



SAD MUSINGS.

You have been to St. Paul's. I have been alone the whole afternoon. Your aunt Sarah never comes near me. I am now getting this dear fellow to write and order a room for us at Kingston. I told you of my little plan. He is making all the arrangements. It is to be a little *festa* on my husband's birthday—shall we say Tuesday, if fine, Robert? The Admiral will hear of it, and understand that we do not forget him. People say I have no resentment in my nature," said Mrs. Palmer, with a smile. "It is as well,

perhaps, that I should leave untasted a few of the bitter dregs of my hard lot. My spirit is quite broken," continued Mrs. Palmer, cheerfully. "Give me that small hand-screen, Dolly. Have you written to Raban, Robert? My George would wish him remembered."

"Oh, don't let us have Raban, Aunt Philippa," said Robert. "There will be Morgan and George and Colonel Witherington and myself, and your little friend Rhoda will like to come—and any one else?"

"I am thankful to say that Mrs. Morgan and those dreadful two girls are going into the country for two days; that is one reason for fixing upon Tuesday," says Mrs. Palmer. "I don't want them, Dolly dearest. Really the society your poor aunt lives in is something too ludicrous. She will be furious; I have not dared tell her, poor creature. I have accepted an invitation for you on Wednesday. Colonel Witherington's sister, in Hyde Park Gardens, has a large dinner-party. She has asked us all three in the kindest manner. Colonel Witherington called himself with the note this afternoon. I wanted him to stay to dinner. I'm afraid your aunt was vexed. Robert, while you are about it, just write a line for us all to Mrs. Middleton."

Robert wrote Mrs. Palmer's notes, sealed and stamped them, and, between whiles, gave a cheerful little description of their expedition. "Dolly was delighted with the service," said he; "but I am afraid she is a little tired." Then he got up and pulled an arm-chair for her up to the fire, and then he went back and finished putting up Mrs. Palmer's correspondence. He was so specially kind that evening, cheerful, and nice to Mrs. Palmer, doing her behests so cleverly and naturally, that Dolly forgot her terrors, and wondered what evil spirit had possessed her. She began to feel warm and happy once more, and hopeful, and she was unaffectedly sorry when Henley got up and said he must go.

He was no sooner gone and the door shut than Mrs. Palmer said, languidly, "I think I should like Frank Raban to be asked, poor fellow. It will please Rhoda, at all events. Just write, dear."

Dolly blushed up crimson. She had not seen him since that curious little talk she had had with George.

"But Robert doesn't want it, mamma," said Dolly.

"Nonsense, child. I want it. Robert is not your husband yet," said Mrs. Palmer; "and if he were—"

"Shall I bring you a pen and ink?" Dolly asked, shyly.

"Just do as I tell you, dearest," said her mother, crossly. "Write, 'Dear Mr. Raban, my mother desires me to write and tell you with what pleasure she would welcome you on Tuesday next, if you would join a small expedition we are meditating, a water-party, in honor of Admiral Palmer's fifty-seventh birthday.'"

"That is not a bit like one of my letters," said Dolly, finishing quickly. "Where can Aunt Sarah be?"

"I am sure I don't know, my dear. She left in the rudest manner when Witherington called. I have seen nothing of her."

Lady Sarah was sitting up stairs alone—oh, how alone!—in the cheerless bedroom

overhead, where she used to take her griefs and her sad mistrusts. They seemed to hang from the brown faded curtains by the window; they seemed to haunt all round the bed, among its washed-out draperies; they were ranged along the tall chimney-piece in bottles. Here is "morphia" and chlorodyne, or its equivalent of those days; here is "the liniment"—liniment for a strained heart! chloroform for anxious love! Are not each one of those the relics of one or another wound, reopening again and again with the strains of the present? Sarah's hands are clasped and her head is bent forward as she sits in this half darkness—laden gray without, chill within—by the empty hearth. Did Robert love Dolly? Had he love in him? Had she been right to see him through Dolly's eyes?

Just then the door opens, and Dolly, flushed, brightening the dull twilight, comes into the room.

"Come down directly, you wicked woman," she says. "You will be catching cold here all by yourself."

CHAPTER XXX.

WAVE OR FLAME.

How sweet they are, those long sunset evenings on the river! The stream, flowing by swift and rippling, reflects the sky: sometimes, in the still gleams and depths of dying light, it would seem as if the sky itself reflected the waters. The distant woods stand out in bronzed shadow; low sunset fires burn into dusk beyond the fringe of trees; sudden sweet glooms fall upon the boats as they glide in and out by dim creeks and ridges. Perhaps some barge travels past through the twilight, drawn by horses tramping along the towing-path, and dragging against the sky. As the boats float shoreward peaceful sights and sounds are all about, borne upon the flowing water.

"I am so sorry it is over," said Dolly, tying on her straw hat.

