

he did so; and therefore he meant to go up the whole length of the drive, into the shrubbery, and before the windows, in order that no one might accuse him of any clandestine dealing.

"And so Sir Francis didn't tell you," began Amy. "And then she stopped and looked at the doctor, with the dying sunlight on his face, and an instinctive knowledge that she was going to give him pain made her put up her left hand to clasp his fellow round his arm."

"Didn't tell me what?" said Carl.

"That he and Lady Crevillon are going to town, and—"

"Yes!"

"No," said Carl, "he did not tell me that."

"But it is only for the season."

"Oh!" ejaculated the doctor, "only for the season?"

As he said it that last ray of sunlight left the earth, and Carl's face grew very dark as he looked on toward the western clouds. So this was the plan, then. They meant to take her away into that quiet whirl which would be so bad for her; they meant to make her forget him if they could; perhaps they would succeed; they meant to marry her to some more desirable catch in the matrimonial market, if the thing were possible. Of one thing he was very certain. If she went up to town and lived the life usually lived by young ladies in their first season it would kill her.

"Amy," said the doctor, "are they mad, do you suppose?"

"Who?"

He did not answer. A sullen spirit of self-repentance came upon him. He would give her up; he would go to Sir Francis then and relinquish all claim—as if he had any claim! Well, then, he might promise never to see her again if they would leave her in peace.

"It is nothing very shocking, Carl; and it isn't my fault. You should not look angry about it."

"Angry!" repeated Carl, turning toward her. "Perhaps it does look like anger, too. It is only because I find it so terrible to think of losing you, Amy. It is because I know, if no one else does, how small an exertion will be too much for you; and I know also something of young lady's life in the London season."

"It will not be necessary for me to do all that other young ladies do."

"But you won't like being left behind."

"I shall like doing what I know would please you. I shall take care of myself."

But that was not all. There was another fear, perhaps even less easy to lay to rest than that one. After all, it was absolutely necessary that she should go! Had Sir Francis any real, valid authority to take her, from him?—unless, indeed, it had been her own choice to go! He drew back his arm sharply as the thought occurred to him. He wanted to ask her that question, but somehow he dreaded the answer too much to ask it.

"I wouldn't go if I could help it," said Amy.

"But Sir Francis has been very kind, Carl; and it is better to give way in a small matter like that than to—"

"A small matter! It is probable that the doctor thought of anything but a small matter."

"And then, if you would be happy about it, I really think I should enjoy it, Carl. In six months' time I shall be twenty-one, and my own mistress."

As though she had read a certain bitter thought of his, some vague reflection of it came into Amy's own mind as they walked on slowly towards the house. When they reached the shrubbery gate, she said, all at once, "Carl, what is it you are afraid of?"

But he would not tell her.

"Amy leaned against the gate and looked at him, possibly not altogether displeased at the thought she had detected.

"Say good-bye to me here, Carl. If we go into the house, there will be Lady Crevillon, and she will watch us. We shall have to bow to each other like two solemn ghosts, for they don't believe that I mean to keep my word with you. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, my love—my own dear love!"

"Listen," said Amy; "I kiss you because you are a coward. I know what it is you are afraid of. People say a man's faith isn't like a woman's; and I begin to think so myself. They will not let you bind me by any engagement, but understand, Carl, that I am bound. Until you yourself, of your own free will, give me back my promise, I am yours. Remember that!"

They passed through the gate, and came suddenly upon Mrs. Lescar, walking, to meet them, through the shrubs. Amy repressed a start of dismay, repeated "Good-bye, Carl," and ran into the house; and the doctor shook hands with Mrs. Lescar in some confusion. He fancied that she had heard those last words. He thought, too, that her passionate face was a little less calm than usual—a little touched with some faint reflection of an emotion of which he had hardly conceived her capable. On the impulse of the moment, and under the influence of that passing sympathy, he spoke.

