a standstill,” Hollister went on, “and passengers and guard made a thorough search of the line; but, strange to say, no trace of the missing young lady has been discovered.

“It was painful to witness the grief of the aged general, who was deeply attached to the young lady, who was his ward. The name of the missing young lady is, we understand, Coosha. She was the daughter of an eminent Zulu chieftain, and was confided to the care of General Burgum by her father during that warrior’s sojourn in Zululand at the time of the Zulu War. She was heiress to very considerable possessions, and has all her life been the general’s constant and dearly-loved companion.”

“Hah!” said Coosha. “Like to hab dat newspaper reporter man here! I talk to him!”

“I certainly think we should telegraph to the general,” Sir Francis said.

“Den him come ’long here and collar me,” said Coosha. “Den I commit suicide dis time wid a vengeance! I kill myself certainly!” She put a large piece of toast loaded with butter and marmalade into her mouth. “I bery certain dat I kill myself!” she said.

“Well, well, we will leave it for the present,” Sir Francis said.

Hollister and Pen went out after breakfast. The girl’s radiant face and the shy happiness in her eyes was ample repayment to Pollie for all that she had done to bring these two together again. It was clear that Hollister was returning to his old allegiance—that the old love had not died, but had slept for a time, and was coming back to life again.

“I am so glad!” Pollie whispered, as she stood by the window and watched them down the path.

“So you ought to be!” said Coosha, who was going on with her breakfast.

“What for?”

“’Cause yo’ got yo’ little Coosha back again.”



said Coosha. "Dere a great many pleasures in yo' life, Pollie Green, if you only know it."

"I suppose so," Pollie said sadly.

"Dat young man yo' was talking to last night—him—"

"Hush, Coosha! You must not—"

"Course not," said Coosha. "Bery nice thing for young lady to go out meeting young gentleman in de garden in de night!"

"Coosha, you are unkind! You—you—"

"Bery sorry!" Coosha said contritely. "Won't say anoder word. Swear I won't say—Ho, dat bees'!"

## CHAPTER 18.

### "So much to hope!"

**A**T the breakfast-table Sir Francis looked over his paper at Pollie.

"Oh, Pollie," he said, "I forget to mention it before, but I think our—our young friends Hollister and that pretty girl are—"

"Oh, yes!" Pollie said. "I am so glad!"

"Glad, my dear?"

"Yes, glad! You know, they have been in love with each other for years. He went away years ago, and she waited for him, and— The tears suddenly welled into her eyes. "I—I wish all love-stories had the same happy ending!" she said, with a sob.

"My darling," Sir Francis said, "I wish from my heart they had!"

He put his arms around her. There was no need to ask her what she was thinking of—it was her own story.

"Daddy, I—I saw him last night!"

"Saw!" His face grew grave and stern. "Do you mean that you saw that man Bruce? Where did you see him?" Sir Francis asked harshly.

"Here—outside, in the garden."

"How dare he come here?" Sir Francis clenched his hands. "How dare he enter this place?"

"He dared, because he is innocent. He has done no wrong."

"He has told you that?"

"It is the truth!"

"It is a lie!" Sir Francis said fiercely. "If he is the innocent man he pretends to be, why is he in hiding? Why does he come here by stealth to have stolen meetings with you? Why does he not come out into the open and defend himself?"

"Because—because he knows how hopeless it is!" Pollie said, with a break in her voice.

"Hopeless! Yes; because he is guilty!" Sir Francis said. "Pollie, there must be no more of these meetings! My dear, your happiness has always been my first thought. There is nothing that I would not do to make you happy. You know that?"

"Yes, daddy."

"I am an old man and you a young girl, and while I live I will protect you. You must see no more of this man! If he should come here again you must tell me; it is I who will see him!"

"Daddy, he is innocent!"

"I tell you he is guilty! An innocent man does not lurk in the shadows; he does not fly from justice and hide himself as this man has done. He is guilty; there cannot be the slightest doubt as to his guilt! Do you think that an innocent man would be content to become an outcast, a wanderer, shunning those who knew him? Do you think an innocent man would not come forward, and say 'I am innocent; I court inquiry. I will help you to make all investigation to prove my innocence and to bring the guilty home to the guilty one?'"

"But, daddy dear, if—if it was impossible—utterly impossible—"

"If he is innocent, it cannot be impossible to prove it! It is only impossible to prove innocence when there is guilt. And I swear to you, Pollie, that Bruce Hardaker is a guilty man!"

"Daddy, I do not—I will not believe it!"

"My darling," Sir Francis said sadly, "Heaven knows, I would do nothing to destroy your faith and belief if I thought it was given to one worthy of it; but this man is not, cannot be, worthy of your thoughts! Put him out of your mind, dear; think no more of him; forget all the old dreams—forget the past completely! Occupy your mind so that you have no room for one thought of a man so unworthy of you!"

He stooped and kissed her, and held her tightly for a moment, then went out of the room.

"Even—even though he tells me not to, I will believe in him," Pollie whispered, "all my life! Even though his innocence is never proved, I will believe in him always—always!"

Later, Hollister and Pen came in to lunch, with apologies for being late. The girl's face was flushed, and her eyes were dancing with happiness. The sad-faced little maid had vanished, and in her place had come a radiant girl whose life seemed to be filled with sunshine and joy.

"Oh, Pen, if I was only as happy as you, dear!" Pollie thought. And then, resolutely, she put all sad thoughts away from her.

"We went so far; we did not know it was so late," Pen said apologetically.

"It doesn't matter a bit," said Pollie; "there's nothing to spoil. And, oh, Pen, there's a letter from your aunt, I think!"

Pen took the letter and opened it.

"Oh!" she gasped.

"What's the matter? Is she dead?" Pollie asked. "No, of course she isn't; she couldn't have written to tell you. Does she want you to go home?"

"It is almost worse," Pen said. "It's—it's



the worst news," She looked up, half crying and half laughing. "Pollie, she—she says she is coming here! She has no right to, but I am afraid it is too late. She says she will be here this afternoon. Of course, you won't receive her. I will be ready when she comes, and we will go home together."

"Nothing of the sort!" Pollie said. "She must stop."

"But— Oh, Pollie, you know what she is; so—so difficult!"

"My dear, by all means let your aunt stay. We shall be delighted to see her," Sir Francis said.

Mrs. Sinkinson put her head in at the door. The wisp of hair bobbed over her right eye.

"There's a old party come," she said. She lifted her hand, and removed the wisp from her right eye, and placed it over her left. "A old party, gasping for breath, and says she's dying," she added.

"Good heavens!" cried Sir Francis.

"Says, if you don't mind 'er sitting down in the drawing-room, she'll die there more pleasant," said Mrs. Sinkinson.

"Who—who is she?"

"I am afraid," murmured Pen, staring at her plate—"I am afraid it is my aunt."

"My dear," Sir Francis gasped, "I had no idea your aunt was dangerously ill."

The sound of hollow groans came from the hall, then the tramp of heavy footsteps.

Sir Francis hurried to the door.

"Ah, dear, dear!" said a voice. "Ah, I have come to see my child, my dear niece—to see her ere I pass away!"

"I hope," Sir Francis said, "that you—you are not seriously indisposed, madam?"

"I may," said Miss Drinkwater pleasantly, "drop dead at any moment! You are Mr. Green?"

"Ye-es—at least—"

"Penelope, my child—my child!" said Miss Drinkwater rapturously.

Pen rose, blushing.

"I had to come. I—I could not die alone," said the lady.

"I hope you are better, aunt?" said Pen.