The sun was setting, a little star was shining overhead, the last bird had flown home to its nest. Robert pushed them right through a bed of rustling reeds on their way to the landing-place. It was crowded with dancing boats; many people were standing along the shore; the gables of the "Red Lion" had been all aglow for a few minutes past. They could hear the laugh of a boating party scrambling to land. Here and there heads were peeping from the bridge, from the landing-places and windows; some twinkled with the last sunset gleams, others with lights already burning. Dolly had been silent for the last half hour, scarcely listening to its desultory talk. They had exchanged broadsides with George and John Morgan in the other boat; but by degrees

that vigorously manned craft had outrun them, rounded a corner, and left them floating mid-stream. Robert was in no hurry, and Frank was absent, and sometimes almost forgot to row. Looking up now and then, he saw Dolly's sweet face beaming beneath her loose straw hat, with Hampton Court and all its prim terraces for a background.

"You are not doing your share of the work, Raban, by any means," said Robert, laboring, and not overpleased.

"Oh, let us float," murmured Mrs. Palmer. She was leaning over the side of the boat, weighing it heavily down, and dabbling one fat white hand in the water; with the other she was clasping Dolly's stiff young fingers. "Truant children!" she said, "you don't know your own happiness. How well I remember one evening just like this, Dolly, when your papa and I were floating down the Hoogly; and now that I think of it, my Admiral Palmer was with us—he was captain then. How little we either of us thought in those days! The Palmers are so close, one needs a lifetime to understand their ways. I should like to show you a letter, Mr. Raban, that I received only this morning from my sister-in-law, Joanna. Was that a fish or a little bit of stick? Sweet calm! Robert, I am thankful you have never been entangled by one of those ugly girls at Smokethwaite. I know Joanna and her—"

"There was never any thought, I assure you," interrupted Robert, not displeased, and unable to refrain from disclaiming the accusation. "My aunt has always been most kind; she would never have wished to influence my inclinations. She is very much tried just now, parting from Jonah, who joins his regiment immediately. They are coming up to London with him next Saturday."

"Ah, I know what it is to part from one's child," said Philippa, tapping Dolly's fingers. "I am glad to hear Joanna shows *any* feeling. My Dolly, if it were not to Robert, who is so thoughtful, should I be able to bear the thought of parting from you? Take care—pray take care! You are running into this gentleman's boat! Push off—push off! Ah! ah! thank you, Mr. Raban. Look, there is John Morgan. I wish he were here to steer us."

"Don't be frightened, dear," said Dolly, still holding her mother's hand, as the little rocking boat made toward the steps, where John Morgan was standing welcoming them all with as much heartiness as if they were returning from some distant journey, and had not met for years. Some people reserve themselves for great occasions, instead of spending their sympathies lavishly along the way. Good old John certainly never spared either sympathy or the expression of his hearty good-will. I don't know that the people who sometimes smiled at his honest

exuberances found that he was less reliable when greater need arose because he had been kind day after day about nothing at all. He saved Mrs. Palmer from a ducking on this occasion as she precipitately flung herself out of the boat on to his toes. Frank Raban also jumped on shore. Robert said he would take the *Sarah Anne* back to her home in the boat-house.

"Then I suppose Dolly will have to go too," said Mrs. Palmer, archly; and Dolly, with a blush and a smile, settled herself once more comfortably on the low cushioned seat. She looked after her mother trailing up the slope, leaning on the curate's arm, and waving farewells until they passed by the garden gate of the inn. Frank Raban was slowly following them. Then Dolly and Robert were alone, and out on the river again. The lightened boat swayed on the water. The air seemed to freshen, the ripples flowed in from a distance, the banks slid by. Robert smiled as he bent over the sculls. How often Dolly remembered the last golden hour that came to her that day before the lights had died away out of her sky, before the waters had risen, before her boat was wrecked, and Robert far away out of the reach of her voice!

There were many other people coming back to the boat-house. The men were busy, the landing was crowded, and the *Sarah Anne* had to wait her turn. Robert disliked waiting extremely. He also disliked the looks of open admiration which two canoes were casting at the *Sarah Anne*.

"There are some big stones by the shore, Dolly," said Robert. "Do you think you could manage to land?"

"Of course I can," said active Dolly; "and then you can tie the boat to that green stake just beyond them." As she stood up to spring on shore, she looked round once more. Did some instinct tell her that this was the end of it all, and the last of the happy hours? She jumped with steady feet on to the wet stone, and stood balancing herself for a moment. The water rippled to her feet as she stood, with both hands outstretched, and her white dress fluttering, and all the light of youth and happiness in her radiant face. And then with another spring she was on land.

"Well done!" said one of the canoes. Robert turned round with a fierce look.

When he rejoined Dolly he found her looking about in some distress.

"My ring, my pretty ring, Robert," she said; "I have dropped it." It was a ring he had given her the day before. Dolly had at last consented to wear one, but this was large for her finger.

"You careless girl," said Robert; "here are your gloves and your handkerchief! Do you know what that ring cost?"

"Oh, don't tell me," said Dolly; "some-

thing dreadful, I know." And she stood penitently watching Robert scrambling back into the boat, and overthrowing and thumping the cushions. And yet, as she stood there, it came into her mind how many treasures were hers just then, and that of them all a ring was that which she could best bear to lose.

