have known it for ever so long. That is why I hate you."

"Well, you know that I love you, too," says he, pressing his cheek to hers, and too much agitated to take notice of the astonishing nature of her answer to his simple question. "My darling! Don't be so unhappy. It will all come right, and she ——"

"Oh, no. No; it is wicked, dishonourable, horrible! Perhaps she loves you in spite of all we know. She may"—anxiously—"in fact," looking at him with loving eyes, "I'm sure she must!"

"Nonsense, sweetheart. That is a mere phantasy of your brain. We are heartily sick of each other, she and I. I have known that for a long time. And, besides ——"

"Well, it is no use speaking to me," says she, sighing heavily. "I can only feel one thing—that you have given your word to her, and that you love me."

"That is two things," says he. "But if she doesn't want my word?"

"Ah! If she would say so!"

"I would to heaven Wylding would make her say it," says he, miserably. "Not that it makes much difference about him! Now that I know you care for me, my own little sweet, precious darling, I shall go up to The Park to-morrow, and tell Jessica that I have changed my mind about—many things."

"Don't do that," says she, quickly. She releases herself from his loving arms and stands back from him. "I couldn't bear you to do that. It would be dishonourable; and I should always feel that it was I who had driven you to do what—what the world would consider——"

"I don't think of the world," says he. "You are my world. There is nothing beyond."

"Then you do think of the world," says she, with a quick flash of it, "and a censorious one, too, for I should condemn a breach of faith in any one."

"But how if you found this to be no breach?"

"Ah! But how shall I find that?"

"Fay! Trust me! Believe in me!" cries he, passionately, drawing her to him, and encircling her little fragile form in his strong arms. "There s no dishonour anywhere, neither with me nor Jessica. She is as free from blame as I am. We were both hurried into an engagement that had no hold upon our hearts. But now—now! My beloved—my darling!" pressing her head down against his breast, "you know how it is with me. I love you, Fay. If I talked to you forever I could say nothing stronger than that."

"And I—I love you, too!" says she, breaking into bitter tears, "but it is all useless! All! If she—of her own will—does not release you from your engagement to her, I can not listen to you."

"Oh, Fay!—be merciful! If I speak to her— "

"No. It would not be the same thing. It would not be right! If she were to tell you she didn't want to marry you, that would be different. I should"—naively—"be happy then! But otherwise——"

"You raise a barrier between us that will never be razed," says Severn, desperately. "She is governed so far by her mother that she would hardly dare to break with me." He speaks sincerely, but in this he wrongs Jessica. "If you decide upon refusing me when I have ended this loveless engagement that now ties me why, I shall not end it. As well be miserable one way as the other."

She is silent.

"Speak, Fay!"

"You proposed to her of your own free will—she has not spoken to you any word that would betray her desire to break her engagement with you. I think you should keep to it," says she.

It is strange to see so much strength—so much determination in so small a creature.

"It shall be as you will," says Severn in a low voice.

He turns away, and then comes back again.

"Nevertheless, I shall put an end to this hated bond to-morrow," says he, doggedly, and with a sudden angry change of purpose.

She makes no reply. She is standing quite quiet, her little figure in its pretty white frock bowed. Her face—two tears run swiftly down her cheeks.

"Oh, darling!" cries he in a suffocated tone.

He makes a step toward her; but she, throwing out both her hands to check him, runs swiftly up the balcony steps leading into the drawing-room, and, like a small whirlwind, disappears round the corner of the first window.

CHAPTER XI.

All nature is but Art, unknown to thee;
All chance, direction, which thou canst not see,
All discord, harmony not understood;
All partial evil, universal good.

With a heavy heart he turns, and walks homeward to Pasco's home, that has now no master. He had seemed cold when speaking to Fay about his brother's unhappiness, about the woman who had caused it. But in truth his coldness had been nothing to his anger against her. To him there was but one possible view of the case, and that was that she had deliberately ruined his life—had come down there to prey upon society, and secure for the establishment of her lost respectability the first eligible man that offered. Pasco had been that man. He would have laughed aloud if any one had told him now—whatever he might have believed before—that Mrs Barrington—or whatever her name was—had ever loved his brother. . . . To him the whole affair was a preconcerted scheme on her part, in which any honest sentiment had no portion whatsoever.

He regarded his brother well out of it, and attributed the woman's refusal to marry him to the fact that, her story being known here, the respectability she craved would have been impossible. Nobody would have called, his family would decline to receive her. She had thrown up the game at the last moment to the everlasting good of Pasco—if Pasco could only have been brought to see it. But he had not seen it, and had left his home yesterday, bound no one knew where, with a heart that seemed broken, and an openly expressed feeling of resentment toward all his family.

He had refused indeed to see Sir George, who up to the last moment had made vigorous efforts to get at him, and explain what really happened, and so break down this terrible barrier that the younger brother had raised between them.

Pasco was obdurate, and left home with a dull farewell to Ernest, and a decided intention of leaving no address behind him.

No wonder Ernest, who regarded Pasco as his dearest possession once a little, petulant, charming face was out of the question—felt bitter against Janet Barrington.

She was still at The Priory, but was leaving to-morrow. To go where no one knew, beyond the fact that she was bound for London first. After that, according to Ernest's belief, for Monte Carlo or some other foreign place where adventuresses live and thrive—or for the—eventually it would be the latter.