"My dear, I am never better. I am resigned. I look forward to death—death alone. Why should I not be resigned? But to die alone—no, no; it is not to be thought of. I—I have come here to die!"

She smiled on them all, with an expression of serene resignation on her face.

"Please do not get any lunch for me," she went on. "I have eaten nothing—nothing at all. I toyed with some breakfast, but it was a mere farce."

But Sir Francis hospitably insisted that the lunch should be brought back.

Miss Drinkwater toyed with some lunch. She ate the remains of a steak-pie, half a dishful of cold potatoes, some ham, a little beef, some tepid pudding, and then she sat down to a good substantial meal of bread and cheese.

The conversation during dinner was mainly about Miss Drinkwater's ailments and speedily approaching dissolution. She was in the best of spirits.

"Let there be no flowers," she said. "A plain deal coffin—plain, unostentatious—a shroud, nothing more. A little more apple-pie? I think I will force a mouthful down. I do not repine. Oh, no! I say, with the poet: 'Oh, grave, where is thy victory? Death, thy sting?' My sufferings would astonish you. At the present moment I am racked with pain. I am used to it. Another might scream and cry out; I do not. I bear it in silence and fortitude. A little blanc-mange. It is not quite cold, I think. Soon I, too, shall be cold—I, too," she sighed, and shovelled the blanc-mange out of sight.

"The racking pains I endure at night! Sometimes the house rings with my screams," Miss Drinkwater remarked.

"Looks like me goin' to hab a mighty plesen' time," said Coosha. "Where do yo' feel de pain de worses, ma'am?"

"Everywhere, child," said Miss Drinkwater. "Sometimes in my head, sometimes in my feet."

"Sometimes in yo' tumnick, I 'speck," said Coosha.

"Yesterday I fainted three times, and awoke shrieking. It was quite a new symptom. I was very interested. I think it means speedy dissolution. But my affairs are in order. When I am no more—"

"Dis conversation," said Coosha, "am turning me against my food. I tink I get de colly-wobbles if I stop here no more."

Later, Pollie was enabled to get a few minutes alone with Pen.

"Oh, I don't know how to thank you enough," exclaimed Pen, her happy face suffused with blushes. "Oh, Pollie, how shall I ever repay you? You—you don't know what you have done for me. You've made my life—" Pen sighed.

"Oh, I was so frightened—so—so horribly jealous of you!"

"Yes, dear, I was jealous of you," Pen confessed, hanging her head. "I was wicked and foolish. I thought you—you cared for him, and I thought that he cared for you, and—and I thought that you both were laughing about me because—"

"Laughing about you because you were miserable! Oh, yes," Pollie said bitterly, "I am the one to laugh! I am so happy myself."

"Tell me, Pollie, tell me," Pen whispered. "Dear, I thought—I guessed there was some—"

"I think we were talking about your aunt, Pen," said Pollie shortly.

Pen looked at Pollie, but Pollie said no more. Much as she liked Pen—loved her—she could not bring herself to talk to Pen about Bruce. She wanted to talk to no one about him. She wanted



to think about his, to keep his memory green in her own heart; but she did not want the sympathy, the well-meant speeches of others, who, no matter how kind they were, and wishes to her, could have no real feeling about him, could never understand, never know.

Bertram Hollister went past the window, and Pen, with a rich, red flush on her cheeks, and an apologetic glance towards Pollie, slipped out and followed him.

"Of course, she would have said that she was sorry, that she hoped it would all come right, and—that sort of thing," Pollie muttered. "She would have been nice and loving and kind about it; but—but she could never have really cared, it could never have mattered to her." She clasped her hands together, and sat looking before her with misty eyes that saw nothing, except a little, upturned face, except a poor, shabby, ragged figure, alone in the night—

"Bruce, will it ever come right, dear?" she whispered. "Will the truth ever come out? Will you ever be cleared in the eyes of the world? Bruce, will you ever come back to me? I wonder—I wonder! I dare not hope; it seems so much to hope for."

## CHAPTER 19.

### "I will be true!"

SIR FRANCIS had brought Pollie to London for a few days' change. Her father had left the hotel for a walk, and Pollie, with her chin resting on her hand, sat staring out unseeing into the quiet street.

For a moment she thought that she was dreaming; for a moment she thought that her eyes were deceiving her, and that what she saw was only a phantom of her own imagining.

He passed, not a dozen feet away from her, slowly down the street. She saw him, and yet sat motionless, unable for a moment to move, unable to realise.

"Bruce!" she whispered. "Bruce! It is—it is Bruce!" She sprang up and ran breathless to the door, then through the narrow hall and to the front, and out on to the steps. "Bruce—Bruce!" she cried aloud. "Bruce!" But he was gone. Bare-headed, she ran out on to the pavement and looked up and down the short street, but there was no sign of him. He was gone utterly!

Pollie was almost dazed by the suddenness of his disappearance. It was less than a minute ago that she had seen him walking slowly, and now there was not a sign of him. There was a narrow turning a little way down on the left-hand side. He would hardly have had time to reach the corner, but to make sure she ran to the turning. No, there was no sign of him. She realised that the quest was hopeless.

"It must have been real!" she muttered. "I am sure it was real! It was Bruce, I am sure!" She felt a sudden dread, a sudden chill. She re-

membered the old superstition that at the moment of death people sometimes appear to those who love them and think of them most.

Pollie was not superstitious, but, in spite of herself, she could not banish this haunting thought from her mind. Supposing Bruce was dead! Supposing what she had seen was not really Bruce in the flesh at all!

"Pollie Green, you are an idiot!" she said to herself severely. "Of course it was Bruce! Don't get such absurd ideas into your head, my girl! It was Bruce—it was Bruce!"

But for all that, it was a very white-faced, grief-stricken-looking girl who was found by Sir Francis on his return an hour or so later to the hotel.

"My darling," he said, "what is the matter?"

"Only my head aches a little. Daddy, don't take any notice of me!"

"But your head did not ache when I went out. You are sure that— My darling, what is it?"

For Pollie had broken down suddenly, and, throwing herself into his arms, was finding relief in sobbing against his shoulder.

"My darling, you must not distress yourself! There—there, tell me what it is—what has happened!" Sir Francis patted her gently on the shoulder.

"Daddy, I—I have seen him!" Pollie whispered. "I have seen Bruce!"

"Eh? Oh!" A sudden change came to Sir Francis Green. "That—that man has been here?" he said. "He has found you out here, and in my absence—"

"No, no, daddy! I saw him! He passed the window! I—I followed him!"

"What?" Sir Francis said sternly. His voice and his bearing had altered. A look of sternness that was strange and foreign to him came into his face.

"I followed him, but he was gone, and—and then I have been frightening myself. It was so mysterious! He seemed to vanish utterly all in a moment, and—and I have been thinking that—that he might be dead!"

Sir Francis sat down, and looked at Pollie, with grave reproach in his eyes.

"This is not like you, my darling!" he said. "I thought you were stronger. I thought you had better control of yourself. If that man is dead"—he paused for a moment—"then his death is not worth one tear from your eyes!"

"Father!"

"To you it may sound harsh and cruel, child!" he said; "but men—men of honour regard life from, perhaps, a rather different standpoint to women—young women, especially. This man has forfeited his good name, his right to respect, his right to affection. A fugitive and a criminal, hiding his face from the gaze of all honest men. To such as he death should be a welcome release! I had thought, hoped, prayed that you had, if not forgotten him, at any rate, had thought of him less, had ceased to care for him."



"I have not!" she said. "Daddy, I have not and I never shall, never as long as I live!"