One of the canoes had come close into shore by this time, and the young man, who was paddling with his two spades, called out, saying, "Are you looking for any thing? Is it for this?" and carefully putting his hand into the water, he pulled out something shining. The ring had dropped off Dolly's finger as she jumped, and was lying on a stone that was half in and half out of the water, and near to the big one upon which she had been standing.

"How very fortunate!" exclaimed Henley from the boat.

Miss Vanborough was pleased to get back her pretty trinket, and thanked the young man with a very becoming blush.

"It is a very handsome coral," Robert said; "it would have been a great pity to lose it. We must have it made smaller, Dora. It must not come off again."

Dolly was turning it round thoughtfully, and looking at the Medusa head carved and set in gold.

"Robert," she said once more, "does happiness never frighten you?"

"Never," said Henley, smiling, as she looked up earnestly into his face.

The old town at Kingston, with its many corners and gables, has something of the look of a foreign city heaped upon the river-side. The garden of the old inn runs down with terraces to the water. A side-door leads to the boat-houses. By daylight this garden is somewhat mouldy; but spiders' webs do not obtrude on summer evenings, and the Londoners who have come out of town for a breath of fresh air stroll along the terraces, and watch the stream as it flows, unconscious of their serenity. They come here of summer evenings, and sit out in the little arbors, or walk along the terraces and watch the boats drift with the stream. If they look to the opposite banks they may see the cattle rearing their horned heads upon the sunset, and the distant chestnut groves and galleries of Hampton Court at the bend of the river.

Near the corner of one of these terraces a little green weather-cocked summer-house stands boldly facing the regattas in their season, and beyond it again are a steep bank and some steps to a second terrace, from whence there is the side-door leading to the boats.

On this particular evening Frank Raban came quietly zigzagging along these terraces, perhaps with some vague hope of meeting Dorothea on her return.

There are some years of one's life when one is less alive than at others, as there are different degrees of strength and power to live in the course of the same existence. Frank was not in the despairing state in which we first knew him, but he was not yet as other people are, and in hours of depression such as this he was used to feel lonely and apart. He was used to see other people happy, anxious, busy, hurrying after one another, and he would look on as now, with his hands in his pockets, not indifferent, but feeling as if Fate had put him down solitary and silent into the world—a dumb note (so he used to think) in the great music. And yet he knew that the music was there—that mighty human vibration which exists independent of all the dumb notes, cracked instruments, rifted lutes, and broken lyres of which we hear so much, and he had but to open his ears to it.

Two voices any thing but dumb were talking inside the little summer-house. Raban had scarcely noticed them as he came along, listening with the vaguest curiosity, as people do, to reproaches and emotions which do not concern them; but presently, as he approached the summer-house, a tone struck him familiarly, and at the same instant he saw a dark figure rush wildly from the little wooden house, and leap right over the side of the terrace on to the path below; and then Frank recognized the frantic action—it could only be George. A moment afterward a woman—he knew her too—came out of the summer-house and stood for an instant panting against the doorway, leaning with her two hands against the lintel. She looked pale, troubled; her hair was pushed back from her white face; her eyes looked dark, beautiful. Never before had Raban seen Rhoda (for it was Rhoda) so moved. When she saw him a faint flush came into her cheeks. She came forward a few steps, then she stopped short again.

She was dragging her silk mantle, which had fallen off. One end was trailing after her along the gravel.

"Mr. Raban, is that you?" she said, in an agitated way. "Why did you come? Is it—is it nearly time to go? Is Mrs. Palmer come back? Oh, *please* take me to her!" And then she suddenly burst into tears, and the long black silk mantle fell to the ground as she put out two fluttering hands.

Raban had flung his cigar over the terrace after George.

"What is it?" he said, anxiously. "Can I help you in any way? What has happened?"

The young man spoke kindly, but in his usual matter-of-fact voice; and Rhoda, even in her distress, wondered at his coldness. No one before ever responded so calmly to whom she had appealed.

"Oh, you don't know," she said; "I can't

tell you." And the poor little hands went up again with a desperate gesture.

Raban was very much touched; but, as I have said, he had little power of showing his sympathy, and, foolish fellow, doing unto others as he would be done by; he only said, "I have guessed something before now, Miss Parnell. I wish I could help you, with all my heart. Does not Miss Vanborough know of this? Can not she advise—"

Rhoda was in no mood to hear her friend's praises just then.

"Dolly!" cried Rhoda, passionately; "she would have every one sacrificed to George. I would love him if I could," she said, piteously, "but how can I? he frightens me and raves at me; how can I love him? Oh, Mr. Raban, tell me that it is not wrong to feel thus?" And once more the fluttering hands went up, and the dark wistful eyes gazed childishly, piteously into his face. Rhoda was looking to Frank for the help that should have come to her from her own heart; she dimly felt that she must win him over—that if he would, he could help her.

