

"If you feel cold, Clara, you will like some tea," she said. "Shall we go in-doors, where it is ready?"

Lady Winsleigh assented with some eagerness—and the two beautiful women—the one dark, the other fair—walked side by side across the lawn into the house, their arms round each other's waists as they went.

"Two queens—and yet not rivals?" half queried Lovelace, as he watched them disappearing.

"Their thrones are secure!" returned Sir Philip, gayly.

The others were silent. Lord Winsleigh's thoughts, whatever they were, deepened the lines of gravity on his face; and George Lorimer, as he got up from his couch on the grass, caught a fleeting expression in the brown eyes of Sir Francis Lennox that struck him with a sense of unpleasantness. But he quickly dismissed the impression from his mind, and went to have a quiet smoke in the shrubbery.

CHAPTER VI.

La rose du jardin, comme tu sais, dure peu, et la saison des roses est bien vite écoulée!—SAADI.

THELMA took her friend Lady Winsleigh to her own boudoir, a room which had been the particular pride of Sir Philip's mother. The walls were decorated with panels of blue silk in which were woven flowers of gold and silver thread—and the furniture, bought from an old palace in Milan, was of elaborately carved wood inlaid with ivory and silver. Here a *tête-à-tête* tea was served for the two ladies, both of whom were somewhat fatigued by the pleasures of the day. Lady Winsleigh declared she must have some rest, or she would be quite unequal to the gayeties of the approaching evening, and Thelma herself was not sorry to escape for a little from her duties as hostess—so the two remained together for some time in earnest conversation, and Lady Winsleigh then and there confided to Thelma what she had heard reported concerning Sir Philip's intimate acquaintance with the burlesque actress, Violet Vere. And they were both so long absent that, after awhile, Errington began to miss his wife, and, growing impatient, went in search of her. He entered the boudoir, and, to his surprise, found Lady Winsleigh there quite alone.

"Where is Thelma?" he demanded.

"She seems not very well—a slight headache or something of that sort—and has gone to lie down," replied Lady Winsleigh, with a faint trace of embarrassment in her manner. "I think the heat has been too much for her."

"I'll go and see after her,"—and he turned promptly to leave the room.

"Sir Philip!" called Lady Winsleigh. He paused and looked back.

"Stay one moment," continued her ladyship, softly. "I have been for a long time so very anxious to say something to you in private. Please let me speak now. You—you know"—here she cast down her lustrous eyes—"before you went to Norway I—I was very foolish—"

"Pray do not recall it," he said with kindly gravity. "I have forgotten it."

"That is so good of you!" and a flush of color warmed her delicate cheeks. "For if you have forgotten, you have also forgiven?"

"Entirely!" answered Errington, and touched by her plaintive, self-reproachful manner and trembling voice, he went up to her and took her hands in his own. "Don't think of the past, Clara! Perhaps I also was to blame a little—I'm quite willing to think I was. Flirtation's a dangerous amusement at best." He paused as he saw two bright tears on her long, silky lashes, and in his heart felt a sort of remorse that he had ever permitted himself to think badly of her. "We are the best of friends now, Clara," he continued, cheerfully, "and I hope we may always remain so. You can't imagine how glad I am that you love my Thelma!"

"Who would not love her!" sighed Lady Winsleigh, gently, as Sir Philip released her hands from his warm clasp—then raising her tearful eyes to his she added wistfully: "you must take great care of her, Philip—she is so sensitive—I always fancy an unkind word would kill her."

"She'll never hear one from me!" he returned, with so tender and earnest a look on his face that Lady Winsleigh's heart ached for jealousy. "I must really go and see how she is. She's been exerting herself too much to-day. Excuse me!" and with a courteous smile and bow he left the room with a hurried and eager step.

Alone, Lady Winsleigh smiled bitterly. "Men are all alike!" she said half aloud. "Who would think he was such a hypocrite? Fancy his dividing his affection between two such contrasts as Thelma and Violet Vere! However, there's no accounting for tastes. As for men's fidelity, I wouldn't give a straw for it—and for his morality—!" She finished the sentence with a scornful laugh, and left the boudoir to return to the rest of the company.