"Mrs. Lescar, I am very unhappy. I think Sir Francis scarcely understands how very much his ward stands in need of care—how very fragile she is."

Mrs. Lescar smiled gravely.

"Lady Crevillon will see to that, I think. It is scarcely in my father's line."

"One word more," said the doctor, stammering; "a very great favor. You will remain here, I believe. If I might sometimes be permitted to call—to hear—there can be no great harm in my hearing occasionally through you."

As he did not seem to know exactly what he wanted to say, and Mrs. Lescar did, she interrupted him to answer. She really had

touched for a moment by Amy's bold little speech, and the doctor was quite right. There could be no harm in his calling at Dykeham now and then to inquire after an old patient. It might even be productive of good. So she said, "Yes, I shall remain at Dykeham for the present; Frank will be left at home, and he is a great charge. Come as often as you like, Dr. Secker."

He made his acknowledgments and went away, Amy watching him from the window of her own room as long as he was in sight. Then she turned to the dressing-table, began to collect and pick up the little ornaments and trinkets, and suddenly dropped them all again, and put her face down on the table with a great sob.

"Oh, Carl—Carlo mio! If I should die in that great, stupid London, and never see him again! Nobody ever loved me before that I remember! Why are they so hard upon us? What does it matter to them?"

Dr. Secker walked back towards the town leisurely, and the moon got brighter and brighter above his head. He looked up and saw that there were no clouds over her—none near her. Surely he might take it as a good omen. She danced in a thousand silver ripples upon the river, and lighted up the big red stones, like a path, the whole way across. It would save him a mile's walk round the wharves, and he went over slipping two or three times, and hearing the water sop out of his boots as he walked on dry land again. For this or any other physical discomfort, he did not at that moment care. He turned his face towards those woods, dark in the distance, amongst which he could no longer see the roof that covered Amy.

She was friendly towards him; as friendly, he thought, as it was her nature to be towards any one. He had not tested her very much, nor taken too frequent advantage of her general invitation. Why was it that, to Dykeham as hopeful as he would, he always left it with a sinking heart!—as though he had been in the presence of a silent, secret protest against his love for Amy!—as though by the working of some subtle influence, he would have to come by and-by to the acknowledgment that he had done a thing unwise, not quite right, and inconsequent, since nothing could ever come of it! He could not tell why it was.

More moons passed away, and the fields were getting yellow for the harvest. Through the hot sun of August the doctor walked one day across those yellow fields to the Red Ford, and thence to Dykeham. Mrs. Lescar, sitting at an open window, saw him coming up the drive at a distance, and the wool-work on which she was engaged dropped for a single little moment on her lap. How long would the doctor continue to come to her for news of Amy? It came into her head just then that she would show him a letter which Lady Crevillon had written to her two or three days ago. She was no mischief-maker; had no desire to hurt any one. In her passionate way she felt at times that it was rather a pity the young doctor had allowed himself to get into the troublesome knot. For it was now, and had been from the first, her opinion, that nothing serious could ever come of the engagement. She hardly knew why. Perhaps, as people so often do, she put together her friend's circumstances and her own feelings. She could never have thought of marrying the doctor.

As to loving him, that was altogether another matter. If a man is your husband, of course you will love him—so Joanna held. But she, if she had been about to marry, would have looked out for what the world might look upon and approve of as a good match—a proper, perhaps wealthy, alliance. So Amy should do, of course; and so she would find out for herself, after seeing a little of life. The sooner this foolish, childish arrangement was forgotten, the better.

"Secker's coming!" said Master Frank, putting his head into the room with noisy abruptness.

Mrs. Lescar disliked a noise, but she also disliked the trouble of reproving her young step-brother, who generally maintained his right to the last word.

"Come here, Frank, and pick up my wool-case. Thank you. What makes you so fond of Dr. Secker?"

"Because he's no end of a sw—no, no, he isn't a swell, either. Because he's a brick."