One has heard before this of women who are only half women, who sang their charmed songs and beguiled luckless mariners into their nets. How many woman mermaids there are who go through life unconscious of the tribe to which they belong! Rhoda pitied herself sincerely; she sobbed out her history to Frank with many tears. "How can I tell them all?" she said; "it will only make wretchedness, and now it is only I who am unhappy."

Was it only Rhoda who was unhappy? George, flying along the garden half-distracted, aching, repentant, might have told another story. She had sent him away. He would do nothing that she wished, she said; he would not accept the independence that Lady Sarah had offered him; Rhoda did not believe in his love, she only wanted him to go, to leave her. Yes, she meant it. And poor George had rushed away frantic and indignant. He did not care where he went. He had some vague idea that he would get a boat and row away forever, but as he was hurrying headlong toward the boat-house he saw Dorothea and Robert coming arm in arm up the little path, and he turned and hurried back toward the inn. Dolly called to him, but he did not answer. Rhoda had sent him away, poor Dolly could not call him back. Robert shrugged his shoulders.

"Why do you do that?" said Dolly, annoyed; "he looked quite ill."

CHAPTER XXXI.

A BOAT UPON THE WATER.

GEORGE was shivering and sick at heart; the avenue led to a door that opened into the bar of the hotel, and George went in and

called for some brandy. The spirits seemed to do him good; no one seeing a clumsy young fellow in a boating-dress tossing off one glassful of brandy after another would have guessed at all the grief and passion that were tearing at his poor foolish heart. Rhoda had sent him away. Had he deserved this? Could not she read the truth? Poor timid faithless little thing. Why had he been so fierce to her, why had he told her he was jealous? George had a curious quickness of divination about others, although he was blind about his own concerns. He had reproached Rhoda because she had been talking to Frank, but he knew well enough that Frank did not care for Rhoda. Poor child, did she know how it hurt him when she shrank from him and seemed afraid? Ah! she would not have been so cruel if she had known all. Thinking of it all, he felt as if he had had some little bird in his rough grasp, frightened it, and hurt its wings. Then he suddenly said to himself that he would go back and find his poor frightened bird and stroke it and soothe it, ask it to forgive him. And then he left the place, and as hastily as he had entered; there was a last glass of brandy untasted on the counter, and he hurried back toward the terrace. He passed the window of the room where Mrs. Palmer was ordering tea from the sofa. Dolly, who had just come in, saw him pass by; she did not like his looks, and ran out after him, although both Robert and her mother called her back. George did not see her this time; he flew past the family groups sitting out in the warm twilight; he came to the terrace where he had been a few minutes before, and where the two were still standing—Raban, of whom he had said he was jealous, Rhoda, whom he loved—the two were slowly advancing, Frank's square shoulders dark against the light, and Rhoda's slight figure bending forward; she was talking to Raban as she had so often talked to George himself, with that language of earnest eyes, tremulous tones, shrinking movements—how well he knew it all! What was she saying? Was she appealing to Frank to protect her from his love and despair, from the grief that she had done her best to bring about? Rhoda laid her hand upon Raban's arm in her agitation.

It maddened George beyond bearing, and he stamped his heavy foot upon the gravel. Some people passing up from the boats stared at him, but went on their way; and Frank, looking up, saw George coming up swinging his angry arms; his eyes were fierce, his hat was pushed aside. He put Rhoda aside very gently, and took a step forward between her and George, who stood for a minute looking from one to another, as if he did not understand, and then he suddenly burst out, with a fierce oath, "Who told you to put yourself in my way?" And,

as he spoke, he struck a heavy blow straight at Raban, who had barely time to parry it with his arm.

It was an instant's anger—one of those fatal minutes that undo days and months and years that have gone before; and that blow of George's struck Rhoda's feeble little fancy for him dead on the spot, as she gave a shrill cry of "For shame!" and sprang forward, and would have clung to Raban's arm. That blow ached for many and many a day in poor Dorothea's heart, for she saw it all from a turn of the path. As for Frank, he recovered himself in an instant.

"Go back, George," he said; "I will speak to you presently."

He did not speak angrily. His voice and the steady look of his resolute eyes seemed to sober the poor reprobate. Not so Rhoda's cry of, "Go, yes, go, for shame!"

"Go! What is it to you if I go or stay? Am I in your way?" shouts George. "Have you promised to marry him too? Have you tortured him too, and driven him half mad, and then—and then— Oh, Rhoda, do you really wish me gone?" he cried, breaking down.

There was a tone in his voice that touched Raban, for whom the cry was not intended. Nothing would have melted Rhoda just then. She was angry beyond all power of expression. She wanted him gone, she wanted him silent; she felt as if she hated him.

"You are not yourself; you are not speaking the truth," said the girl, in a hard voice, drawing herself up. Then, as she spoke, all the brandy and all the fury seemed to mount once more into George's head.

"I am myself, and that is why I leave you," he shouts; "you are heartless; you have neither love nor charity in you at all; and now I leave you. Do you hear me?" he cried, getting louder and louder.

