A Mystery.

Life held in her hands a measure,
And swung it lightly and low;
And she said: I will see if my pleasure
Do not outweigh my woe.
And she gathered all stingless laughter,
All loves that were lasting and sure,
All joys that left memories after,
All wealth that was wingless and pure;
She gathered all sunlight and starlight,
All thornless and fadeless flowers;
She gathered the faint light and far light,
Of pangless and perfect hours;
She gathered all glimpses elysian
That never had blasted the soul,
All hopes that had held to fruition,
All talents that won to the goal,
All wisdom that never had saddened,
All truths that never had lied,
All ambitions that never had maddened,
All beauty that satisfied.

And she flung them all, all in her measure,
But they nothing outbalanced the pain;
And she said: I must add yet a treasure,
The kindest and best in my train.
And she reached out and took Death and laid it,
All restful and calm on the scale;
Yet pain, as before, still outweighed it;
And she sighed as she said: Could this fail?
Then she reached up to merciful Heaven,
Took down, and flung over Earth's strife,
A little pale hope, all unproven—
The hope of a measureless life;
Flung it down with a doubting and wonder,
With question and touch of disdain;
When lo! swift the light scale went under;
Life's woe was outweighed by life's gain!

Oh, strange! Oh, most strange! If the measure
Of all mortal days be but woe,
Compared with their acme of pleasure
(Life mused as she hung the scale low),
Why, then, should it lessen Earth's sorrow?
Why magnify Death's consequence
To believe in a timeless to-morrow?
And life held the scale in suspense.

A GORDON'S PRIDE

It did not occur to her that she had mistaken gratified vanity for love; she was not even conscious how far the desire to oppose and thwart Miss Digby influenced her; and she was disappointed that love was not more entrancing after all. She had read somewhere that it changed the very aspect of the world for those who opened their hearts to it, that the sunshine became more golden, that the flowers grew more fair. She had not found it so. It was pleasant to be so tenderly cared for, so assiduously worshipped—to know that one man's thoughts were all for her, that his life was centred in her—to know that her very action was of the highest importance to him. But there it all ended; she could not understand what the poets meant by rapture and delight. She owned to herself that, now this great, grand dower of womanhood had been given to her, she did not think so very much of it. The part that she enjoyed the most and found the greatest pleasure in was in remembering how completely she had ignored Helen Digby.

"What will papa think of me when he learns that under her auspices, under her charge and control, under her guidance, I have met a lover, settled my whole life, and she knows nothing of it? What will papa say to that? What will he think of her boasted prudence, her power of guidance?"

It was neither a kind or generous view to take of matters—it was unlike Ethel Gordon—but her dislike of Miss Digby had blinded her and she went slowly on the road that led to her doom.

One beautiful morning Laurie Nugent did not feel inclined to join the other guests at breakfast. He asked for a cup of coffee and the morning papers to be taken out into one of the pretty little arbors that were dotted over the grounds. He had been dreaming of Ethel all night, thinking of her ever since the morning sun had begun to shine, and he felt unable and unwilling to speak to others until he had looked upon her. He knew that she would be out soon. On those warm, beautiful days the visitors at the hotel cared little for being indoors. He opened the paper—there was but little news. Once or twice he laid it down, for between him and the printed page the face of Ethel Gordon seemed to float.

"How she has bewitched me!" he said to himself.

He laid the paper aside, and then took it up again. Suddenly the smile died from his lips, and a livid pallor not pleasant to behold came over his face. There was a small paragraph of five or six lines which seemed to fascinate him. He read and re-read it.

"It cannot be true," he said to himself. "It is a ruse to satisfy people. Of course the police must say something or the public would lose all faith in them. It cannot be true. They know nothing about it."

He laid the paper down again, but the hand that raised the cup to his lips trembled so that he could hardly hold it.

"Good Heavens, if it should be true!" he cried. "And I am wasting time her. I ought to leave this very day, this very hour, but—I cannot—I would just as soon die as leave my love, I must take her with me."

There was no more quiet reading for him that morning. It seemed to him that he hardly had time to think. The ladies came out, and Miss Digby sent to him for the *Times*. It was strange how he hesitated about giving it to her. His face flushed, and then grew pale.