"But you know that those words are vulgar, and meaningless too. What can be the sense of calling a man a brick? Wait a bit, I haven't done with you. Dr. Secker has business with me, and I don't wish you to be in the way. You had better go on with your play until he has finished what he has to say to me, then you can come in."

The young gentleman uttered a groan of strong disapproval, kicked over a footstool, and banged the door after him.

A quarter of an hour after that, Mrs. Lescar was sitting opposite the doctor, working away as busily as if her daily bread had depended upon that mass of beads and tent-stitch. And Dr. Secker had a letter in his hand, which, however, by this time he was only pretending

to read, having mastered its contents some time since.

"A little gaiety seems to have done my cousin no harm," said Joanna.

Dr. Secker would have felt that there was quiet malice in the speech, if his faculties had been awake to take it in. As it was, he felt an insane desire to fling that one word back to her, and say, "She is not your cousin; she is no relation to you."

Mrs. Lescar looked very composed and quiet—too quiet to hurt any one; but a wasp's sting while he stings you.

It was the doctor's own fault that he had read that letter. Joanna simply broke off in her answer to his inquiries, and said, "Perhaps you would like to see for yourself what Lady Crevillon says."

What he had seen might not, at another time, have taken so strong an effect upon him. Though he could hardly have disregarded it altogether; but now it fell upon that confused heap of queries and doubts which Mrs. Lescar had helped to pile up in his mind; and it fell also upon a paragraph which he had read in that morning's newspaper, and had called "Lies, like most other reports." The paragraph ran thus—

"A marriage is on the tapis between Lord Frederick Page and Miss Crevillon, daughter of the late Colonel Crevillon, and ward of Sir Francis Crevillon, of Dykeham."

And in Lady Crevillon's letter he read, "Lord Frederick is very attentive, and I am sure Amy likes him in her heart. But she seems anxious and unhappy; and unless there was some promise ungenerously extorted from her before she left home, which she, poor child, thinks it would be dishonorable to break, I cannot understand her. She evidently liked him so much at first, and now she is shy—has taken to blushing; and once after he had been here I saw her crying."

Dr. Secker sat for some time very quiet, but the movement of Mrs. Lescar's long needle and the flying about of a piece of crimson wool tortured him. He got up and walked about the room, trying with all his might to find out what he ought to do, and to do, or, at any rate, resolved to do it. Lady Crevillon's words were offensive enough; the more so because he knew that report had not been in the paper. Mrs. Lescar knew well enough what he was thinking about, but she had no intention of arguing the matter with him. She did not mean to give herself any trouble, or stir in the affair at all vehemently. If he asked her opinion he should have it, as indeed he always did have it.

"Freddy Page," said Mrs. Lescar, meditatively. "Why, he was a little boy in pinafores when I first knew him! To be sure that must be fifteen years ago! I suppose he is about Amy's age. As a boy he was very handsome; but good-looking boys don't always develop into handsome men."

All this was gall and wormwood to the doctor; fretting him intolerably. What possible interest did she suppose he would take in hearing about the good looks of Frederick Page?

"Do you think," said Carl at last, weakly yielding to his pain, perplexity and bitter longing that some one would throw a little discredit on the statement; "do you think it is true—that Amy—"

He turned back without finishing the speech to his walk up and down the room.

"Dr. Secker," said Joanna, "believe me when I say I am very sorry for you."

So she was. The calmest hearts dislike to witness suffering; and suffering was so very palpable in the doctor's tone and manner that she could not help seeing it.

"Very sorry," she repeated. "But I always give my opinion frankly when it is asked; and I always did think that this affair was unfortunate; never likely to lead to anything but pain for you, possibly for Amy also. Opposition was a thing she would not tolerate; the very thought of it only made her more determined and rebellious. But then she was very young, and had been so long an invalid, that a very great allowance must be made for her."

The doctor, touched by the unwonted energy of that "very sorry," walked up to her and said, putting his hands together, as he did when he was agitated—

"Then you think, Mrs. Lescar—for I know you heard that promise of Amy's—you think I ought to release her from it?"