Any one could hear. Dolly could hear as she came hurrying up from the end of the terrace to the spot where her poor boy stood shouting out his heart's secret to unwilling ears. More than one person had stopped to listen to the angry voice. The placid stillness of the evening seemed to carry its echo along the dusky garden bowers, out upon the water flowing down below. Some boatmen had stopped to listen; one or two people were coming up through the twilight.

"He is not sober," said Rhoda to Dolly. She spoke with a sort of cold disgust.

Dolly hardly heard her at the time. All she saw then was her poor George, with his red angry face—Frank trying to pacify him. Should she ever forget the miserable scene? For long years after it used to rise before her; she used to dream of it at night—of the garden, the river, the figures advancing in the dark.

Dolly ran up to her brother, and instinct-

ively put out her arms as if to shield him from every one.

"Come, dear; come with me," she said, flurriedly; "don't let them see you like this."

"It would shock their elegant susceptibilities," cries the irrepressible George; "it don't shock them to see a woman playing fast and loose with a poor wretch who would have given his life for her—yes, his life, and his love, and his heart's blood!"

Dolly had got her arms tight round George by this time. She had a shrinking dread of Henley seeing him so—he might be coming, she thought.

"Robert might see you. Oh, George, please come," she whispered, still clinging to him; and suddenly, to Dolly's surprise, George collapsed, with a sigh. His furious fit was over, and he let his sister lead him where she would.

"Go down by the river-side," said Raban, coming after them; "there are too many people the other way." He spoke in a grave, anxious tone, and as the brother and sister went their way he looked after them for a moment. Dolly had got her arm fast linked in George's. The young man was walking listlessly by her side. They neither of them looked back; they went down the steps and disappeared.

The place was all deserted by this time; the disturbance being over, the boatmen had gone on their way. The two went and sat down upon a log which had been left lying near the water-side; they were silent; they could see each other's faces, but little more. He sat crouching over, with his chin resting on his hands. Dolly was full of compassion, and longing to comfort; but how could she comfort? Such pain as his was not to be eased by words spoken by another person. When George began to speak at last his voice sounded so sad and so jarred from its usual sweetness that Dorothea was frightened, as if she could hear in it the echo of a coming trouble.

"I wanted that woman to love me," he said. "Dolly, you don't know how I loved her." He was staring at the stream with his starting eyes, and biting his nails. "We have no luck, either of us," he said; "I don't deserve any, but you do. Tell Frank I'm sorry I struck him; she had made me half mad; she looks at me with those great eyes of hers, and says, 'Go!' and she makes me mad; she does it to them all.... But now I have left her! left her! left her!" repeated ugly George, with a sort of sob. "What does she care?" and he got up and shook himself, as a big dog might have done, and went out a step into the twilight, and then came back.

"Thank you, old Dolly, for your goodness," he said, standing before her. "I can't face them all again, and Robert, with his confounded supercilious airs. I beg your

pardon, Dolly; don't look angry. I see how good you are, and I see," he said, staring her full in the face, "that we have been both running our heads against a wall."

He walked on a little way, and Dolly followed. She could not answer him just then. She felt with a pang that George and Robert would never be friends; that she must love them apart; even in heart she must keep them asunder.

They had come to the place where not an hour ago she had jumped ashore. The boat was still there, as they had left it—tied to the stake. The boatmen were at supper, and had not yet taken it in. "What are you doing?" said Dolly, as George stooped and began to untie the rope; "George, be careful."

"The fresh air will do me good," he said; "don't be afraid; I'll take care, if you wish it." Then he nodded and got into the boat, where the sculls were lying, and he began to shove off with a rattle of the keel upon the shore. "I will leave the boat at Teddington," he said, "and walk home. Good-night! Good-by!" he said. A boatman, hearing the voices, came out of the boat-house close by, and while Dolly was explaining, the boat started off with a dull plash of oars falling upon dark waters. George was rowing very slowly, his head was turned toward the garden of the inn. There were lights in the windows, and figures coming and going; the water swirled against the wall of the terrace; the scent of the rhododendrons seemed to fill the air and to stifle him as he passed; a bird chirped from the darkness of some overhanging bushes. He could hear his mother's voice: "Robert! it is getting late: why don't they come in to tea? I must say it is nasty stuff, and not to compare to that delicious Rangoon flavor." He paused for a moment; her voice died away, and then all was silent. The evening was growing chill; some mists were rising. George felt the cool damp wind against his hot brow as he rowed doggedly on—past the lights of the windows of the inn, past the town, under the darkness of the bridge.

He left them all behind, and his life, and his love, he thought, and his mad passion; and himself, and Dolly, and Rhoda, and all the hopeless love he longed for and that was never to be his. There were other things in life. So he rowed away into the darkness with mixed anger and peace in his heart. What would Rhoda say when she heard he was gone? Nothing much! He knew her well enough to know that Dolly would understand, but her new ties would part them more entirely than absence or silence.

There is a song of Schubert's I once heard a great singer sing. As she sang, the dull gray river flowed through the room, the bright lamp-lit walls opened out, the mists

of a closing darkness surrounded us, the monotonous beat of the rowlocks kept time to the music, and the man rowed away, and silence fell upon the waters.