Errington, meanwhile, knocked softly at the door of his wife's bedroom, and receiving no answer, turned the handle noiselessly and went in. Thelma lay on the bed, dressed as she was, her cheek resting on her hand, and her face partly hidden. Her husband approached on tiptoe, and lightly kissed her forehead. She did not stir—she appeared to sleep profoundly.

"Poor girl!" he thought, "she's tired out, and no wonder, with

all the bustle and racket of these people! A good thing if she can rest a little before the evening closes in."

And he stole quietly out of the room, and meeting Britta on the stairs told her on no account to let her mistress be disturbed till it was time for the illumination of the grounds. Britta promised, Britta's eyes were red—one would almost have fancied she had been crying. But Thelma was not asleep—she had felt her husband's kiss—her heart had beat as quickly as the wing of a caged wild bird at his warm touch, and now he had gone she turned and pressed her lips passionately on the pillow where his hand had leaned. Then she rose languidly from the bed, and walking slowly to the door, locked it against all comers. Presently she began to pace the room up and down—up and down. Her face was very white and weary, and every now and then a shuddering sigh broke from her lips.

"Can I believe it? Oh, no—I cannot—I will not!" she murmured. "There must be some mistake—Clara has heard wrongly." She sighed again. "Yet—if it is so—he is not to blame—it is I—I who have failed to please him. Where—how have I failed?"

A pained, puzzled look filled her grave blue eyes, and she stopped in her walk to and fro.

"It cannot be!" she said, half aloud—"it is altogether unlike him. Though Clara says—and she has known him so long!—Clara says he loved *her* once—long before he saw me—my poor Philip!—he must have suffered by that love—perhaps that is why he thought life so wearisome when he first came to the Alten Fjord—ah! the Alten Fjord!"

A choking sob rose in her throat, but she repressed it. "I must not weary him," she continued, softly—"I must have done so in some way, or he would not be tired. But as for what I have heard—it is not for me to ask him questions. I would not have him think that I mistrusted him. No—there is some fault in me—something he does not like, or he would never go to—" She broke off and stretched out her hands with a sort of wild appeal. "Oh, Philip! my darling!" she exclaimed, in a sobbing whisper, "I always knew I was not worthy of you—but I thought—I hoped my love would make amends for all my shortcomings!"

Tears rushed into her eyes, and she turned to a little arched recess, shaded by velvet curtains—her oratory—where stood an exquisite white marble statuette of the Virgin and Child. There she knelt for some minutes, her face hidden in her hands, and when she rose she was quite calm, though very pale. She freshened her face with cold water, rearranged her disordered hair, and then went downstairs, thereby running into the arms of her husband who was coming up again to look, as he said, at his "Sleeping Beauty."

"And here she is!" he exclaimed, joyously. "Have you rested enough, my pet?"

"Indeed, yes!" she answered, gently. "I am ashamed to be so lazy. Have you wanted me, Philip?"

"I always want you," he declared. "I am never happy without you."

She smiled and sighed. "You say that to please me," she said, half wistfully.

"I say it because it is true!" he asserted, proudly, putting his arm around her waist and escorting her in this manner down the great staircase. "And you know it, you sweet witch! You're just in time to see the lighting up of the grounds. There'll be a good view from the picture-gallery—lots of the people have gone in there; you'd better come too, for it's chilly outside."

She followed him obediently, and her reappearance among her guests was hailed with enthusiasm—Lady Winsleigh being particularly effusive, almost too much so.

"Your headache has quite gone, dearest, hasn't it?" she inquired, sweetly.

Thelma eyed her gravely. "I did not suffer from headache, Clara," she said. "I was a little tired, but I am quite rested now."