"Hush!" he said sternly and angrily. "Margaret, in this you cannot expect sympathy from me; to me that man is utterly dead. Were he my own son it would be the same. He would cease to exist for me! If he had the claims of close relationship, I would pass him by in the streets without one glance. It must be the same with you. This love you speak of is unworthy of you. By professing it, you sink almost to his level. Remember what he is, a shamed outcast, a hunted criminal, a dishonoured man, who can never again hold up his head and look his fellow men in the face. Is this the man whom my daughter can love? If he is dead, then you should rejoice in his death. If he is living, then he should be dead to you, utterly dead!"

"You—you condemn him!" Pollie cried. "But why? Supposing he is innocent; and he is innocent!"

"Innocent! Do innocent men skulk and hide? Would not an innocent man come out into the open and say, 'Here I am! I am innocent! Try me! I have nothing to conceal, nothing to feel shame for! I am willing to be tried, so that my name may be cleared and my innocence proved!'"

"But if he could not prove his innocence? If it was impossible for him to do so? And, knowing it, he—"

"If it is impossible for him to prove his innocence, then he must be guilty," Sir Francis said. "But we will talk no more of this!"

She stood before him trembling, looking with wonder and fear into his face so changed. Was this her father—the gentlest, the kindest of living men—this man, whose eyes looked so hard, whose voice sounded so unnaturally harsh?

"I do not think—I know that he is innocent!" she said. "I know it, because he himself has told me so, and he would not lie to me! I know that he is innocent, and all that I hope for, and pray for is that that the truth may come to light, father. Then—then you will be sorry that you have been harsh, that you have condemned him!" She broke down suddenly, sobbing wildly.

"If Bruce Hardaker's innocence is really proved, and if I live to see it," Sir Francis said, "then I will go to him, and I will ask him to forgive me for having doubted his honour. I will make such amends to him as lies in my power. But that day will never come."

His voice was softer now, the sight of her tears disarmed him. He rose and went to her, and put his hand on her heaving shoulder.

"My darling, be brave; be true to yourself," he said.

Pollie lifted her face, wet with her tears.

"I will be true to myself and to him," she said, "all my life, daddy. I would not be true to myself and my love for him if I—I believed

ill of him. Dear, you were right just now when you said men and women looked at things differently. I am a woman now, daddy, and because he has told me that he is innocent I will and must believe him. Nothing shall ever shake my belief in him, though I may never see him again. I shall think of him always as one who has been cruelly wronged and injured, one who has suffered unjustly."

She held up her tear-stained face to him, and kissed him, and then turned and went out of the room.

Had he been too harsh? Had he been too unsympathetic? He wondered miserably. Bruce Hardaker was, of course, guilty! No sane man could doubt his guilt for a moment. A man who concealed himself from the police who were seeking him, who refused to come out into the light of the day as an honest man should, what doubt could a sane man have? Of course Bruce Hardaker was guilty! But his little girl loved him. Sir Francis groaned in the bitterness of his spirit. He had spoken strongly and harshly. He had made his little darling weep, and because of that man, that dishonoured man, who was not worth one tear from her bright eyes, nor one thought from her pure heart.

"I will get her away," he decided. "She will be better at home."

The quietude of the sleepy little hotel got on his nerves. He could guess that Pollie was up in her room, finding relief in tears. In that, a woman has the advantage over a man. A woman can have a "good cry," and feel the better and happier for it. A man must bottle up his emotion, or let it off in the form of anger, which is always unsatisfactory for himself and for everyone else. Sir Francis thought of another plan. He put on his hat. He would take a good, hard walk, and be back in an hour. He could walk it off.

He beckoned to the elderly waiter.

"Tell Miss Green that I am gone out," he said. "I shall be out for half an hour or so. I have a call to make."

He had made Pollie cry with his harsh outburst. He felt ashamed and sorry. At the foot of the stairs he hesitated. Should he go up and tap on her door, and— No, he wouldn't! He would go out. An hour's hard walking would put him right, and by that time Pollie would have finished crying, and the skies would be clear again.

Sir Francis marched out of the hotel. At the top of the steps he paused to pull on his gloves. He never wore them in the country. In London he would just as soon have gone without his coat as without his gloves.

And as he stood there, pulling on his gloves, a man came up the street—a young man, in a shabby suit of clothes, whose haggard face was pale and worn, whose eyes looked haggard and weary.

Sir Francis suddenly shook from head to foot. It was the man himself. For an instant the



sight, of that white, worn young face touched him deeply—a face so different from the frank, happy, earnest face of the lad he had known.

For an instant the impulse was on him to go and hold out his hand. Then he remembered this man was a thief, a criminal; this man had shut himself out from the sympathy of honourable men.

Bruce Hardaker glanced upwards. His lips trembled, a gleam of hope came into his eyes, and died out again. A flush came painfully into his cheeks.

Sir Francis looked down. Their eyes met. Sir Francis made no sign. The man passing might have been the most utter stranger.

And yet, though the elder man's face was stern and set, and yet, though there was no recognition in his eyes, his heart was filled with pity and compassion. But his sense of honour, his great ideal, was stronger even than his natural kindness and gentleness of heart, and the man passed on.

Sir Francis did not move. A minute passed and another. He still stood on the top step of the hotel entrance. The shabby figure was gone. He had turned into the busy street, and had been lost among the traffic. He was out of sight.

"Poor lad!" Sir Francis muttered, then caught himself up angrily. "Pity! Why should I pity him? What pity does he deserve—a black-hearted villain, who defrauded those who trusted him? Thank Heaven I was strong enough to resist the temptation to speak to him!"

He turned, and went back into the hotel. He took off his hat, and hung it up, and went slowly upstairs to Pollie's room.

Twice he knocked at the door before there was any reply.

"Yes, what is it?"

"It is I—it is father."

There was a movement inside, and Pollie came to the door and opened it. A very woe-begone, white-faced, red-eyed Pollie, who looked at him pitifully.

Sir Francis held out his arms, and took her into them.

"You must think no more of him," he said huskily. "He is not dead—he is living. I have seen him."

"Daddy!" She drew back, and looked eagerly into his face.

"I have seen him, not five minutes ago," he said.

"Oh! And he spoke to you—he told you—"

Sir Francis shook his head.

"He did not speak to me," he said quietly.

"My darling, I have come to tell you to pack up our things. We are going home this afternoon."

But it was destined that Pollie and Bruce should yet meet. The following morning Sir Francis, encountering an old friend in the street, asked Pollie to go on alone back to the hotel. She was wending her way slowly along when—

"Bruce!" His name broke from her lips. A cry of surprise and joy. They were face to face here in the quiet London street—he, white-faced, haggard, weary, and shabby; she, quivering with the joy of seeing him again. "Bruce, it—it is you? Bruce!" she whispered.

"Pollie!" He shrank back; a flame of colour leaped into his haggard cheeks. "I—I did not mean—" He stammered incoherently. "I tried to avoid—"

"Me, Bruce? You tried to avoid me, knowing that I longed to see you?"

"I had not the right to see you; I have not the right to speak to you now, a man such as I am." He looked down at the rags he wore.

"You told me that you are innocent of wrong-doing, that you have no crime on your conscience, and I believe you. Bruce, I believe you with all my heart and soul, dear. Do you doubt my belief?"

"No, no; I thank Heaven for it!" he said. "But I am not fit for you to speak to here in the street. People who see us may think that I am a beggar asking alms."

"And it is I who am the beggar," she whispered. "I who am begging you to speak to me, stay with me—I, who have been longing for a sight of your face for so long, Bruce, for so long!"