So Dolly stood watching the boat as it disappeared along the dark wall; for a time she thought she heard the plash of the oars out upon the water, and a dark shade gliding away past the wharves and the houses that crowd down to the shore.

She was saying her prayers for her poor boy as she walked back slowly to join the others. Robert met her with a little remonstrance for having hidden away so long. She took his arm and clung to it for a minute, trembling, with her heart beating. "Oh, Robert, you won't let things come between us," said the girl, greatly moved: "my poor George is so unhappy. He is to blame, but Rhoda has been hard upon him. Have you guessed it all?" "My dear Dolly," said Robert, gravely, "Rhoda has told us every thing. She is most justly annoyed. She is quite overcome. She has just gone home with her uncle, and I must say—" "Don't, don't say any thing," said Dolly, passionately, bursting into tears; and her heart went out after her poor George rowing away along the dark river.



CHAPTER XXXII.

TRUST ME.

THE much-talked-of tea was standing, black as the waters of oblivion, in the teapot when they rejoined Mrs. Palmer. Philippa was sitting tête-à-tête with Raban, and seemed chiefly perturbed at having been kept waiting, and because John Morgan had carried off Rhoda.

"I can't think why he did it," said Mrs. Palmer, crossly; "it is much pleasanter all keeping together, and it is too silly of that little Rhoda to make such a disturbance. As if George would have said any thing to annoy her, with all of us present! Tell me what did really happen, Robert. Why was I not sent for?"

"I am afraid George was a good deal to blame," said Robert, in a confidential voice. "I only came up after the fracas, but, from what I hear, I am afraid he had been drinking at the bar. Dolly can tell you more than I can, for she was present from the beginning."

Dolly was silent: she could not speak. Frank looked at her, and saw her blush painfully. He was glad that Miss Vanborough should be spared any farther explication, and that Mrs. Palmer beckoned him into a window to tell him that the Admiral had the greatest horror of intemperance, and that she remembered a fearful scene with a kitmutghar who had drained off a bottle of her eau-de-Cologne. "Dear George, unfortunately, was of an excitable disposition. As for the poor Admiral, he is perfectly ungovernable when he is roused," said Mrs. Palmer, in her heroic manner. "I have seen strong men like yourself, Mr. Raban, turn pale before him. I remember a sub-lieutenant trembling like an aspen leaf: he had neglected to call my carriage. Is it not time to be off? Dolly, what have I done with my little blue shawl? You say George is not coming?"

"Here is your little blue shawl, mamma," said Dolly, wearily. She was utterly dispirited; she could not understand her mother's indifference, nor Robert's even flow of conversation; she forgot that they did not either of them realize how serious matters had been.

"It is really too naughty of George," was all that Mrs. Palmer said; "and, now that I think of it, he certainly told me he might have to go back to Cambridge to-night, so we may not see him again. Mr. Raban, if you see him, tell him— But I forgot," with a gracious smile, "we meet you to-morrow at the Middletons'. Robert tells me my brother and his family are come to town this week. It will be but a painful meeting, I fear. Dolly, remind me to call there in the morning. They have taken a house in Dean's Yard, of all places. And there is Madame Frisette at nine. How tiresome those dress-makers are!"

"Is Madame Frisette at work for Dorothea?" asked Robert, with some interest.

Dolly did not reply, nor did she seem to care whether Madame Frisette was at work or not. She sat leaning back in her corner with two hands lying listless in her lap, pale through the twilight. Frank Raban, as he looked at her, seemed to know, almost as if she had told him in words, what was passing

in her mind. His jealous intuition made him understand it all; he knew, too, as well as if Robert had spoken, something of what he was not feeling. They went rolling on through the dusk, between villas and dim hedges and nursery gardens, beyond which the evening shadows were passing; and all along the way it seemed to Dolly that she could hear George's despairing voice ringing beyond the mist, and, haunted by this echo, she could scarcely listen with any patience to her companion's ripple of small-talk, to Mrs. Palmer's anecdotes of Captains and Colonels, and anticipation of coming gayety and emotions. What a season was before her! The Admiral's return, Dolly's marriage, Lady Henley's wearing insinuations—she dreaded to think of it all.

"You must call for us to-morrow at half past seven, Robert, and take us to the Middletons'. I couldn't walk into the room alone with Dolly. I suppose Joanna, too, will be giving some at-homes. I shall have to go, however little inclined I may feel."

"It is always well to do what other people do," said Robert; "it answers much best in the long-run."

He did not see Dolly's wondering look. Was this the life Dolly had dreamed of? a sort of wheel of commonplace to which poor unquiet souls were to be bound, confined by platitudes, and innumerable threads, and restrictions, and silences. She had sometimes dreamed of something more meaningful and truer, something responding to her own nature, a life coming straighter from the heart. She had not counted much on happiness. Perhaps she had been too happy to wish for happiness; but to-night it occurred to her again what life might be—a life with a truth in it, and a genuine response and a nobler scheme than any she had hitherto realized.