"I think," said Joanna, "that you would be acting the part of a wise and generous man if you did so."

The doctor stood to all appearance calmly looking down upon the wool-work, and streaks of crimson and gold crossed each other in intricate confusion before his eyes. This was the hardest thing he had ever been called upon to do in his whole life. He was not yet sure that he could do it.

"If it is for her happiness—" he said. And then he held out his hand. "Good-bye, Mrs. Lescar. I must think about it."

Joanna looked at him with some faint stirring of admiration, as she had looked at the two ladies who took the double bed at Pecker's wily-bed; a little pity too she felt, but no remorse. She had only acted for the best, and, so far as she knew it, had told the truth.

So far as she knew it, she had told the truth. "Would you like this?" he said offering him the letter. "Take it if you would. It may be a help to refer to it."

The doctor looked at it without a word, and went away. But he did not go home. He went about the whole sultry afternoon amongst the poorest and most wretched of his patients. He might have had some dim thought of self-teaching in this; of bringing before himself images of another kind, but, so far as appearance went, infinitely greater than his own. But he was not very clear in his own mind

what he did it for. He never went home till the moon had risen; another moon; never more the same radiant queen that had shone for him on the May night long past. Well, it had been a mistake. Better far that it had been discovered now than that she should have married him to find it out afterward.

And then he went in to write his letter; a letter so sorrowful and tender, in spite of all his honest efforts to make it exactly what it should be, and no more;—that the answer for which he watched daily struck him when it came, like a blow upon a broken limb. There were in Amy's envelope two words only in answer to the letter which had cost him so much. They were, "very well!" written seemingly in careless haste; the "V" blotted and repeated in inverse on the fold of the paper. They could have cost her scarcely a moment, or a moment's thought, as he said in his bitterness. No hesitation; not a single backward look of remorse for what he must suffer. Well, whatever that might be, he was glad that she should be unhurt. And thus they parted.

CHAPTER V.

AMONGST THE FALLEN GRAIN.

Dr. Secker was right, inasmuch as her two words of answer had cost Amy no deliberation. How could she deliberate? He made no charge against her, or himself. He simply absolved her from her word to him. Under the circumstances there was but one thing to be done, and she did it.

Lady Crevillon knew nothing of the matter from Amy; knew nothing of it in fact until she heard from Joanna; consequently she did not understand the sudden change of manner which was apparent in Amy just at this time.

On the morning of the arrival of Carl's letter Amy having sealed her own reply to it, turned to her ladyship and said—

"I should like to change my mind and go with you to-night, if I may."

Lady Crevillon made a slight gesture of astonishment before she answered—

"Come by all means. But I thought you said that one hearing of 'Faust' was enough!"

Amy could not explain—I refused for Carl's sake, and because I knew Lord Frederick would be there and would join us."

She said nothing, therefore, allowing Lady Crevillon to think what she liked. It was quite true that she did not care about hearing "Faust" again. It must be recollected that this was her first season in town, and she had certain angles of simplicity and prejudice which were yet to be worn smooth. The dying scene frightened her. It seemed a terrible thing to see so many figures sink on their knees in the presence of a death which was only mimicry. The contrivance for taking away Gretchen's soul to heaven appeared to her most pitifully clumsy that it gave her a feeling of relief after the awful reality of the former scene; but she did not care to go through it all a second time. Altogether she had not thought it would be giving up much to spend one evening at home and alone. But now all that was changed to her would have been a loss to find the source of that wonderful brilliancy which rose to her eyes; the carnine that tinted her lips, and the shimmering plere of strong excitement that surrounded her. He might have liked to sit in the stalls and watched her furtively; he might have looked on and dreamed himself back into the figure of a rebel, sister; the figure of Lord Frederick Page, which placed itself beside Lady Crevillon. Then he would have turned away. He could not have remained to see another man devote himself to the goddess when she once trodden the floor of his own airy castle.