"And do you think that I have not longed to see your dear face?" he said passionately. "Do you think that I have not thought of you every day—that I have prayed that I might see you again, and yet have dreaded it? I tramped from London here down to the country, all those miles, just so that I might see, perhaps, your shadow on the window-blind. I dared to hope for no more. I would have been content with that. Just to look at the house that sheltered you—to stand under your window, and to feel that once again I was near you, my darling—my darling! I knew you were here. I have tried to avoid you, because it is not right that a man fallen so low as I have fallen should speak to you."

"Bruce," she whispered, "don't! Bruce, I think my heart is breaking!"

"I think my heart broke long ago," Bruce said. "But you must not stand here speaking to me. They are staring at you, the people who pass by. They do not understand why such as you should speak to such as me."

"What does it matter what they think? What are they to us, or we to them—you and I, Bruce? And—and we are so much to each other!" answered Pollie.

The light of hope seemed to leap suddenly into his weary eyes; his face flushed almost unconsciously; he drew himself up; for a moment he looked like the Bruce of old.

He had her love; he held her heart still, her faith and trust, the loyalty of her sweet, true woman's heart. He had said to her, "I am innocent!" and she believed without questioning.

"You must not think hardly of my father, dear. He does not know. He cannot believe



that you are innocent. He has not the same trust and faith in you that I have, because—because he does not love you as I love you—”

“Pollie!”

“As I love you, and shall love you always. Perhaps I ought to feel some shame for speaking like this, but I do not. I want you to know—I want you to know past all mistaking that I love you with all my heart and soul; that I will wait for you for years—all my life; that there will never be another love in my life but the love I bear for you! You do believe it, dear?”

“I believe it—I believe it,” he said hoarsely—  
“I believe it! And I thank Heaven for its mercy to me—Heaven, that I thought had forgotten me. And now—”

“No, no; not yet,” she implored—“not yet! Come, walk beside me! I can’t let you go yet!”

What did it matter to her that the old waiter was watching from the window of the hotel, or that the hall-porter looked at her with astonished eyes, or that the passers-by turned their heads again to see the lovely, well-dressed girl talking with such intense earnestness to the worn and shabby man at her side?

He was beside her. It was he—Bruce—she was speaking to—Bruce whose voice she could hear again now!

All the world might come to see, and she would not be ashamed. No; she gloried in it. Poor, ill, shabby, needy as he was, she would have taken his hand, and stood with him, so that all might see them, and have said to them all: “This is the man I love! This is the man who has suffered, who has been persecuted, and who is innocent!”

“What have I done? What am I, to deserve your great love, your faith and trust, my darling?” he said. “You know nothing—nothing of the truth; and yet, because I have said I am innocent, you accept it without question. Let me tell you something of the past—something of the misery of these last two years, such awful misery and shame as I never thought could ever come into my life.”

“Tell me,” she said gently.

For a moment he was silent.

“You know when I left England, three years ago, I thought that I was leaving you to become the wife of another man. I left, meaning, hoping, never to see the old country again. I

thanked Heaven for the opportunity that had come to me to go far away.

“But I could not get away from my thoughts, I could not forget you or my love for you, my darling, though I tried with all the power of my will to put you out of my mind. But I could not.

“There was one man, a chemist, clever and capable, almost a genius—a chemist and electrician, who was about the only one among those who worked with me whose society I cared for. His talk seemed to lift me out of myself. He interested me in science—in the science of medicine and electricity. We saw much of one another. At night he would come to my rooms, and smoke, and talk to me. I did not know then—I did not dream what a black-hearted villain he was!

“One day I had ridden over to the bank in the neighbouring town to draw the money to pay the men their month’s wages. It was a considerable amount—some four hundred pounds.

“As I rode back with this money on me, I met Bonassi. He had known of my errand and the reason for it, as I had told him the previous night. He stopped me and talked to me. He had found a rare and wonderful plant in the woods, he told me. He took out his pocket-book, as though to show it to me, and I naturally leaned forward on my horse; and then, before I realised my danger, or dreamed of treachery, he struck at my head with something that he held in his hand. I was stunned, and fell to the ground.

“Pollie!”—Bruce’s voice trembled—“it was many months before I came to my own sane senses—months! Can you understand, my darling? My insensibility was not that of minutes or hours, but of long months. I found out why afterwards. A creature of his, an Italian, Rugeri, told me.

“We were at sea in a small tramp-steamer, in which Bonassi and Rugeri had taken passage, carrying me with them. Every day for weeks that fiend had injected a poisonous drug into my veins—some drug distilled from a South American plant, of which he was one of the very few who knew the secret.

“The properties of this drug were to kill a man’s reason, to turn him, during the time that it was acting on him, into a helpless and hopeless imbecile. It acted directly on the brain,



not affecting, or scarcely affecting, at all the rest of the body.

"For two months I had moved, eaten, slept under the influence of this drug, a creature entirely at the mercy of this ruffian and his accomplice, Rugeri, a man who, I remembered, had been engaged to lay cables.

"These two carried me away, so that when the loss of the money became known, my absence should suggest that it was I who had stolen it and decamped with it. They had robbed me of two months of my life while the hue-and-cry for me was being raised—while my guilt became certain in the mind of every man.

"And then they let me come back to my senses, and laughed in my face when they told me. I was mad then. I sprang at Bonassi. I think I would have choked the life out of him, but the other tore me off.

"I—I can't tell you, even you, Pollie, of those days. A thousand times I was tempted to end it all. The sea was beneath me. But one thought held me back—the thought of you! I wanted you to know, you to understand, that I was innocent—that I had never parted with honour.

"We were landed at last at a small port in a South American republic, and there they deserted me, leaving me penniless. I was among strangers who could not speak a word of my language, and of theirs, the Spanish tongue, I was utterly ignorant.

"I had to live in this place for months, working like a slave at the docks, my food a few crusts of bread, a handful of fruit, and my lodging some sheltered corner of the quay. When I saw my reflection in the still water of the basin I did not recognise myself. I looked like a wild thing, with long and matted hair, a beard, and a face that did not seem even familiar to me.

"An English cargo-boat called at last. The captain was short-handed. It was my opportunity. Yet, even short-handed as he was, he looked at me with distrust. But I pleaded with him, and he at last consented to take me.

"We sailed. We touched at many ports on the West Coast of South America—Valparaiso, Iquique, and Callao. At Callao we found a vessel bound for Liverpool. I exchanged into her, though my captain would then have kept me on

"I came home, meaning to go to my father—meaning to tell him all the truth, and abide by what he advised me. I came home to learn that he had been dead for six months—died believing me, his son, to be a dishonoured scoundrel!

"More than a year had passed since my disappearance. What could I do? What was there for me to do, Pollie? There was but my bare word—my story. Who would have listened to it? Who would have believed it? The thought of prison, and of the shame of it, was more than I could bear. I had but one thought and one hope—to find those two men who alone, besides myself, knew the truth. And, when I had found them, what—what was there to hope for? That they would admit their guilt to save me? Was that likely?

"I think some of the drug still remained in me; I was scarcely capable of reasoning. I came to London, thinking that I might find them here. I did not know even that they were in England—in Europe, even. I have lived—somehow. I have seen those whom I used to know once, passed them in the street, and I have hidden my face from them."

He paused, making a hopeless gesture of despair that went straight to her heart.

"And so I have lost everything—my name, my honour, even the right to look my fellow-men in the face, even the right to touch your hand!"