Frank heard a sigh coming from her corner. They were approaching the street where he wanted to be set down, and he, too, had something in his mind, which he felt he must say before they parted. As he wished Dorothea good-night he found a moment to say, in a low voice, "I hope you may be able to tell Lady Sarah every thing that has happened, without reserve. Do trust me. It will be best for all your sakes;" and then he was gone before Dolly could answer.

"What did he say?" said Robert Henley. "Are you warm enough, Dolly? Will you have a shawl?"

He spoke so affectionately that she began to wonder whether it was because they were not alone that he had been cold and disappointing.

They reached the house, and old Sam came to the door, and Robert helped to unpack the wrecks of the day's pleasures—the hampers and umbrellas and armfuls of crumpled muslins. Then the opportunity came for Robert to be impulsive if he

chose, for Mrs. Palmer floated up stairs with her candle to say good-night to Lady Sarah. She was kissing her hand over the balusters, and dropping all the wax as she went along.

Robert came up to Dolly, who was standing in the hall. "Good-night," he said. "It might have been a pleasant day upon the whole if it had not been for George. You must get him to apologize to Rhoda, Dora. I mean to speak very plainly to him when I see him next."

His calmness exasperated her as he stood there with his handsome face looking down a little reproachfully at her flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes.

"Speaking won't do a bit of good, Robert," she said, hastily. "Pray don't say much to him—"

"I wonder when you will learn to trust me, Dora," said her cousin, taking her hand. "How shall we ever get on unless you do?"

"I am sure I don't know," Dolly answered, wearily; "we don't seem to want the same things, Robert, or to be going together a bit."

"What do you mean?" said Henley. "You are tired and out of spirits to-night."

With a sudden reaction Dolly caught hold of his arm with both hands. "Robert! Robert! Robert!" she said, holding him fast, and looking as if she could transform him with her eyes to be what she wanted.

"Silly child," he answered, "I don't think you yourself know what you want. Good-night. Don't forget to be ready in time to-morrow."

Then he was gone, having first looked for his umbrella, and the door banged upon Robert and the misty stars, and Dolly remained standing at the foot of the stairs. Frank Raban's words had borne fruit, as sensible words should do. "Trust me," he had said; and Henley had used the same phrase, only with Robert "Trust me" meant believe that I can not be mistaken; with Frank "Trust me" meant trust in truth in yourself and in others. Dolly, with one of those quick impulses which come to impressionable people, suddenly felt that he was right. All along she had been mistaken. It would have been better, far better, from the beginning to have told Lady Sarah every thing. She had been blinded, overpersuaded. Marker came up to shut bolts and put out the lights. Dolly looked up, and she went and laid her tired head on the old nurse's shoulder, and clung to her for an instant.

"Is any thing the matter, my dearie?" said Marker.

"Nothing new," Dolly said. "Marker, George is not come home. I have so much to say to him! Don't bolt the door, and please leave a light."

But George did not come home that night, although the door was left unbolted, and the light kept burning on purpose. When the

morning came his bed was folded smooth, and every thing looked straight and silent in his room, which was orderly as places are when the people are away who inhabit them.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CIRCUMSTANCE.

FOR some days before the picnic Mrs. Palmer and Julie had been absorbed in the preparation of two beautiful garments that were to be worn at Mrs. Middleton's dinner, and at a ball at Bucklersbury House, for which Mrs. Palmer was expecting an invitation. Lady Sarah had written at her request to ask for one. Meanwhile the dresses had been growing under Julie's art; throwing out fresh flounces and trimmings and ribbons hour by hour, until they had finally come to perfection, and were now lying side by side on the bed in the spare room, ready to be tried on for the last time.

"Must it be *now*, mamma?" said Dolly. "Breakfast is just ready, and Aunt Sarah will be waiting."

"Julie, go down stairs and beg Lady Sarah not to wait," said Mrs. Palmer, with great decision.

Julie came back saying that Miss Rhoda was with Lady Sarah below, and asking for Miss Dolly.

"Presently," said Mrs. Palmer. "Very pretty indeed, Julie!" Then she suddenly exclaimed, "You can not imagine what it is, Dolly, to be linked to one so utterly uncongenial, you who are so fortunate in our dear Robert's perfect sympathy and knowledge of London life. He quite agrees with me in my wish that you should be introduced. Admiral Palmer hates society, except to preach at it—such a pity, is it not! I assure you, strange as it may seem, I quite dread his return."

Dolly stood bolt upright, scarcely conscious of the dress or the pins, or her mother's monologue. She was still thinking over the great determination she had come to. George had not come back, but Dolly had made up her mind to tell Lady Sarah every thing. She was not afraid; it was a relief to have the matter settled. She would say no word to injure him. It was she who had been to blame throughout. Her reflections were oddly intermingled with snips and pricks other than those of her conscience. Once, as Julie ran a pin into her arm, she thought how strange it was that Mr. Raban should have guessed every thing all along. Dolly longed and feared to have her explanation over.

