

put on her hat and a cape. Then she sauntered into the grounds.

She walked about a little, but the solitude was unbearable. She decided to walk briskly to the town, and change her library books. So, in a few moments, she set out at a sharp pace. Her way led through flowery lanes, very quiet and peaceful; and at a sudden turn in one, she came face to face with him who was filling her thoughts—Bertie Richmond.

The young man's face was drawn and pale, and his blue eyes seemed full of despair. He looked years older since the happy time, two months ago, when poor Caroline had fancied that he loved her.

The girl would have bowed and passed on, but the young fellow stopped her.

"You're going to cut me now, are you?" he said, bitterly and abruptly. "I thought you were my friend, Carrie!"

"I had no intention of cutting you, Bertie," returned the girl, a little hurriedly. "I am going to the town with my book."

"Oh, don't trouble to make an excuse," he cried, with a harsh, unnatural laugh. "I treated you like a brute, I know, and naturally you resent it. But, perhaps, if you knew how I've been punished for it, you might feel a little pity. I've been in hell, Carrie!"—and he turned a wild burning look upon her, which made the girl shudder.

The question she would have asked died upon her lips, and the young fellow turned away, and began striking at the hedge with his cane, perhaps to hide his quivering lips.

"I suppose you've heard the news?" he said, without looking at her.

"No, what is it?"

"She's engaged," he said, abruptly and passionately; "to Sir Hugh Pennant. He's a baronet and wealthy, and I'm only a country squire. What a fool I've been, haven't I, Carrie?"

He turned his blazing eyes and flushed face to the girl, and she, who loved him, felt a tender pity for him.

"Carrie," he went on suddenly, seizing her hand; "will you take me? Let us be married at once. I cared for you, you know, before. You like me, don't you? I thought you did. Will you have me? I haven't a relation in the world, as you know. Say 'yes,' and we'll go abroad and you'll help me to forget."

The girl hesitated. Her pride was wounded, but her love was an unselfish one, and rose higher than her own feelings.

"If you have ceased to love her," she began, slowly; "and—"

The young fellow flung her hand away roughly.

"Ceased to love her!" he said, passionately. "I worship her! I adore her! I could kiss the ground she walks on! I shall never cease to love her!"

Caroline turned and walked proudly away. "Very well!" the young man called out desperately after her. "If you give me up I'll go and blow my brains out!"

The girl stood still, trembling violently. It was evident that he was in a desperate state, and quite in a condition to commit some rash action. She, and she alone, could save him.

She loved him. Did she love him dearly enough to sacrifice her pride for him? Should she go after him?

He was still walking away without a look behind, walking in a wild, unsteady way. The girl ran after him with a fleet, light step.

"Bertie!" she called, with a sob in her voice. "Bertie! stop!"

He turned and waited for her, with the wild look still on his face.

"Want to say good-bye?" he asked grimly.

"No. I want to say that—that I will do as you wish if—if you think it will make you happy."

"Happy!" he repeated. "Oh, yes! no doubt we shall be happy."

"You must try and let me make you happy," Caroline said, more firmly. "We will go away as you said."

"Yes, yes," he said. "We will go away—soon. I should like to be married before her," he added, in a vindictive undertone.

Caroline shivered. This was a terrible marriage to which she was pledging herself; but she did not falter. Surely she could win him back and make him happy, and if she left him to himself she dare not think what would happen.

"I can't be married at once, you know," she reminded him. "Lady Polter cannot live many days. I could not be married while she lies dying."

"We don't want a fuss," he returned impatiently. "You couldn't have satin and bridesmaids and all the rest, I know; but you can meet the day after tomorrow at the church at 8 o'clock in the morning, can't you? I'll get a license. We've both lived here long enough. It will be all right."

"But afterwards? I can't leave auntie."

"You needn't. We'll keep it quiet till Lady Polter is gone; then you can come away at once. Say yes or no," he ended, roughly.