"You have not lost my love, my darling!" she whispered. "You will never lose that. And one day all those who have wronged you—my own father—will acknowledge the wrong they have done you, and ask you to forgive."

He shook his head.

"I think hope is dead now, my darling. It fought hard, very, very hard, for life; but I think it is dead now, never to come back to life again. Heaven bless you! If you could only know what the memory of your sweet face has been to me—the one thing that has held me back, the one thing that has made me live—you, my Pollie, the sweetest, the truest woman who ever breathed!"

Her eyes, filled with love and an overwhelming pity, were on his face.

"Bruce—my Bruce, between you and me, who love one another, there can be no false pride. Dear, you can make me a little happy—a little happier. You will."



He looked at her, not understanding

"I am rich, Bruce. I have money. That is nothing, means nothing to me. To you it would mean everything. It would mean that you could track those two men down. With money you could do much."

"I can't!" he said hoarsely. "Don't ask me that, Pollie! I can't take money from you, darling. You have given me what is better, greater—you have given me your faith."

"But it is from me—I who love you!" she pleaded. "Bruce, it is cruel to refuse! Think of what it means to me, thinking of you, knowing perhaps that—that you are hungry, Bruce! It will break my heart!"

He caught her two hands in his, and pressed them passionately to his lips. It mattered nothing to him that anyone should see.

"No, I am sunk low enough. Leave me the last shred of my self-respect. My darling, don't worry or grieve for me. I have lived somehow for so long, I shall manage. I can't—I can't take money from you, my darling! And now you must go. I have not the right to keep you. You must go."

She clung to his hand.

"I can't!" she whispered. "Bruce, I can't leave you! Don't take away this little happiness from me. It means so much to me. Let me know that I am helping you. If you knew how happy it would make me——"

"It would be the last shred of my self-respect gone, darling!" he said. "You would not rob me of that?"

A sob rose in her throat, the tears came burning to her eyes. She hid her face in her hands; and then, when she looked up again, he was gone.

Pollie looked about wildly, eagerly, and saw him just for a moment. He was entering one of the houses a little way up the street. A moment more, and he had vanished entirely from her sight.

## CHAPTER 20. Hope!

JOHN LONSDALE leaned across the little table in his sitting-room, and held out his hand.

"I believe," he said quietly—"I believe every word that you have told me, Mr. Hardaker."

By a fortunate chance Bruce Hardaker had come across Pollie's old friend who was labouring in the East End of London, and his kindness and sympathy had induced Bruce to reveal his identity and to tell him of that which had wrecked his happiness and had made him an outcast among his friends.

"You mentioned the name of Pietro Bonassi," went on John Lonsdale eagerly. "Do you know, I believe I know the fellow and where he is lurking now. His companion in the cruel treachery of which you speak—I mean the Italian, Rugeri—is also to be found. As a matter of fact, this Rugeri owes me a debt of gratitude. I was able, under Providence, to save the life of his daughter, whom he loves with a passionate devotion."

"Sir—Mr. Lonsdale"—the door had opened hurriedly, and the woman of the house came in—"I'm sorry to interrupt you, sir, with this gentleman, but there's a man come for you. He's outside. There's something terrible happened—something——"

"What is it?" Lonsdale cried.

"I—I think it's murder, sir! It's one of them foreigners half-killed another near here, in Rad's Court—an Italian!"

"Rad's Court!" Lonsdale cried. He looked swiftly at Bruce. "Is the man dying?"

"Ay, sir! They say he hasn't many minutes left, poor soul! They tried to find a Catholic minister, sir, but they couldn't, and he asked for you particular. He begged them to bring you to him."

Lonsdale took his hat.

"I will go at once," he said. "And you"—he turned to Bruce—"and you will come with me, for this man is one of the two whom you seek!"

The narrow, squalid street was filled with an interested crowd.

The people made way respectfully for John Lonsdale and his companion. They knew him, and it was evident that they respected the man himself no less than his cloth.

"A good sort, 'e is," a woman said. "I'd like to know where me and the kids would be if it 'adn't been for 'im 'elping!"

The policeman on duty at the door of one of the most wretched of all the wretched houses there, touched his helmet to Lonsdale.



"The doctor's up with him now, sir. But there's no chance for him; it's a question of minutes almost, I believe."

"And the other man?" Lonsdale asked quickly.

"Got away, sir, for the time; but we've got his description, and it won't be long before we have him all right," said the constable, with comfortable assurance.

"I hope so—I am sure I hope so," Lonsdale said.

He put his hand on Bruce's arm, and they went up the narrow stairs together. In a pitched attic room, the embodiment of dirt, poverty, and squalor, they found the dying man.

"You will be of more use here, Lonsdale, than I," the doctor said.

There was one other beside the doctor in the room, a police-inspector, who was standing beside the bed, taking down the information that the dying man was giving in a short, jerky, breathless, choking voice.

"Why he not come—why he not come?"

"I am here, Rugeri. You want me?" Lonsdale said gently.

"Ah, I ask zem to tell you! I know you come to me. It was judgment, signor—judgment! She is taken away—stolen from me. He——"

He struggled desperately for his breath, and words failed him for some moments.

"It seems, sir that one of this man's compatriots induced his daughter—Rugeri's daughter—to elope with him. Rugeri came back unexpectedly, and discovered the arrangement. There was a quarrel, and the other stabbed Rugeri. Where the daughter is I do not know. I suppose she has gone with the villain who has stabbed her father. It is only a question of minutes," the inspector added, in a low voice.

Lonsdale bent over the dying man, an ineffable pity in his thin, worn face. He knew the man's passionate devotion to the beautiful girl—a devotion and love that was now costing him his life.

"Ah, signor, it is judgment!" the man murmured. "I have worked in crime with this villain. His name is Bonassi. And now, he—he, Bonassi—he has stolen my Betta from me—he has——" He writhed in sudden agony, and the perspiration poured from his forehead. "I come back—I find him. My Betta already is gone. I asked him for my Betta. He laugh at

me! I guess ever'thin', signor, and I strike at him wiz my hand, like ze English, for I have not a knife. But he has the knife, signor—and so——"

The voice died away.

"I think only of my Betta," the man murmured presently. "For me it does not matter. But my Betta; what comes of her presently? Signor, it is this that makes me not wish to die, I want to live——"

"I will find Betta. I will help her, I promise you, Rugeri!"

"It is enough. If the signor say so, I believe. May the saints bless and be kind to you! I shall die without such great trouble. I shall——" He broke off suddenly, gasping, his eyes dilated. "Who is that, signor—that? Who stands there? Who——"

Lonsdale turned his head quickly. For a moment he had forgotten Bruce Hardaker.

"You know him?" Lonsdale asked quickly.

"Ah, know him! Yes, yes; I know him! The man Bonassi drugged! The man Bonassi make his friend, and from whom he take ze money! Signor, is he dead, that he comes to me in this, the last hour?"

"No; he is living, and he has come so that you may do an act of justice and mercy before you are called to your own account, Rugeri," Lonsdale said solemnly. "This is the man whose life has been ruined by Bonassi and by you. As you hope for mercy for yourself, as you hope for justice on the man who has so deeply wronged you, and as you hope to one day meet Betta again, speak the truth now. Clear an innocent man of the suspicion of guilt that lies heavily on him. Rugeri, will you?"

"Signor, I do anything—anything! It is true. He no guilty; he Bonassi's victim. Yes, signor, that I swear! All shall know the truth. I hide nothing—nothing!"

Lonsdale turned to the inspector.

"This man has a confession to make before he dies," he said quickly.