Lady Winsleigh bit her lips rather vexedly, but said no more, and at that moment exclamations of delight broke from all assembled at the brilliant scene that suddenly flashed upon their eyes. Electricity, that radiant sprite whose magic wand has lately been bent to the service of man, had in less than a minute played such dazzling pranks in the gardens that they resembled the fabled treasure-houses discovered by Aladdin. Every tree glittered with sparkling clusters of red, blue, and green light—every flower-bed was bordered with lines and circles of harmless flame, and the fountains tossed up tall columns of amber, rose, and amethyst spray against the soft blue darkness of the sky in which a lustrous golden moon had just risen. The brilliancy of the illumination showed up several dark figures strolling in couples about the grounds—romantic persons evidently who were not to be persuaded to come indoors, even for the music of the band, which just then burst forth invitingly through the open windows of the picture-gallery.

Two of these pensive wanderers were Marcia Van Clupp and Lord Algernon Masherville—and Lord Algy was in a curiously sentimental frame of mind, and weak withal, "*comme une petite queue d'agneau affligé*." He had taken a good deal of soda and brandy for his bilious headache, and, physically, he was much better—but mentally he was not quite his ordinary self. By this it must not be understood that he was at all unsteady by the potency of his medicinal tittle—he was simply in a bland humor—that peculiar sort of humor which finds strange and mystic beauty in everything, and contemplates the meanest trifles with emotions of large benevolence. He was conversational too, and

Inclined to quote poetry—this sort of susceptibleness often affects gentlemen after they have had an excellent dinner flavored with the finest Burgundy. Lord Algy was as mild, as tame, and as flabby as a sleeping jelly fish—and in this inoffensive, almost tender mood of his, Marcia pounced upon him. She looked ravishingly pretty in the moonlight, with a white wrap thrown carelessly round her head and shoulders, and her bold, bird-like eyes sparkling with excitement (for who that knows the pleasure of sport, is not excited when the fox is nearly run to earth?), and she stood with him beside one of the smaller illuminated fountains, raising her small white hand every now and then to catch some of the rainbow drops, and then with a laugh she would shake them off her little pearly nails into the air again. Poor Masherville could not help gazing at her with a lack-luster admiration in his pale eyes—and Marcia, calculating every move in her own shrewd mind, saw it. She turned her head away with a petulant yet coquettish movement.

"My patience!" she exclaimed; "yew *kin* stare! Yew'll know me again when yew see me—say?"

"I should know you anywhere," declared Masherville, nervously fumbling with the string of his eyeglass. "It's impossible to forget *your* face, Miss Marcia!"

She was silent, and kept that face turned from him so long that the gentle little lord was surprised. He approached her more closely and took her hand—the hand that had played with the drops in the fountain. It was such an astonishingly small hand—so very fragile looking and tiny, that he was almost for putting up his eyeglass to survey it, as if it were a separate object in a museum. But the faintest pressure of the delicate fingers he held startled him, and sent the most curious thrill through his body—and when he spoke he was in such a flutter that he scarcely knew what he was saying.

"Miss—Miss Marcia!" he stammered, "have—have I said—anything to—to offend you?"

Very slowly, and with seeming reluctance, she turned her head toward him, and—oh, thou mischievous Puck, that sometimes takest upon thee the semblance of Eros, what skill is thine? There were tears in her eyes—real tears—bright, large tears that welled up and fell through her long lashes in the most beautiful, touching, and becoming manner! "And," thought Marcia to herself, "if I don't fetch him now, I never will!" Lord Algy was quite frightened—his poor brain grew more and more bewildered.

"Why—Miss Marcia! I say! Look here!" he mumbled in his extremity, squeezing her little hand tighter and tighter. "What—what *have* I done! Good gracious! You—you really mustn't cry, you know—I say—look here! Marcia, I wouldn't vex you for the world!"

"Yew bet yew wouldn't!" said Marcia, with slow and nasal plaintiveness. "I like that! That's the way yew English talk. But yew kin hang round a girl a whole season and make all her folks think badly of her—and—and—break her heart—yes—that's so!" Here she dried her eyes with a filmy lace handkerchief. "But don't *yew* mind me! I kin bear it. I kin worry through!" And she drew herself up with dignified resignation, while Lord Algy stared wildly at her, his feeble mind in a whirl. Presently she smiled most seductively, and looked up with her dark, tear-wet eyes to the moon.