"Have you nearly done? Let me go down, Julie," said Dolly, becoming impatient at last.

But Julie still wanted to do something to the set of the sleeve.

And while Julie was pinning poor Dolly down the clock struck nine, and the time was over, and Dolly's opportunity was lost forever. It has happened to us all. When she opened the dining-room door at last she knew in one instant that it was too late.

The room seemed full of people. Lady Sarah was there; Mrs. Morgan bristling by the window; Rhoda was there, kneeling at Lady Sarah's knee, in some agitation: her bonnet had fallen off, her hair was all curling and rough. She started up as Dolly came in, and ran to meet her.

"Oh, Dolly!" she said; "come, come," and she seized both her hands. "I have told Lady Sarah every thing; she knows all. Oh, why did we not confide in her long ago?" and Rhoda burst into tears. "Oh, I feel how wrong we have been," she sobbed.

"Rhoda has told me every thing, Dolly," said Lady Sarah in a cold voice—"every thing that those whom I trusted implicitly saw fit to conceal from me."

Was it Aunt Sarah who had spoken in that cold, harsh-sounding tone?

"Rhoda has acted by my advice and with my full approval," said Mrs. Morgan, stepping forward. "She is not one to look back, once her hand is to the plow. When I had seen George's letter—it was lying on the table—I said at once that no time should be lost in acquainting your aunt, Dolly. It is inconceivable to me that you have not done so before. We started immediately after our eight-o'clock breakfast, and all is now clearly understood, I trust, Lady Sarah. Rhoda's frankness will be a lesson to Dolly."

Poor Dolly! she was stiff, silent, overwhelmed. She looked appealingly at her aunt, but Lady Sarah looked away. What could she say? how was it that she was there a culprit while Rhoda stood weeping and forgiven? Rhoda who had enforced the silence, Rhoda now taking merit for her tardy frankness! while George was gone, and Dolly in disgrace.

"Indeed, Aunt Sarah, I would have told you every thing," cried the girl, very much agitated, "only Rhoda herself made me promise—"

"Dolly, you never promised!" cried Rhoda. "But we were all wrong," she burst out, with fresh penitence: "only, Lady Sarah knows all, and we shall be happier now," she said, wiping her eyes.

"Happy in right-doing," interrupted Mrs. Morgan.

"Have we done wrong, Aunt Sarah? Forgive us," said Dolly, with a touching ring in her voice.

Lady Sarah did not answer. She was used to her nephew's misdeeds, but that Dolly—her own Dolly—should have been

the one to plot against her cut the poor lady to the heart. She could not speak. "And Dolly knew it all the time," she had said to Rhoda a minute before Dolly came in. "Yes, she knew it," said Rhoda. "She wished it, and feared—" Here Rhoda blushed very red. "George told me she feared that you might not approve and do for him as you might otherwise have done. Oh, Lady Sarah, what injustice we have done you!"

"Perhaps Dolly would wish to see the letter," said Mrs. Morgan, offering her a paper: there was no mistaking the cramped writing. There was no date nor beginning to the note:

"I have been awake all night thinking over what has happened. It is not your fault that you do not know what love is, nor what a treasure I have wasted upon you. I have given you my best, and to you it is worthless. You can't realize such love as mine. You will not even understand the words that I am writing to you; but it is not your fault, any more than it is mine, that I can not help loving you. Oh, Rhoda, you don't care so much for my whole life's salvation as I do for one moment's peace of mind for me. I see it now—I understand all now. Forgive me if I am hurting you, for the sake of all you have made me suffer. I feel as if I could no longer bear my life here. I must go, and yet I must see you once more. You need not be afraid that I should say any thing to frighten or distress you. Your terror of me has pained me far more than you have any conception of. God bless you! I had rather your hands smote me than that another blessed."

"It is most deplorable that a young man of George's ability should write such nonsense," said Mrs. Morgan.

Poor Dolly flushed up and began to tremble. Her heart ached for her poor George's trouble.

"It is not nonsense," she said, passionately; "people call what they can not feel themselves nonsense. Aunt Sarah, you understand, though they don't. You must see how unhappy he is. How can Rhoda turn against him now? How can she, after all that has passed? What harm has he done? It was not wicked to love her more than she loved him."

"Do you see no cruelty in all this long deception?" said Lady Sarah, with two red spots burning in her cheeks. "You must both have had some motive for your silence. Have I ever shown myself cold or unfeeling to you?" and the flushed face was turned away from her.

"It was not for herself, Lady Sarah," said Mrs. Morgan, wishing to see justice done. "No doubt she did not wish to injure George's prospects."

Dolly was silent. She had some dim feeling of what was in Lady Sarah's mind; but it was a thought she put aside—it seemed unworthy of them both. She was ashamed to put words to it.

If Dolly and her aunt had only been alone, all might have been well, and the girl might have made Lady Sarah understand how true she had been to her and loyal at heart, although silent from circumstances. Dolly looked up with wistful, speaking eyes, and