When Amy went home that night she did what was still more astonishing to Lady Crevillon, unless indeed, her ladyship reflected, Lord Frederick was in reality effecting all traces of that unhappy Redford entanglement.

"Lady Crevillon," said Amy, "you remember the proposal you and Sir Francis were good enough to make this morning, and to which I objected?"

"Proposal! What, about taking you to—"

"Yes," interrupted Amy, "I have no longer any objection; indeed I should like it very much."

Lady Crevillon did not this time make any remark, as she had done about "Faust." She was very well contented, though she could not help remembering together with the morning's proposal Amy's very decided "No. I want to go back to Dykeham;" and wondering a little at the change. But of course it was all for the best. Her ladyship reflected that trust her step-daughter so far, since if Joanna cared for any one in the world it was Frank. Yes, of course it was for the best. The longer they could keep Amy away from that Redford man the better.

And the unhappy doctor went about his work as usual, and did his best to bear his sorrow in the midst of other thoughts to think about her, stopping in his country walks to lean over stiles and watch, first the green hay fly about from the ponderous, many-spined machines of blue and red; after that the corn as it fell down before the scythes and sickles of the reapers, and finally the motley throng of gleaners, legal and illegal, who rushed in to quarrel over the fragments of the spoil and to announce that harvest was over.

Dr. Secker moved amongst these, an absent spectator; hearing the sounds of them dully, as one hears the accompaniment to an air, and to announce that harvest was over.

He was here and there in the flash of a polished scythe in the sunlight, and the busy thrille of the whetstone was to him the far-off music of a trained band. He saw the Serpentine where other eyes looked down upon the pleasant dyke. The gate on which he leaned became to him the railing of Rotten Row. And that fairest amongst the fair equestrians, and who was her escort? Not Sir Francis, but the other one, the bay on the other side? Intuitively he sketched the portrait of the young noble. The dainty town-bred pallor, the light downy mustaches and whiskerless young cheeks, the splendid riding equipment, and the glossy horse with a neck like Diana's bow.

How could he, Carl Secker, ever have thought to keep to himself a pearl so rare as that one lost to him now!

When the harvest was over there was a thanksgiving service, and a great day of festivity and rejoicing in Redford. The doctor had not meant to be present amongst the merry-makers; he was not in a state of mind for that sort of thing. He thought he should do better by going to visit those whom feebleness or infirmity would keep at home. His patients said of him that his manner was gentler and kinder than it had ever been; as perhaps it was. But when in passing homewards he saw the big tent and the flag flying above it, Dr. Secker stopped as he used to stop and watch the reapers, to look over the hedge into the field.

He saw men and women who had feasted and were merry; he saw big boys and little boys tumbling over each other for the very green and abundance of the thing, to the music of the "Dixie's Land Polka," the most popular melody which the Redford band had on its list. The doctor saw also a group of ladies and gentlemen standing in the entrance to the tent, and while he was looking on, Mrs. Lescar and Frank left the group and moved a little farther up the field. Carl had not troubled Mrs. Lescar much of late; he had rather held aloof from any meeting with her. Through her the slush had come; and however little she had been to blame, the sight of her was not pleasant to his eyes. But now it came into his mind that September was nearly over, and the Dykeham family would probably be coming back soon. It was nothing to him, of course, but still he thought he should like to know; so he went into the field and joined the two as they stood near the impromptu orchestra.

"They all seem very happy, don't they?" said Mrs. Lescar. "I have been helping to supply these people with tea, Dr. Secker. I wonder what you, as a medical man, would have thought of the quantity of that fluid and of ponderous plum cake which a single individual can make away with."

"Poor things!" said the doctor. "They don't get it very often, some of them."

"No! A very good thing for them, too, I should say."

The doctor refrained from asking any question. He was certain that Joanna knew what he had thought for, and he would not give her the triumph of seeing his impatience.

"I suppose you won't stay here long," he said. "The days begin to close in early."