The inspector nodded.

There was nothing wonderful or strange to him in this. He had seen many such cases before, and had listened to many a death-bed confession.

Notebook in hand, he stood at the head of the bed while Rugeri, in a low, faint voice, spoke.



## CHAPTER 21.

## Confession.

TO Bruce Hardaker it was all like a dream—this wretched garret room, this man lying here with the sweat of death on his brow, speaking in a fluttering voice; the motionless figures of the doctor and Lonsdale, and not a sound in the silence but that feeble voice and the rustle of the leaves of the inspector's note-book. It was the truth at last—the truth as he himself had told it to Pollie and to Lonsdale—being uttered by other lips now! The black cloud of shame and disgrace was being lifted.

Lying there, gasping for the breath that would soon leave him for ever, Rugeri told how Bonassi had gained the confidence and the friendship of the man he meant to victimise. How he had made it his business to find out when Bruce Hardaker would go to the bank to draw the money for the men's wages. How he had waylaid him on the road home; and then how, day by day for many weeks, Bonassi injected the poison into the veins of his victim.

"He steal from him ze money, and he take him away, and make him forget all, so zat it shall be thought that he was the thief," Rugeri said faintly. "But I, who know all, know that he did not take the money. It was Bonassi—Bossi, so sometimes he calls himself. Zis is the truth, I swear! It is my last word. I speak no more. I would not die with a lie on my lips. The good signor here knows that. He believe, for he has promised to help my Betta."

"And I will keep my promise," Lonsdale said.

"I have taken down the confession. Will it be possible for the man to sign it?" the inspector asked of the doctor.

The doctor shook his head.

"Ah, yes! I sign—I sign my name to it. My—"

Rugeri stretched out his hands.

Slowly, laboriously, moaning under his breath, he scrawled his name on the leaf of the inspector's notebook.

And then, when it was done, Lonsdale and the doctor wrote their names as witnesses.

The act of justice was done. And now the end was very near.

The doctor and the police-inspector moved

softly to the far end of the room, and Lonsdale fell on to his knees beside the bed.

In the utter stillness of the place they could hear his low voice pleading for mercy for this sinner.

"Signor, remember, you promise—promise me my Betta—"

"I will find her and help her. I promise!" Lonsdale said.

The man drew a deep breath.

"I believe," he whispered. "Tell her, signor, that I forgive—forgive my Betta. I—"

And then silence.

"It is over!" the doctor said. "The poor fellow has gone to his account."

He took the rugged hands and folded them over the lifeless breast.

"Our work is done here," he said—"yours and mine, Lonsdale. And yours commences, Carter. I have heard of this Bonassi before. A clever and cunning scoundrel. I fancy you will have your work cut out for you."

"We shall find him. We have a close description of him, and he will be clever to elude us," the inspector said. "But this other man—this Bruce Hardaker—who is concerned by Rugeri's confession, where shall we find him? Is he in England?"

"Yes!" Bruce came forward. "He is here, sir. I am the man."

"You are Hardaker?"

"Yes."

"There is a warrant out for your arrest, then?"

"Yes," Bruce said quietly.

"And you evaded capture?"

"Yes."

"But you were absolutely innocent, as Rugeri's confession proves."

"How could I prove it?" Bruce said bitterly. "I knew my innocence. But what proof had I to offer? The money was in my charge. I disappeared, the money with me, and I was never heard of again. Would not that have been enough to condemn me? How could I say I am innocent, in the hope that one human being would believe me?"

The inspector nodded.

"If you had been arrested and tried, there would not have been one chance in ten thousand for you," he said. "But now I have a duty to



perform. I must arrest you; the warrant is still in force. I am sorry; but——"

"I expected it," Bruce said quietly, "and I am ready to come with you."

"We shall make it as easy for you, Mr. Hardaker, as we can. You can be sure of that," the inspector said. "And now"—he turned towards the door—"it will be as well for these people outside not to guess that you are under arrest. They might think that you had something to do with the crime that has been committed here. I can trust you to come with me quietly?"

Bruce smiled.

"Remember, I gave myself up," he said. "I will come with you quietly. Yes, gladly and willingly. Thank God, this hunted life of mine ends to-night——"

He paused. They were near the door. From below came the sound of a scuffle, of a man's voice raised in protest, of a woman's shrill scream, and then running footsteps on the stairs, and the deep, panting breathing, as of a hunted creature.

"Someone has forced his way into the house past the constable I left on duty!" the inspector muttered. He sprang towards the door, but he was not quick enough. It was flung open suddenly, and a woman sprang in. Dark-skinned, swarthy, with black hair tinged with grey hanging about her face—a woman who had left her youth far behind her, but whose face, worn and lined though it was, still betrayed some evidence of a beauty long gone.

Panting, with her hand pressed over her heart, she stood staring at them with savage eyes, like a wild animal.

"I no believe it! she gasped. "It a lie! He no go away with Betta! Rugeri, I no believe it!" She staggered a step into the room, and her eyes travelled towards the bed on which the dead man lay.

"What do you want? Who are you?" the inspector said, taking hold of her arm.

She turned on him savagely.

"I—I, his wife!" she gasped.

"His wife—Rugeri's?"

"No, no! I, Pietro Bonasasi's wife! I come. They have told me a lie. They say that Pietro have gone with Betta, and that he have stabbed with knife Rugeri, who tried to prevent——"

"It is true," the inspector said. "Come, you must not stay here! It is true what you have heard."

She flung his detaining hand off fiercely, and a torrent of words broke from his lips. She spoke in Italian, and they could not understand her.

"I, his wife—Pietro's wife! I marry him when I in Italy, when I young girl. I young then, and pretty. Now, I not young, and he tired. But I find him! I know—I know——"

The inspector nodded.

"He has gone with the girl Betta!" he said.

Jealous, deserted women had served the law before, and would serve it well again, he knew.

"I go!" she gasped—"I go find him! I know where he is!"

The inspector nodded coolly.

"Of course we know where he is," he said; "we may as well go together."

She looked at him for a moment with a glint of suspicion in her eyes; but it vanished, and gave place to fury.

"He strike me. He say I old and ugly. He say he wish I dead. And now he go with Betta—Betta, who never was pretty as I when I marry Pietro. But to-night—now, I go find him. I show you. You come, too. I show you where Pietro Bonasasi hide. I know!" She laughed shrilly, and turned away, and went down the stairs; and the inspector, nodding to Bruce to follow, hurried after her.

## CHAPTER 22.

### Wedding Bells.

SIR FRANCIS and Pollie had returned to their home.

Pollie had heard of the Italian's confession, of Bruce's arrest. But in the light of that which she knew, she was aware that it was but a matter of hours before her loved one's complete innocence was declared before the world.

The door of the room in which Pollie was sitting was pushed open, and Sir Francis looked in.

"Pollie, my darling, I have news for you!" he said, in an agitated voice.

"News, daddy?"

"A—a letter from Lonsdale!"

"Yes?" she said quietly.



"A letter containing news that—that to me was most unexpected, but to you less so. You were right, and I wrong, my darling!"

"Daddy, what—what do you mean?"

"I mean, my darling, that Bruce Hardaker's innocence is proved. He is a free man; his entire innocence clearly and undeniably proved." He opened his arms to her. "And I was wrong," he said, as he took her in them—"wrong! Do you remember what I promised? I said that if I was wrong, and you were right, I would ask his pardon humbly, my darling. I would ask him to forgive me, and I will—I will!"