"I cannot tear it out," he said. "They might think it strange. How foolish I am! What can they know of it?"

Yet, when after a time he saw the paper open in Ethel's hand, he rose from his seat with a suppressed cry; but with an effort he again controlled himself, and then walked away from the spot. Lady Stafton, meeting him some time afterward, said—"You do not look well this morning, Mr. Nugent."

He murmured a few words. She saw how his lips trembled, and she passed on, while Laurie Nugent sought the silent depths of the wood, there to think at his ease. He seated himself on the grass.

"In the first place," he mused, "is it true? I do not believe it. If there be only the least foundation for such a rumor, I ought to fly at once, without an hour's delay. Can I go! Can I leave the girl I love better than my life? A thousand times—no! I cannot leave her. If I go she must go with me. And how can that be accomplished?"

The old doubt returned to him—did she really love him, or was it gratified vanity and love of rule? Never mind—it mattered little to him. He loved her, and every desire of his heart was centred in her. He had sworn to win her, and he would keep his vow. She would love him in time.

"I must go, and I must take her with me," he repeated. For some time he sat absorbed in thought, his face grave and anxious. Suddenly a light came over it, and Laurie Nugent sprang from his seat with a cry.

"I have found it—I can manage it! If I make good use of Miss Digby, I may win the day."

So careless, so volatile, so *debonnair* was he that as he sat an idle strain of song came from his lips. He had solved the problem—he saw his way clear to persuade Ethel to go away with him. What now cared he?

"I must make Miss Digby more useful than ever she had been in her life," he said. "She must be the decoy. I wonder if my love will consent?"

Yet during the remainder of that day Laurie Nugent was strangely nervous. If any one entered the hotel suddenly, he would start and grow pale. He asked more than once if there were any new arrivals, and seemed greatly relieved when he was told "No." "Nor will there be," said the manager, "at this time of the year. St. Ina's is quite out of the beaten track."

A look of wonderful relief came over Mr. Nugent's face.

"You really consider it quite out of the beaten track?" he questioned.

"It is the least frequented spot in England," was the reply, "although I think it one of the prettiest." Then the manager left his guest to his own meditation.

"I must see Ethel to-night," he said; "and then, if she will consent, to-morrow I will go over to Homleigh—that is the nearest place. I will make all arrangements there. This is Tuesday—if she consents at all, she will agree for Thursday."

He wrote on a slip of paper—"I want to see you so particularly, Ethel, my dear love, that I am obliged to ask you to come out for a few minutes this evening. Do not be later than 9, and come to the lime-grove—I shall be waiting for you there. Do not refuse, sweet, for all my future life depends upon the 'Yes,' or 'No,' that you will say to me to-night."

He contrived to place that in her hand, and when she smiled, he knew that she had consented. She would rather have died than have smiled had she known what would come of that evening's meeting.

CHAPTER XV.

The stars were gleaming in the depths of a dark blue sky, the night wind was sweet with the breath of odorous blossoms, the dew thick upon the grass and the flowers—a great calm and silence seemed to lie like a blessing over the earth; the lime-trees were faintly stirred by the night wind, the leaves rustled and sighed.

Ethel walked quickly and quietly down to the lime-grove. She had found some little difficulty in leaving the house unobserved, but she had accomplished it; and, when Helen Digby believed her safe in her room, she was walking with rapid steps to meet Laurie Nugent.

She knew perfectly well that she was not doing right—in the long, sad after-years she never tried to excuse herself—but there was comfort to her in the thought that she was deliberately disobeying Helen Digby.

"If my father could see me now," she thought to herself, "he would say it would have been better to leave me alone. If he had trusted me, I would not have done this."

Bitter, cruel, unjust thoughts against her father's chosen wife came over her as she walked in the silence of the sweet summer night to keep her appointment. There was no seat under the fragrant limes, and Laurie Nugent, as soon as he saw Ethel, hastened forward, and took both her hands in his.

"My darling," he said, "how good of you to come! I knew that I was asking the greatest possible favor. I hardly dared hope that you would grant it."

There was an answering light of joy on her face. She smiled gently as one who was simply pleased.

"You wanted me particularly; so I could not refuse to come. But I must not stay. Tell me quickly what it is—Laurie."