"I guess it's a good night for lovers," she said, sinking her ordinary tone to an almost sweet cadence. "But we're not of that sort, are we?"

The die was cast! She looked so charming—so irresistible, that Masherville lost all hold over his wits. Scarcely knowing what he did, he put his arm round her waist. Oh, what a warm, yielding waist! He drew her close to his breast, at the risk of breaking his most valuable eyeglass, and felt his poor weak soul in a quiver of excitement at this novel and delicious sensation.

"We are—we are of that sort!" he declared courageously. "Why should you doubt it, Marcia?"

"I'll believe *yew* if *yew* say so," responded Marcia. "But I guess yew're only fooling me!"

"Fooling you!" Lord Algy was so surprised that he released her quite suddenly from his embrace—so suddenly that she was a little frightened. Was she to lose him, after all?

"Marcia," he continued mildly, yet with a certain manliness that did not ill become him, "I—I hope I am too much of—a gentleman to—to '*fool*' any woman, least of all you, after I have, as you say, compromised you in society by my—my attentions. I—I have very little to offer you—but such as it is, is yours. In—in short, Marcia, I—I will try to make you happy if you can—can care for me enough to—to—marry me!"

Eureka! The game was won! A vision of Masherville Park, Yorkshire, that "well-timbered and highly desirable residence," as the auctioneers would describe it, flitted before Marcia's eyes—and filled with triumph, she went straight into her lordly wooer's arms, and kissed him with thorough transatlantic frankness. She was really grateful to him. Ever since she had come to England she had plotted and schemed to become "my lady" with all the vigor of a purely republican soul—and now at last, after hard fighting, she had won the prize for which her soul had yearned. She would in future belong to the English aristocracy—that aristocracy which her relatives in New York pretended to despise, yet openly flattered—and with her arms round the trapped Masherville's neck, she foresaw the delight she would have in being toadied by them as far as toadyism could be made to go.

She is by no means presented to the reader as a favorable type of her nation—for, of course, every one knows there are plenty of sweet, unselfish, guileless American girls, who are absolutely incapable of such unblushing marriage-scheming as hers—but what else could be expected from Marcia? Her grandfather, the navy, had but recently become endowed with Pilgrim-Father Ancestry—and her maternal uncle was a boastful pork-dealer in Cincinnati. It was her bounden duty to ennoble the family somehow—surely, if any one had a right to be ambitious, she was that one! And while proud dreams of her future passed through her brain, little Lord Algy quivered meekly under her kiss, and returned it with all the enthusiasm of which he was capable. One or two faint misgivings, troubled him as to whether he had not been just a little too hasty in making a serious *bonâ fide* offer of marriage to the young lady by whose Pilgrim progenitors he was not deceived. He knew well enough what her antecedents were, and a faint shudder crossed him as he thought of the pork-dealing uncle, who would, by marriage, become *his* uncle also. He had long been proud of the fact that the house of Masherville had never, through the course of centuries, been associated, even in the remotest manner with trade—and now—

"Yet, after all," he mused, "the Marquis of Londonderry openly advertises himself as a coal-merchant, and the brothers-in-law of the Princess Louise are in the wine trade and stock-broking business—and all the old knightly blood of England is mingling itself by choice with that of the lowest commoners—what's the use of my remaining aloof, and refusing to go with the spirit of the age? Besides, Marcia loves me—and it's pleasant to be leved!"

Poor Lord Algy! He certainly thought there could be no question about Marcia's affection for him. He little dreamed that it was to his title and position she had become so deeply attached—he could not guess that after he had married her there would be no more Lord Masherville worth mentioning—that that individual, once independent, would be entirely swallowed up and lost in the dashing personality of Lady Masherville, who would rule her husband as with a rod of iron.