"I shall never forgive myself—never, as long as I live," Sir Francis went on. "My darling, I've been an obstinate, stubborn, blind old fellow. I ought to have known better. I ought to have trusted the lad, and believed in him as you did."

"Daddy—daddy, you only believed as all the rest of the world believed," Pollie sobbed. "Oh, daddy, don't speak harshly of yourself now!"

"And I passed him in the street!" Sir Francis said. "I looked him in the face, and did not know him, and he was an innocent man. There is only one thing that I can do now."

Pollie looked up at him with shining eyes.

"And that is to go to him, and offer him my hand, to beg his forgiveness for the wrong I did him in my mind. Yes, as I promised you—to beg his pardon humbly for having doubted him."

"My dear, dear daddy!" Pollie whispered.

"I will go to-day—now, without loss of time, and if he forgives, as I hope and pray he may, I shall not come home alone, my darling."

She clung to him, weeping and laughing in her joy and happiness.

"You will bring him back with you—back here, to—to—"

"To you," he said gently—"to your loving, trusting little heart, my darling!"

"I can hardly believe it is all true," Pollie whispered. "It seemed so far away, so hopeless. Yet I knew—I knew how innocent he was; but how could I hope that it would ever be proved. He had lost hope, too. And now he is coming here to us again—coming home here!"

"If he will come!" Sir Francis said.

"If he will come!" She knew there would be little doubt of that. He was coming back to her in honour, holding his head high again, no longer a fugitive, no longer an outcast; but the man she loved restored to his place in the world again.

Sir Francis answered the unspoken question in her eyes.

"No, my darling, I shall go alone, and you will wait here for him and for me. It is better."

She knew that it was better; she knew that it would be better for their meeting to take place here in the old familiar house. She had waited so long, so many years, so patiently, so trustfully, so hopefully; but now she knew that it would be hard to live through the few hours that must pass before her father could be back again, bringing the wanderer home.

A telegram was sent to Mr. Lonsdale. The train was looked out on the time-table, and the trap ordered to take Sir Francis to the station, and now the time had come for him to go, and he took Pollie in his arms and strained her to his heart.

"Patience, little woman!" he said. "Patience for only a little while now. It will not be for long."

And then he was gone, and Pollie stood looking after him till she could no longer see him through the mist or tears.

"Where Sir Francis druv to in dis mighty hurry?" Coosha demanded.

"He—he has gone to fetch him!" Pollie whispered.

"My goodness, him a bery kind ole genl'man!" said Coosha. "Fancy him doing such a ting! I neber tought it ob him. How long yo' tink before him come back?"

Pollie shook her head.

"Tink him hab bery much trouble getting him let off?"

"He is let off already," Pollie said.

"Do you mean to say dat dey don't want him?" said Coosha, opening her eyes wide.

"No, they don't want him," Pollie said.

"What de dickens dey don't, den, for—eh? Answer me dat!"

"Because—because he is innocent," Pollie said.

"Inneretut!" Coosha stared at Pollie open-



eyed. "Dat's right, him innercent enough. I know dat plenty well. Who de dickens eber say dat him not innercent?"

"Oh, Coosha, all the world said that he was guilty!" Pollie cried.

"H'm! Dis bery int'resting intelligence!" Coosha said. "Dis de bery first time dat I hab heard ob dis. And what de dickens did dey tink him guilty 'bout?"

"Of—of stealing. Oh, Coosha, you know—you know! Of stealing. They thought—they dared to think that he was a thief!"

"Well, dat takes de cake!" said Coosha. "First time I eber heard a single word about it. It de reason him run off for a soldier, den? Dere's artfulness for yo'!"

"For a soldier?" Pollie asked.

"Certainly! Him 'listed, I take my oaf!"

"Coosha"—Pollie started in wonder—"you are wrong; you must be wrong. How could you possibly know? Oh, Coosha, it isn't true!"

"I take my solemn oaf!" said Coosha. "Him told me himself, wid him bery own mouth."

"He did? Coosha, you are dreaming!"

"Say dat I 'toxicated!" said Coosha. "Say de word, Miss Green—say dat I didn't hear Jim Ribbing tole me wid him own lips dat him going for a soldier!"

"But—but what should Jimmy Ribbing know about it? How could he possibly know?"

"I tink," said Coosha solemnly, "dat yo' hab been sitting in de sun, and got a sunstroke! If Jimmy Ribbing didn't know if him 'listed, who de dickens else could know? Of course, Jimmy Ribbing 'listed; but dis de first time I eber heard one word 'bout him being tief!"

"Jimmy Ribbing? Oh, you mean Jimmy Ribbing!" Pollie cried. "Coosha, I wasn't speaking about Jimmy Ribbing!"

"Den who de goodness gracious was yo' speaking 'bout?"

"Bruce—Bruce Hardaker!" Pollie cried.

"Den—den it ain't Jimmy Ribbing dat Sir Francis am gone to fetch?"

"No, no, no! It's Bruce Hardaker. He has gone to fetch him, and bring him home with him."

"Well, I be bless!" said Coosha. "And all de time I tinkin' what a bery nice ole gen'leman him was to go and do such a tinf!"

Ho, ho! Hu, hu! How, how! Oh, my heart am broke! Hoo, hoo!"

"Coosha—Coosha, don't! What's the matter?" Pollie cried.

"Matter? Noting de matter; only I broke my heart wid grief, dat all. My young man gone to be a soldier! Hoo, hoo! And him get kill in de wars, I know dat! I got de sign. My nose been itching. Dat a sign I be vexed!"

"Coosha, aren't you glad that Bruce is coming heme again?"

"Yes; but I be gladder if it was Jimmy Ribbing. No, I ain't. I jolly glad ole Bruce all right; take my oaf I am. Bery tankful. Only I wish Jimmy Ribbing all right, too."

"He will be all right," Pollie said. "He will cover himself with glory, Coosha, and come back an officer and—"

"Huh," said Coosha, "I don't tink! 'Sides dat, I like Jimmy Ribbing better as him am, widout being ole ossifer. Neber mind; 'spect dat dere's just as good as he."

It was late in the evening. The sun had gone down when the telegraph-boy trudged up the hill and came in through the gates.

"For me?" Pollie cried. "For me, Griggs?"

"Ay, for ye, missy!" he mumbled toothlessly.

How her hands trembled as she took the envelope and tore it open, and how her eyes shone when she read the message:

"Coming home. Bruce, Lonsdale, and I, all well. Leaving by six o'clock train.—FATHER."

"Oh, lawky!" said Griggs. "That ain't a shillin' you've give me, Miss Pollie, 'tis a sovereign!"

"I know," Pollie said—"I know! You've brought me good news, Griggs, and it's worth it to me—worth much—much more!"

Griggs departed, clutching his wealth, and Pollie flew into the house. She must make ready, there was a lot to do. How foolish and thoughtless she had been! There would be the rooms to get ready. Mr. Lonsdale was coming, too! She was glad to think this.

"Law!" said Mrs. Sinkinson. "If you don't whisk and whirl around like a tumteetotler!"



"They are coming!" said Pollie. "Dinner, Mrs. Sinkinson, and—and you must do your very best. It will be supper, though; they won't be here till nine. And oh, how careless I have been. None of the rooms are ready, but I will see to everything if you will get the nicest supper ready that you ever got in your life!"

"And so I will, bless your loving 'art!" said Mrs. Sinkinson.

"Bruce, is it true—is it true that you are here? It is what I have been dreaming of, hoping of," Pollie whispered. "And now that it is really true, I can hardly believe it. Oh, Bruce, how I have longed and hoped!"

She clung to him, sobbing in her joy.