There was an instant's pause before the girl answered "Yes," during which she choked back both tears and doubts; but her lover noticed nothing.

"Very well," he said, more naturally than he had yet spoken—"the day after tomorrow, at 8 o'clock, at St. Margaret's."

The girl bowed her head and was turning away, when Bertie caught her shoulder roughly.

"Give me a kiss!" he said, with a boisterous laugh; "to celebrate our betrothal"—and he bent and kissed her, turning away the instant after and walking off at a quick pace.

It was a very pale-faced bride who entered St. Margaret's Church on a wild wet morning two days later. Poor Caroline, with no one to advise her, had decided, with many tears, to keep her promise to marry Bertie for his sake. So, dressed plainly in a dark morning gown, and wearing a simple white sailor hat, she entered the church, hardly believing that her bridegroom would be there. There he was, however, and he came to meet her with a laugh that grated on the girl's excited nerves.

"Here you are!" he said. "The parson's ready to tie us up."

"Oh, hush!" the girl whispered, glancing round. "Remember where we are."

He only laughed again, quite impervious to the clergyman's grave glance of rebuke as he came out of the vestry, robed in his

surplice and stood waiting to begin the service.

Caroline's responses were low and nervous. The tears were very near, and once or twice she shivered; but Bertie spoke out boisterously and several times he laughed aloud wildly, though the clergyman frowned in displeasure.

The service was as short as it could legally be made. The clerk acted as father and as witness, and Bertie Richmond and Caroline Denver were man and wife.

They separated at the church-door with a promise to meet the following day to arrange their plans; but Caroline was not able to keep the appointment. Lady Polter was very ill. Each moment was expected to be her last, and the girl could not leave the house while her more than mother was dying. All the day she stayed near to the darkened chamber and when night drew she did not go to bed.

It was nearly dawn when the poor lady breathed her last, and then the girl was so thoroughly exhausted by fatigue and grief that she went to bed and slept heavily.

It was afternoon of the next day when she awoke. As soon as she had dressed and taken a little refreshment, she donned a long cloak and hastened from the house. She made her way to the road and across the fields to the grounds of the Grange, where Bertie Richmond lived alone.

It was a pretty house, not large, but comfortable and pleasantly situated.

Caroline entered, with a dull sort of wonder that, although it was now dusk, no lights were visible at the front of the house.

She rang the bell and waited impatiently. It was some little time before the summons was answered, and the butler had evidently lit the lamp before opening the door.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am, for keeping you waiting," he said, recognizing Caroline as the light fell on her face; "but we're rather upset today."

"Is Mr. Richmond in?" Caroline asked, stepping inside.

"Why, no, ma'am! Didn't you know? He's gone!"

"Gone! Gone where?" asked the girl.

"Why," returned the butler, dropping his voice, "you see, ma'am, my poor master he's been rather queer like and wild for a bit past, and yesterday he went quite mad, and they took him to the asylum!"

"Good gracious, Jenkins, what a fool you are!" cried the housekeeper, busting up. "To tell her like that! The poor young lady! Get some water, can't you, stupid? Don't you see she's fainted?"

CHAPTER IV.

Madame "De Trop."

"Phew!" said Jack, looking up from his newspaper, as he sat at breakfast with his wife in their pretty little London house. "Lady Polter is dead."

"Lady Polter!" echoed Kitty. "Is she a relation of yours, Jack?"

"Oh, no! Not related in the least, though she and my mother have always been excellent friends. I'm thinking about poor Carrie."

"Who's Carrie?" asked Mrs. Barry, pouring out coffee with a matronly air; and then, as her husband did not answer, she looked up sharply and repeated her question, to find that he was watching her amusedly.

"It's the funniest thing in the world to watch you doing the matron, Kitty," he said. "You have the airs of a grandmother, and you are such a young thing!"

His wife laughed as she carried a cup of coffee to his side, and told him not to be impatient.

"Are you happy, Kitty?" asked Jack, suddenly, laying his hand on hers to detain her.