He was happily ignorant of his future and he walked in the gardens for some time with his arm round Marcia's waist, in a very placid and romantic frame of mind. By and by he escorted her into the house, where the dancing was in full swing—and she, with a sweet smile, bidding him wait for her in the refreshment-room, sought for and found her mother, who, as usual, was seated in a quiet corner with Mrs. Rush-Marvelle, talking scandal.

"Well?" exclaimed these two ladies, simultaneously and breathlessly.

Marcia's eyes twinkled. "Guess he came in as gently as a lamb!" she said.

They understood her. Mrs. Rush-Marvelle rose from her chair in her usual stately and expansive manner.

"I congratulate you, my dear!" kissing Marcia affectionately on both cheeks. "Bruce-Errington would have been a better match—but, under the circumstances, Masherville is really about the best thing you could do. You'll find him quite easy to manage!" This with an air as though she were recommending a quiet pony.

"That's so!" said Marcia, carelessly, "I guess we'll pull together somehow. Mar-ma," to her mother—"yew kin turn on the news to all the folks yew meet—the more talk the better! I'm not partial to secrets!" And with a laugh, she turned away.

Then Mrs. Van Clupp laid her plump, diamond-ringed hand on that of her dear friend, Mrs. Marvelle.

"You have managed the whole thing beautifully," she said, with a grateful heave of her ample bosom. "Such a clever creature as you are!" She dropped her voice to a mysterious whisper. "You shall have that check to-morrow, my love!"

Mrs. Rush-Marvelle pressed her fingers cordially.

"Don't hurry yourself about it!" she returned in the same confidential tone. "I dare say you'll want me to arrange the wedding and the 'crush' afterward. I can wait till then."

"No, no! that's a separate affair," declared Mrs. Van Clupp. "I must insist on your taking the promised two hundred. You've been really so *very* energetic!"

"Well, I *have* worked rather hard," said Mrs. Marvelle, with modest self-consciousness. "You see nowadays it's so difficult to secure suitable husbands for the girls who ought to have them. Men *are* such slippery creatures!"

She sighed, and Mrs. Van Clupp echoed the sigh, and then these two ladies—the nature of whose intimacy may now be understood by the discriminating reader—went together to search out those of their friends and acquaintances who were among the guests that night, and to announce to them (in the strictest confidence, of course!) the delightful news of "dear Marcia's engagement." Thelma heard of it, and went at once to proffer her congratulations to Marcia in person.

"I hope you will be very, very happy!" she said simply, yet with such grave earnestness in her look and voice that the "Yankee gel" was touched to a certain softness and seriousness not at all usual with her, and became so winning and gentle to Lord Algy that he felt in the seventh heaven of delight with his new position as affianced lover to so charming a creature.

Meanwhile George Lorimer and Pierre Duprez were chatting together in the library. It was very quiet there—the goodly row of books, the busts of poets and philosophers—the large, placid features of Pallas Athene crowning an antique pedestal—the golden

pipes of the organ gleaming through the shadows—all these gave a solemn, almost sacred aspect to the room. The noise of the dancing and festivity in the distant picture-gallery did not penetrate here, and Lorimer sat at the organ, drawing out a few plaintive strains from its keys as he talked.

"It's your fancy, Pierre," he said, slowly. "Thelma may be a little tired to-day, perhaps—but I know she's perfectly happy."

"I think not so," returned Duprez. "She has not the brightness—the angel look—*les yeux d'enfant*—that we beheld in her at that far Norwegian fjord. Britta is anxious for her."

Lorimer looked up, and smiled a little.

"Britta? It's always Britta with you, *mon cher!* One would think——" he paused and laughed.

"Think what you please!" exclaimed Duprez with a defiant snap of his fingers. "I would not give that little person for all the *grandes dames* here to-day! She is charming—and she is *true!* *Ma foi!*—to be true to any one is a virtue in this age! I tell you, my good boy, there is something sorrowful—heavy—on *la belle* Thelma's mind—and Britta, who sees her always, feels it—but she cannot speak. One thing I will tell you—it is a pity she is so fond of Miladi Winsleigh."