"No, we shall be going directly. You never come to Dykeham now, Dr. Secker. Too busy, I suppose? I heard from Lady Crevillon this morning. They are—"

Frank, Frank, how very rude! Let me beg—"

"Never mind him," interrupted the doctor. "Frank and I are old friends. They are coming home, do you say?"

"No. Going down the Rhine. Probably thence to Rome, but the route seems uncertain."

The doctor would have liked to go away then; but he felt Joanna's eye upon him, curiously, as though she wondered, just as a matter of curiosity, how this news affected him.

"I hope—that they are all well," said Carl. "Quite well, I believe, thank you. Lady Crevillon says my cousin is anticipating the journey with great delight. But that is natural; she has never been able to travel much before. I believe Lord Frederick Page and sister are about to take a similar tour."

In all this Carl felt, with a sting of exasperated rebellion, that there was cruelty—cold and tranquil cruelty. He could forgive her for playing with him a little at first. People do that sometimes to increase their own importance as the holders of valuable information; but she need not have told him about Amy's delight. Why did she do it? Was it experimental, or for the mere pleasure of using her power to torment him?

He said something about its getting late, and took off his hat to her, eschewing the customary hand-shake. Joanna's hand was cold, like herself. He could feel through her glove; passiveness, limp, incapable of giving a strong healthy grasp.

He was not to get away then, however. He had forgotten Master Frank's effort to attract his attention; but the young gentleman was at his elbow before he got to the gate of the field.

"I say, why wouldn't you listen to me just now? Can you row, doctor?"

"Row?" repeated Carl, helplessly. "Row what?"

"A boat, to be sure. I'm going to have one. Pecket, the basket-maker, has got one, and it only wants painting up. It's to be painted green, and it will cost a lot of money, but it's to be a regular little clipper. I shall keep it under the willows in Davis' Hole; but I mind, you are not to tell."

To the doctor's mind, distracted with other thoughts, the boy's speech was very hazy; but he heard something about the boat, and Davis' Hole and to subdue his own impatience, and humor the lad's enthusiasm for the new toy, as he generally did.

"It's to be a yacht, complete, eh? Balls and rigging, of course, and a crew from Lilliput. Well, I'll come and see you all some day; but mind, Frank, don't you go too near Davis' Hole. Remember what it was named from. Keep it to the ponds in the park."

The doctor did not see the look of amazement and contempt with which Frank received his advice, nor hear the tone in which the boy repeated to himself, "See me sail it! Keep to the ponds in the park, indeed!" He was too much occupied to think anything more just then of Frank or his amusements.

"Amy was anticipating the journey with much delight," he said to himself. "See me sail it!"

And Lord Frederick would be with her. Well, it was quite clear that he himself had done right; nay, it was just possible that Mrs. Lescar had been actuated by a kindly motive in telling him all this, and he had wronged her. She might have wished to satisfy him as to the wisdom of his proceeding. Yes, of course he had done right; and now it was all over, and he could never hope to see Amy again, unless, indeed, he saw her as the wife of Lord Frederick Page. He hoped he never might do that. He said words which were not gentle at all respecting Lord Frederick, in which he was unjust, since Lord Frederick had never injured him knowingly in any way; but people in the doctor's present circumstances are not always just. He looked up at the blank windows of his house with a dull impatience, if there had only been some stringing time before him—some great rush of work or excitement! But to go on in the same mill-horse round of visits; to bear patiently with the garrulous list of new symptoms of the hypocondriac up at Bedford Grange, who expected to see him daily, and to have a daily change of treatment; to listen to and answer the well-known phrases of his richer patients; and then the never-failing "Ah, thin, doctor sure it's the drink taces him; if it wasn't for that he'd be as good as gold," of the Irish quarter. And all this with the consciousness some about his heart that the one star which had filled his life with tender light was gone from the sky, to shine no more for him.

CONTINUED IN NEXT ISSUE.