She hesitated before uttering the name; but he had prayed so hard that she would use it that she made the effort. He kissed her white hands as he thanked her, and then she raised her eyes to his face.

"What is it, Laurie? I must not stay."

To her great surprise she saw tears shining in his eyes, and the light of the stars showed that his face was pale and sorrwful.

"I have so much to say to you, my darling, that I hardly know how to begin. Ethel, you have read of women who have held the hearts of men in the hollow of their small white hands—in like manner do you hold mine. You have heard of women who have held men's lives in their power—so, dearest, do you hold mine. On your 'Yes' or 'No' to-night depends my whole future—my life, my death, my sorrow, my joy, my well or evil doing, all depend on what you shall say to me to-night."

She looked anxiously at him—the starlight, the night wind, the solemn silence, the holy calm, all tended to soften her heart. She felt more kindly disposed to him than she had ever felt before—such absolute sovereignty over a tall strong man was delightful. She let her white hand linger in his clasp, and said gently—

"Tell me what you mean, Laurie."

He was silent for a few minutes, and she guessed rather than knew that some great struggle was going on in his mind. Suddenly he did what he had never dared to do before—he clasped her in his arms and kissed her beautiful face.

"My darling," he said, gently, "if I could but take you away—if we could only leave this cold, cruel world behind us—if we could go where no troubles, no sorrows, where the sun is always bright, and the world always fair!"

She shrank from him, and the idea struck her that, although she was in love with him she would not care about going away with him. Then Laurie recovered himself, and Ethel reproached herself that she was not kinder to him.

"My darling Ethel," he said, "I am going to put your love to the test. You are a generous noble girl; you have heroism and courage for anything that you care to do. I want you to display that heroism for me. I want to put your love to the test. Will you bear it, do you think?"

"Yes," she replied, proudly; "any test that you can offer I can bear."

"That is spoken like yourself; you are braver than any other woman, Ethel, just as you are more beautiful. How many girls in your place would have meekly yielded to Miss Digby—would have submitted to her in everything! But you have held your own against her. What I have to ask you to-night would dismay and frighten a woman of Miss Digby's class."

He had studied Ethel so well, he knew how to practice on every weakness—he could play upon her feelings, her faults, her virtues, as a clever musician upon a harp. He knew that she would do and dare more from a spirit of opposition to Miss Digby than from love for himself.

"Ethel," he continued, "give me a patient hearing. I find that I am obliged to leave here suddenly—I ought to go to-morrow—and, oh, my love, it breaks my heart to leave you. I cannot go alone."

She looked up at him with wondering eyes.

"You must go alone, Laurie. I cannot accompany you."

"You could, my darling, if you would be only a little braver than other women are—a little more courageous. Ethel, let me make you my wife quite secretly, and then go away with me."

"I cannot," she replied, "papa would never forgive me."

"Yes, he would. Hundreds of marriages take place in the same way. He would forgive you directly."

"But it would not be right. I could not do it; do not ask me, Laurie."

"It would, be quite right, my darling. Where did you tell me your father was!"

"He is at Vienna," she said, gently. "But, Laurie, I can never consent."

The deadly despair that came over him at the thought of losing her frightened him.

"Ethel, listen to reason. Marry me, and I will take you to Austria; we will go to your father and ask him to forgive us." He had not the least notion of doing what he said, but he knew the idea would please her. "Such a step as that would have one effect," he said; "your father would never marry Miss Digby."

Her whole heart changed as he said the words.

"He would never marry Miss Digby! Oh, Laurie, are you quite sure of that?"

"Quite sure," he replied. "Your father would ask himself of what use would it be to marry a woman who had not been able to keep his daughter under control? He could not believe in her prudence or discretion after that. He would not be angry with you, but he would be so angry with her that he would in all probability refuse to see or speak to her again."

"Do you think so?" cried Ethel.

"I am sure of it. Then there is another thing, Ethel. Your father's chief object in marrying is to secure a friend and adviser for you. If you were married, there would be no need of such a friend."

Her face grew brighter still.

"There would not, indeed," she said.

"I am quite certain, Ethel," he continued, "that if you consent to my wish your father will never marry at all."

"If I thought so, I would say 'Yes' at once, Laurie."