His mood is a terribly bitter one now, as he walks along through the warm woodlands; his brother's griefs have been as his own, but now a yet more intimate one claims him. Fay's face as last he saw it, with those two large melancholy tears stealing down the woe-begone little cheeks, has rendered him almost distracted. They have told their own tale. She loved him. He loved her with all his heart and soul—nothing stood between them but a hateful engagement in which neither of the supposed interested parties had sunk any heart-capital whatsoever—and yet——

Well, if she would not have him, he would follow Pasco's example, and cut this life altogether. Tuesday next his leave would be up, and he must rejoin his regiment; but he could not live out a detestable existence in a country that contained the being he loved, but who, of her own account, had determined to render herself inaccessible. Of Jessica he thought little beyond this, that he would certainly end the farce existing between her and him to-morrow. The very thought of her had grown hateful. And she would probably be glad of her release.

He—Ernest—had nothing to offer beyond an old name, and nowadays, an heiress such as Jessica could always be sure of securing that—that it would leave her free to accept the evident admiration of her cousin. Of course if he—Ernest—had been a man of property, a desirable parti of that sort, it would be impossible now to draw back, but as it is——

Entering the library, he finds a letter awaiting him. Opening it with langnid interest, he finds it contains a whole world of excitement. His uncle, an old man living in Devonshire, is dead, and has left him all his property. A clear three thousand a year!

Severn falls into a chair, and having re-read the letter, gives himself up to despair. With this—with her—what life would have meant! And now! Now it is impossible that he should have the small comfort of breaking off his engagement with the other.

It is growing toward evening, and Fay, who had spent a good deal of her afternoon in her own room in tears, has crept down to the small drawing-room, knowing that there solitude at least will be found. The children are all spending the day at a distant place, and Nettie has gone visiting. Not being the latter's day At Home, her small sister feels sure of thinking out her sad thoughts undisturbed. Vain hope!

The door is thrown open and Miss Wilcott is ushered in by one of the servants. Fay, with a little wild thought of hiding her tell-tale eyes, rises hurriedly to greet her visitor, keeping her back well to the light.

"Nettie is not in," says she, as cordially as nature will permit. "But perhaps I may be her substitute for this one day."

"I'm rather glad she is from home," says Miss Wilcott, coolly. "It is you I want to see. May I take off these laces? They are so warm, and I dare say I shall be here for some time."

"Let me take them off," says Fay, her heart sinking within her. This girl, of all others! How long is she going to stay? Nevertheless, she busies herself with the undoing of the laces.

"You are not feeling well, are you?" says Miss Wilcott, looking at her sharply.

"Oh, yes, quite well, thank you. Did you walk?"

A pause, and then:

"Yes; such a lovely day. If you are quite well, at all events you have been crying."

"Do you never cry?" says Fay, slowly, deliberately, and with just a suspicion of insonence.

"Never," says Miss Wilcott. "I'm not a foolish person as a rule. This sounds a little rude, because you evidently have been crying, but in reality it is not so. Very sensible people have been known to give way to folly occasionally. But crying is not in my line. If you want a thing, take it—don't sit crying for it. That is sensible advice, and economical, too. You save your eyes."

"It sounds a little lawless," says Fay, laughing in a rather forced fashion. "May I ask what you have been appropriating lately?"

"My cousin, Gilbert Wylding," returns Miss Wilcott, coolly. "I finally made up my mind to marry him this morning."

There is a long pause. Fay has turned very pale. She would have spoken, but is afraid to trust her voice. Presently, however, she gains once more control over herself.

"Surely I heard the truth when I was told you were engaged to Captain Severn?"

"The whole truth and nothing but the truth," with a shrug of her handsome shoulders.

"And now, how are you going to——I don't understand you," says Fay.

"A great many people have said that to me off and on," says Miss Wilcott, carelessly. She smiles curiously — a little complacently, and glances at Fay out of her dark, almond-shaped eyes. Never had she seemed so Jewish in the other's opinion. Dark, handsome, a little crafty, detestable, decides Fay, who, though full of a confused joy, that as yet had hardly grown definite, still feels the indignity shown to her lover. To calmly throw him over like that without a word or thought!

"And Ernest — you have not considered him?" she says, warmly.

The other looks at her very straight this time.

"Well, I never thought you a hypocrite," says she.

The blood rushes into Fay's pale cheeks. She grows visibly unnerved, whereupon Miss Wilcott gives way to that peculiar low laugh of hers.

"Oh, I think I have considered him," she says, with a touch of amusement that is not wholly free of a sneer. "Was I ever so considerate to him before, I wonder? I don't think he will die of chagrin or grief over my loss. I really think, on the contrary, that he will feel inclined to kill the fatted calf. He will be now free to—" She pauses, her eyes still fixed on Fay.

"Well?" says the latter, with a rather ominous compression of her lips.

"To seek consolation elsewhere. What did you think I was going to say?" laughing again.

"Your thoughts are beyond me," says Fay, rather haughtily.

"Yes? Well, yours are not beyond me. Am I rude again? You thought I was going to say that he would now seek consolation from you."

Fay rises to her feet, her dark eyes flashing, her small, shapely head well thrown back. She opens her lips as if to speak, but Jessica, by an imperious gesture, stops her.

"There—there. What is it all about?" says she, contemptuously. "Why should you be angry because I tell you Ernest adores you? It is I who should be angry with you, but," with a little smile, "I'm not. Did you think I was blind all these weeks?