"Why, yes, of course! It's been the greatest fun ever since we were married!" cried Kitty. "Why, aren't you happy, Jack?"

"Oh, yes—of course," he said, releasing her, and there was a suspicion of a sigh in his tone as he spoke.

Kitty did not notice it.

"You were just telling me something—about some Carrie or other," she said, in a dignified way. "Who is she?"

"She's a cousin of ours—a distant one. I believe we are the only relatives she has. Lady Polter was her godmother, and brought her up, and she's lived there ever since she was a child. I say, Kitty! wouldn't it be a kind thing to ask her here for a bit?"

"Here!" said Kitty, looking considerably startled.

"Why not? She's all alone in the world, poor girl! and she would enjoy being here. You could go about together, you know."

"Is she poor?" Kitty asked, slowly.

"Oh, dear, no—very well off indeed. Her income runs into thousands."

"Ah, well, then," said Kitty, in a relieved tone, "there's no necessity for us to ask her here. She'll have plenty of places to go to."

"Oh, no doubt. I only thought it would be a good thing to do, and she would be a companion for you."

"I don't want any companion—except you," Kitty said, resentfully.

"But—aren't you lonely when I am away?"

"Oh, dear, no," said Kitty, briskly. "I dine out, and shop and read and practise. I never feel dull. But, of course, if you want your cousin—perhaps you feel dull"—resentfully.

"I? Of course not, you silly child! Well, then, we'll say no more about it"—and Jack took up his newspaper again.

Kitty could not see his face. She fancied that he was annoyed, and she maintained a troubled silence. She felt strongly disinclined to invite this cousin. A third person in their tiny household would be decidedly de trop, she thought. She could not understand why Jack should want her, and a strange, queer feeling took possession of her at the thought that he should find it dull—with her.

It had been "so jolly" Kitty thought since their marriage. They had been the best of friends. There had been no love-making, and no "sentimental nonsense," as the young bride put it.

Once or twice Jack had attempted a kiss; but Kitty had indignantly repulsed him, and reminded him of his promise, and now he was merely friendly, and his wife was satisfied.

This was the first cloud which had arisen

since their marriage, three months ago, and Kitty felt the tears arise to her eyes at the thought that she had offended Jack.

She had made an excuse and slipped away, and later on in the day she wrote a cordial note to Caroline Denver, asking her to come and stay with them a few weeks.

"I've written that letter, Jack," she said that evening, just as they were starting for the theater.

"What letter?" said Jack. "Is this your fan, dear—Kitty?"

"Oh, yes! Thanks. I put it down and should have forgotten it, I believe. Why, the letter to your cousin, Miss Denver."

"Did you ask her to stay?" cried Jack, in much astonishment.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because you wished it, of course! I'm afraid I wasn't very nice about it this morning, so I thought I would write at once, by way of apology."

"What a dear little girl you are, Kitty!" cried her husband, warmly. "And I'm sure Carrie will be pleased to come."

So they went amicably together to the theater; but while Kitty laughed and applauded the play, there was a sore feeling in her heart that Jack should be so pleased at the advent of this stranger, while she was so fully content with his society.

A few days later came a somewhat formal note from Miss Denver, thanking Mr. and Mrs. Barry for their invitation and accepting it.

CHAPTER V.

An Unfortunate Misunderstanding.

"You won't forget to meet your cousin tonight, Jack?" Kitty said, on the morning of the day that Caroline was to arrive.

"Oh, send the carriage," returned Jack.

"I don't know," Kitty said, hesitatingly.

"Wouldn't she think it kinder if you met her?"

She had determined that she would not give way to this feeling she had that she did not want to share Jack's attentions with anyone else; and to that end she had decided to do everything she could to make Miss Denver happy during her stay.

"You'll come to?" asked Jack.

"No, I really can't. I've so much to do. I've quite a lot of calls to make that I can't put off," said Kitty, hastily.