"Why?" asked Lorimer, with some eagerness.

"Because——" he stopped abruptly as a white figure suddenly appeared at the doorway, and a musical voice addressed them:

"Why, what are you both doing here, away from everybody?" and Thelma smiled as she approached. "You are hermits, or you are lazy! People are going in to supper. Will you not come also?"

"*Ma foi!*" exclaimed Duprez; "I had forgotten! I have promised your most charming mother, *cher* Lorimer, to take her in to this same supper. I must fly upon the wings of chivalry!"

And with a laugh, he hurried off, leaving Thelma and Lorimer alone together. She sunk rather wearily into a chair near the organ, and looked at him.

"Play me something!" she said softly.

A strange thrill quivered through him as he met her eyes—the sweet, deep, earnest eyes of the woman he loved. For it was no use attempting to disguise it from himself—he loved her passionately, wildly, hopelessly; as he had loved her from the first.

Obedient to her wish, his fingers wandered over the organ-keys in a strain of solemn, weird, yet tender melancholy—the grand, rich notes pealed forth sobbingly, and she listened, her hands clasped idly in her lap. Presently he changed the theme to one of more heart-appealing passion, and a strange wild minor air, like the rushing of the wind across the mountains, began to make itself heard through the subdued rippling murmur of his improvised accompaniment. To his surprise and fear, she started up, pressing her hands against her ears.

"Not that—not that song, my friend!" she cried, almost imploringly. "Oh, it will break my heart! Oh, the Alten Fjord!" And she gave way to a passion of weeping.

"Thelma! Thelma!" and poor Lorimer, rising from the organ, stood gazing at her in piteous dismay—every nerve in his body wrung to anguish by the sound of her sobbing. A mad longing seized him to catch her in his arms—to gather her and her sorrows, whatever they were, to his heart!—and he had much ado to restrain himself.

"Thelma," he presently said, in a gentle voice that trembled just a little, "Thelma, what is troubling you? You call me your brother—give me a brother's right to your confidence." He bent over her and took her hand. "I—I can't bear to see you cry like this! Tell me—what's the matter? Let me fetch Philip."

She looked up with wet wild eyes and quivering lips.

"Oh, no—no!" she murmured, in a tone of entreaty and alarm.

"Do not—Philip must not know. I do wish him always to see me bright and cheerful—and—it is nothing! It is that I heard something which grieved me."

"What was it?" asked Lorimer, remembering Duprez's recent remarks.

"Oh, I would not tell you," she said eagerly, drying her eyes and endeavoring to smile, "because I am sure it was a mistake, and all wrong—and I was foolish to fancy that such a thing could be, even for a moment. But when one does not know the world, it seems cruel——"

"Thelma, what do you mean?" and George surveyed her in some perplexity. "If any one's been bothering or vexing you, just you tell Phil all about it. Don't have any secrets from him—he'll soon put everything straight, whatever it is."

She shook her head slightly. "Ah, you do not understand!" she said, pathetically; "how should you? Because you have not given your life away to any one, and it is all different with you. But when you do love—if you are at all like me—you will be so anxious to always seem worthy of love—and you will hide all your griefs away from your beloved, so that your constant presence shall not seem tiresome. And I would not for all the world trouble Philip with my silly fancies, because then he might grow more weary still——"

"*Weary!*" interrupted Lorimer, in an accent of emphatic surprise. "Why, you don't suppose Phil's tired of you, Thelma? That's nonsense indeed! He worships you! Who's been putting such notions into your head?"

She rose from her chair quite calm and very pale, and laid her two trembling hands in his.

"Ah, you also will mistake me," she said, with touching sweetness, "like so many others who think me strange in my speech."

and manner. I am sorry I am not like other women—but I cannot help it. What I do wish you to understand is that I never suppose anything against my Philip—he is the noblest and best of men! And you must promise not to tell him that I was so foolish as to cry just now because you played that old song I sung to you both so often in Norway—it was because I felt a little sad—but it was only a fancy—and I would not have him troubled with such things. Will you promise?”