"And to me," said Bruce, "it has all been like a dream, this last twenty-four hours of my life. I had given up hope. I had dared not look forward to the time when the cloud should be lifted. But it has been lifted at last, Pollie. I am free. There is no suspicion left against me now; everyone knows that I am innocent."

"I always knew," she whispered—"always, my darling! I trusted in you always; and now you have come back to me, and the past will be forgotten. I will help you to forget." A flush came into her sweet face, her eyes shone into his. "Your future is mine, dear—all mine!"

She lifted her arms, and drew his head down to hers, and kissed him on the lips.

The door opened and Coosha, followed by Sir Francis and Lonsdale, entered.

"Well, Bruce Hardaker," said Coosha, "I bery glad to see yo' again, not so much for myself, but because Pollie Green hab been worrying herself 'bout yo' for a bery long time. Now I hope dat yo' come back yo' going to stop quiet at home."

"He certainly is going to stop quietly at home," Sir Francis said—"that is, if I have any authority over him—the authority of—ahem!—a father-in-law!"

Bruce looked up eagerly.

"You mean that, sir?" he said, in a low voice.

"From the bottom of my heart, my dear Bruce—from the very bottom of my heart. I can only make restitution to you by giving

you that which I prize and love most in the world. I am going to do that, Bruce; but on conditions, mind you—conditions that I shall insist on. We will talk of those later, but I fancy I shall have my own way in the matter. And now, Lonsdale, I think you and I, and—ahem!—Coosha will go and have a quiet pipe in the study, and——"

"If yo' don't make any trouble 'bout it," Coosha said, "I tink I prefer cigar!"

"Very well, then, come along!" Sir Francis said.

Sir Francis, with a beaming face, drove the other two before him out of the room, and at the door he paused.

"I prescribe quietude and rest for you for at least five minutes, Bruce," he said, looking back. "And now, my dear Lonsdale, you and I have a little business matter to discuss," Sir Francis said comfortably. "I can tell it very briefly. In London I met my old friend Lord Hesletine. We served together once. A nice fellow. What was I saying? Oh, yes! I met him, lunched with him at the club, and, among other things, we naturally talked of this place. He told me that Macgrudger is shortly giving up the living here. By the way, the living is in Hesletine's gift."

"I think I know what you are going to say," John Lonsdale said. "I think I understand. But—but it would be impossible."

"It would be nothing of the sort. Hesletine was most kind about it—agreed readily, in fact. The matter, so far as he and I are concerned, is ended. Macgrudger leaves in a month, and you will take his place."

Lonsdale shook his head.

"You tempt me, but—but there is duty waiting for me. They want me——"

"Yes. And if you go back to them, for how long will it be before you must leave them for good?" Sir Francis cried. "Do you think I am blind, man? Do you think that I don't see that you are killing yourself? Go back to your slums, and in three months' time you will be a dead man! You will throw your life away for no purpose! Three months make but little difference; and we will find other men, younger and stronger than you, to take up your work. Believe me, the work will still go on. You are



not the only man on earth who can do it, Lonsdale. It is true that you owe a duty to your fellow-man. That duty you have paid nobly. Now you must think of your duty to yourself. If a man takes his own life, it is a sin in the eyes of God and man. By going back there, by refusing this offer, you are practically guilty of suicide. You can do but little. Your time would be too short. Here, in the fresh, clean air, there will be many years of a long and useful life left to you. Lonsdale, am I speaking truly?"

John Lonsdale dropped his face into his hands.

"You are speaking truly," he said, in a low voice. "I know—I have always known that my time would not be long."

"But here it will be long. Come, man, give way! Admit that I am right, admit that there is no use in this mad and foolish sacrifice that you contemplate. The little good that you may do will not outweigh the great harm that you will certainly do. We can't—we can't spare you, John. We want you. Come to us! My girl's money shall be devoted to the cause you have at heart. And, John, it is a terrible thing to realise, but money is wanted there more than you are. Money counts more than your life does."

"It is true," Lonsdale said hoarsely. "Sir Francis, I scarcely know what to say. I realise the truth of what you tell me. Heaven knows, I realise it, and my own weakness, my own helplessness! But it is hard to own oneself beaten!"

"Yes, it is true! We want you here, John. There is work to be done even in this place; good to be done. You are the man we want, the man who can do it. You will come?"

"Yes, I will come," he said quietly.

And in the drawing-room, with the arms of the man she loved around her, and her face pressed against his breast, Pollie was dreaming of the bright and happy future that lay before them both, the reward that would be theirs after long waiting, after much suffering, after constancy and faithfulness and loyalty.

"He has given you to me!" Bruce whispered. "Sweetheart, I can hardly realise the truth even now—even now, while I hold you in my arms! A little while ago you seemed so far away from me, there seemed to be not one

hope left in the world for me, and now this great happiness has come into my life!"

"And into mine!" she whispered. "You have come back to me, my darling! Oh, you knew—you knew that I would wait for you, though the years might pass; you knew that when you did come back at last, you would find me waiting still—still Pollie Green!"

It was the very first duty that the new rector—the Rev. John Lonsdale—was called on to perform in the little village church, on a certain sunshiny day when all the village was en fete. It was by no means a grand wedding—not such a wedding as had at one time been expected in the history of Pollie Green.

"Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder."

The last words were spoken, and the new rector's voice trembled. Then, as the wheezy old organ made a valiant effort, the wedding party came slowly down the aisle of the church, and so out of the twilight of the place, out into the sunshine, where beaming faces were waiting to greet them.

The world was very full of sunshine and happiness for them just then. After the darkness and sorrows of the past, the happiness of the present and the prospects for the future were all the more radiant by comparison.

The wedding breakfast atoned for the extreme simplicity of the ceremony itself. It was a lavish spread. And at the long tables, heavily laden, humble villagers rubbed shoulders with their wealthier and more exalted neighbours. But to-day all differences of rank and station were levelled; there was no distinction made, for all alike were friends of Pollie Green!

Coosha was on her feet, her bright eyes never brighter than at this moment, her black face beaming with good-nature and contentment.

"People, I got a tose to propose," she said. "And dat is, I got to wish eberyone, absent friends included, good health! I hope dat ebery one may lib long and die happy!"

"Ladies and gentlemen, I going to propose de health ob Sir Francis Green, who am one ob da bery best—"



Applause drowned Coosha's words, and held her silent for a moment.

"And of Mr. Hollister and Penelope, who ought to be married next!"

There was more applause, during which the young couple turned pink.

"And ob de new rector—Mr. Lonsdale—who everybody know and like and respeck, and who we all bery glad to see here!"

The company applauded vigorously.

"And now I come to de most important person in de company, dat is Mr. Bruce Hardaker, and him wife, Pollie Green—dat was. I hab known Pollie Green for a bery long time, and hab always done my best for her. I hab been a bery good friend to her, as she will tell yo' herself, and I bery pleased and proud and happy

to know dat she hab married a bery respectful young man, who am going to live here in dis house all him life, along wid his wife and his father-in-law and me, which yo' all be bery glad to hear, I am sure. But"—Coosha went on after the long interval that had been devoted to cheers—"I got a bery serious complaint to make against Mr. Bruce Hardaker. I tink dat dis day he hab committed a crime, so now I tell yo' what dat sinful ting he hab done is."

Coosha paused, and looked round her proudly, conscious of the fact that she had created a small sensation.

"Gen'lemen and ladies, de crime dat Bruce Hardaker hab committed dis day is, dat he hab rob de world ob—ob Pollie Green!"

THE END.



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