"Oh, very well. I'll meet her!"—and Jack departed gaily.

It happened that Kitty was detained, and was unable to get home till close upon dinner time, when her maid at once informed her that Miss Denver had arrived.

The young hostess dressed as quickly as possible, vexed with herself, although it was not her fault, that she had not been at home to receive her guest.

She hurried downstairs and opened the drawing-room door.

A queer little pang shot through her heart as she noticed that her husband and his cousin were seated close together, and were engaged in a low and evidently earnest conversation.

As she advanced into the room they broke off what they were saying hastily, and Caroline Denver rose to meet Mrs. Barry.

Kitty was quick to note the great beauty of her guest.

"She is a thousand times handsomer than I," she thought; and she also saw that Miss Denver had been crying, and wondered why.

Jack introduced the two with his usual ease, but there was a little stiffness in their greetings.

For the life of her Kitty could not help being a little formal and stand-off to this beautiful girl, who seemed on such confidential terms with Jack; while, on her side, Caroline felt a little awkward to think that Kitty must perceive that she had been crying.

So there was not much cordiality in the few words that passed between them, and all three felt glad when dinner was announced.

The meal passed off well enough, the presence of the servants limiting conversation to the general chat-chat of society.

The two girls made quite a contrast.

Caroline was, of course, in deep mourning, and the crape and jet of her evening gown set off her beautiful complexion, and outlined her splendid figure well.

Kitty, in deference to her guest's mourning, wore no color, but was dressed in soft white, in which she looked particularly young, but very charming.

Unfortunately for herself, poor Kitty was not yet aware how very lovely she was, and the thought of her great inferiority to his cousin in Jack's eyes was haunting her all dinner time.

Jack was obliged to go out that evening, so the two girls had the opportunity of a chat together; and Kitty could not sufficiently admire her new relation's knowledge and intellect.

"She is so much cleverer than I," thought the poor child, dolefully, "that Jack will be sure to think me stupid in comparison with her."

The next few days passed quietly over. On the fourth day Kitty was obliged to dine out. Jack should have gone, too; but in the morning he had such a headache, that he was obliged to stay at home.

Kitty offered to stay, too, but her husband would not hear of it. The party was a very special one. Royalty was to be present, and Kitty had promised to go with her mother-in-law, Lady Discombe, who would be mortally offended if she did not.

So Kitty, gowned in palest blue silk, and wearing diamonds in her soft golden hair, rolled away to her party at night in the smart brougham side by side with her mother-in-law, and Caroline Denver took a solitary dinner while Jack was asleep in her own room.

About 11 o'clock Jack woke, feeling much better, and descended in search of something to eat. Entering the library, he found his cousin alone there.

"Are you better, Jack?" she asked, looking up as he entered.

"Oh, yes; I'm all right—thanks. I'm always better after a good sleep." Jack returned, wondering what Caroline had been crying about. "I'm just going to have some

supper," he went on. "Stay and keep me company, will you?"

"Oh, I'm not hungry," Caroline said, hastily.

"I don't suppose you ate much dinner. You'd better have something, and then," he added, gently, "perhaps you will confide in me, and tell me what this trouble is that is causing you so much pain. You promised you would tell me the other evening, you know, when Kitty came in."

"Yes, I know. I should like to tell you, Jack. I ought to have some advice, and I don't like going to a lawyer."

Then a servant entered, and a dainty little supper was served, which Caroline was persuaded to partake of.

When the meal was cleared away, Jack drew a sofa forward, and the two sat down for a chat.

Caroline felt ashamed at first to tell her story, but Jack was so kind and sympathetic that very soon she was pouring it out freely, and soon he knew all—Bertie Richmond's courtship of her, his wild love for the other girl, and then his proposal in the lane, the secret marriage, and lastly, his madness, and Caroline's terrible position.

"You see," Caroline said, sobbing; "I am only twenty, and I have plenty of money, and—and people think me good-looking, and yet I can take no pleasure in life, because I have bound myself to a madman."