“But what has made you sad?” persisted Lorimer, still puzzled.

“Nothing—nothing indeed,” she answered, with almost feverish earnestness. “You yourself are sometimes sad, and can you tell why?”

Lorimer certainly could have told why—but he remained silent, and gently kissed the little hands he held.

“Then I mustn’t tell Philip of your sadness?” he asked softly, at last. “But will you tell him yourself, Thelma? Depend upon it, it’s much better to have no secrets from him. The least grief of yours would affect him more than the downfall of a kingdom. You know how dearly he loves you!”

“Yes, I know!” she answered, and her eyes brightened slowly. “And that is why I wish him always to see me happy!” She paused, and then added in a lower tone, “I would rather die, my friend, than vex him for one hour!”

George still held her hands and looked wistfully in her face. He was about to speak again, when a cold, courteous voice interrupted them.

“Lady Errington, may I have the honor of taking you in to supper?”

It was Sir Francis Lennox. He had entered quite noiselessly, his footsteps making no sound on the thick velvet-pile carpet, and he stood close to Lorimer, who dropped Thelma’s hands hastily and darted a suspicious glance at the intruder. But Sir Francis was the very picture of unconcerned and bland politeness, and offered Thelma his arm with the graceful ease of an accomplished courtier. She was perforce compelled to accept it, and she was slightly confused, though she could not have told why.

“Sir Philip has been looking everywhere for you,” continued Sir Francis, amicably. “And for you also,” he added, turning slightly to Lorimer. “I trust I’ve not abruptly broken off a peasant *tête-à-tête*?”

Lorimer colored hotly. “Not at all!” he said rather brusquely. “I’ve been strumming on the organ, and Lady Errington has been good enough to listen to me.”

“You do not *strum*,” said Thelma, with gentle reproach. “You play very beautifully.”

“Ah! a charming accomplishment!” observed Sir Francis, with his under-glance and covert smile, as they all three wended

their way out of the library. “I regret I have never had time to devote myself to acquiring some knowledge of the arts. In music I am a positive ignoramus! I can hold my own best in the field.”

“Yes, you’re a great adept at hunting, Lennox,” remarked Lorimer, suddenly, with something sarcastic in his tone. “I suppose the quarry never escapes you?”

“Seldom!” returned Sir Francis, coolly. “Indeed, I think I may say, never!”

And with that he passed into the supper-room, elbowing a way for Thelma, till he succeeded in placing her near the head of the table, where she was soon busily occupied in entertaining her guests and listening to their chatter; and Lorimer, looking at her once or twice, saw, to his great relief, that all traces of her former agitation had disappeared, leaving her face fair and radiant as a spring morning!

CHAPTER VII.

A generous fierceness dwells with innocence,
And conscious virtue is allowed some pride.

DRYDEN.

THE melancholy days of autumn came on apace, and by and by the manor was deserted. The Bruce-Errington establishment removed again to town, where business, connected with his intending membership for Parliament, occupied Sir Philip from morning till night. The old insidious feeling of depression returned and hovered over Thelma’s mind like a black bird of ill omen, and though she did her best to shake it off she could not succeed. People began to notice her deepening seriousness and the wistful melancholy of her blue eyes, and made their remarks thereon when they saw her at Marcia Van Clupp’s wedding, an event which came off brilliantly at the commencement of November, and which was almost entirely presided over by Mrs. Rush Marvelle. That far-seeing matron had indeed urged on the wedding by every delicate expedient possible.

“Long engagements are a great mistake,” she told Marcia—then, in a warning under-tone, she added: “Men are capricious nowadays—they’re all so much in demand. Better take Masher-ville while he’s in the humor.”

Marcia accepted this hint and took him, and Mrs. Rush-Marville heaved a sigh of relief when she saw the twain safely married and off to the Continent on their honeymoon trip—Marcia all sparkling and triumphant, Lord Algy tremulous and feebly ecstatic.

“Thank Heaven *that’s* over!” she said to her polite and servile