"Then you—don't love him?" Jack asked, slowly. The subject was rather a delicate one.

"I did love him, dearly," said the girl, passionately. "You may judge how I loved him when I was willing to sacrifice my own pride and marry him on the chance of making him happy! If he had loved me ever so little, and found ever so little happiness with me, I could have been content; but to think he only proposed to me because he was mad—that he never loved me at all, and that I married him!"—and Caroline covered her flushed face with her hands.

Meanwhile Kitty had found her party very tedious. The only pleasure she enjoyed was talking to Lord Houlden, who had become a great friend of hers, and who was at the dinner. Lord Houlden had taken a violent fancy to Kitty, because he declared she was so like his lost Lynette.

Their features were different, of course, but in height, shape, complexion, and wealth of golden hair there was certainly a likeness.

Mrs. Jack Barry was almost the only person in London to whom Lord Houlden ever spoke of his lost bride. He had returned to London within the last year, but had only just begun to be seen in society again.

Kitty always spoke hopefully of Lynette's coming back some day; but Lord Houlden, although the young girl never failed to cheer him at the time, had almost given up any hopes he might once have indulged.

On this particular occasion Lord Houlden saw that Kitty seemed out of spirits, and helped her to get away early.

So it happened that it was barely midnight when Kitty crossed the hall in her own house, and, lifting up the curtain that overhung the library door, heard her husband say—

"It's a terrible affair when one has married and finds it to be a mistake, but I think this marriage can be annulled. I'll put the thing in train at once, and then, once free, off we'll go abroad somewhere, eh, Carrie? and you'll soon forget all this dreadful time."

Poor Kitty stood as if turned into stone. Not knowing of Miss Denver's secret marriage, what could she think of Jack's words but that they referred to his own marriage—to her, and that he was seeking means of annulling it, so as to marry his cousin!

Before she could move Caroline had answered, gratefully—

"Oh, Jack, it sounds too good to be true! Can you really get the marriage annulled, do you think?"

"I don't suppose there's any doubt of it." But poor Kitty waited to hear no more. She fled upstairs to her own room, locked the door, and fell upon her bed in a passion of grief and shame.

"Oh! I've made a dreadful mistake!" she sobbed. "An awful mistake! It was I who asked Jack to marry me. Oh!"—and she blushed with shame at the thought. "I didn't mean any harm; but what must he have thought of me? He was too kind to refuse and hurt my feelings, but now he's sorry. It's likely enough, too!"

went on the poor child, slowly dragging herself to her glass, and beginning to take off her pretty gown, for she had sent her maid to bed.

"How beautiful she is! How clever! And she is rich as well, while I—"

and she surveyed her tear-stained face miserably. "Of course he despises me! He wants to get rid of me—and well he may! But, oh! that isn't the worst of it! I'm the wretchedest girl in London, I do believe! I thought it was all fun when we were married. I never meant to care; but now I know—I know I love him with all my heart! It was a silly girl who asked him to marry her, but it's a woman who loves him—and he will never know or care!"

CHAPTER VI.

A Foreign Tour.

Kitty slept late on the following morning, but rose with a somewhat lighter heart. She had quite made up her mind as to her future course of procedure.

She had been a foolish, giddy girl to act as she had done and force Jack to marry her. If he wanted to be free—and had she not heard him say with his own lips that he wished it?—she would cheerfully agree, even if it broke her heart.

She was quite ignorant about the marriage laws, of course—that was a detail. In the meantime, Jack must not see that she cared. She must behave just as usual. She descended to the breakfast-room with assumed gaiety, and found Jack there before her.

"That you, Kitty!" he said, coming forward. "How quietly you must have gone upstairs last night! We never heard you come home."

"Oh! I was tired," returned Kitty, easily. "It was a stupid party, and I didn't want to sit up talking."

"Well, I've got some news for you. How should you like to go to India?"