His heart beat with triumph, yet he felt almost ashamed of the manner in which that triumph was won.

"It would really be a grand jest, Ethel to go to Vienna as my wife, and let your father see of what little use Miss Digby is after all. He would see then that she is not capable of taking care of you, but that you were and are quite capable of taking care of yourself. How surprised he would be to find that Miss Digby had failed."

"You tempt me, Laurie," she said gently. "You do not think, then, that my father would be very angry?"

"He would not be angry at all, darling—who could be angry with you?—but he would see how very much he had overrated Miss Digby."

"It would be a great triumph," she remarked; "but would it be right?"

"Right to keep your father's love for yourself—right to expose the incapacity of the woman he has selected to be your adviser—right to make the man you have honored with your love happy? How can you ask me, Ethel? Most certainly it would be right. You told me," he continued, "that Miss Digby had warned you against me. Imagine the triumph of going with me into her presence, and saying to her, 'Here is the man against whom you warned me; he is my husband now!' Imagine her anger, her mortification. They would be immeasurable, Ethel."

The idea took possession of Ethel. To obtain such glorious revenge upon her rival she would have committed any act short of dishonor or sin.

She hardly heard the half-whispered, pleading, passionate words, so completely had this idea taken possession of her. She could not have devised sweeter triumph, more bitter revenge, as regarded the woman who had stepped between her and the bright pleasures of her life. She had been chosen for her prudence, her discretion, her womanly wisdom, her capability of guidance. If she could convince her father that Helen Digby had none of these qualities, he would surely abandon all idea of marrying her. He would own that he had been mistaken—the Gordons were proud even in their humility—and there would be an end of it.

Her beautiful face flushed, and a proud defiant light came into her eyes. He was thinking of nothing but love and winning her—she was thinking solely of revenge.

With the stars shining down upon her, and the night wind whispering around her, she gave herself up to this dream of revenge. Suppose that she yielded to Laurie—that on Thursday she met and married him—that they afterward went home and together sought Helen Digby's presence—what a triumph it would be! She pictured to herself the scene—how she would take Laurie's hand in her own and say, "Miss Digby, this is the gentleman you warned me against—he is my husband now. I married him this morning, and we are going to join my father in Austria. He will know how to appreciate your watchful care."

She smiled as she pictured the dismay on Helen Digby's face; the triumph would be complete and sweet—she could ask no greater. It was characteristic of her that she gave no thought to the future. This marriage, if she agreed to it, would restore her to her father's love—her lost position. She never once remembered that if she became Laurie Nugent's wife she must go away and live with him. She never once thought of the future—whether he would go to Fountayne or London; she only remembered that she could take no greater vengeance on Helen Digby than by proving to Sir Leonard that he was quite mistaken in his estimate of her. That the vengeance might recoil on her own head did not occur to her. She never thought of the consequences of her marriage; she thought that Laurie Nugent loved her very dearly, and all his happiness depended on her. If she could make him happy, regain her lost position, keep her father's love, and take revenge on Miss Digby all at one stroke, how thankful she ought to be! Then she roused herself to hear what he was saying.

"I have my faults, Ethel, but my love for you is greater than I can tell—it fills my whole heart and leaves room for nothing more. If you refuse me, Ethel, and I have to leave you, I shall become a desparate man—I shall care for nothing, shall go to ruin as fast as I can go; life will have no interest, no charm for me. If you will trust me, will grant my prayer and be my wife, I will make you the happiest woman in all the wide world."

He stopped suddenly, and by the light of the stars he saw her beautiful face raised to his.

"Is it right, Laurie? Will people blame me afterward, and say I have done an unwomanly action?"

There was something like remorse in his heart when he answered, with all appearance of frankness—"No. No one would ever blame her—people did things of that kind every day. If there was any wrong, any harm in it, he would not ask her to do it."

"No," she said, wit the simple faith of a child, "I am quite sure you would not."

It had never occurred to her to ask him any questions about his position, his ability to keep a wife, his income, his source of revenue—she had never thought of it. She thought of two things only—her desire to prevent her father's marriage, and her desire to make Laurie Nugent happy.

Neither of these two motives would have been strong enough to influence her separately—the two combined conquered her. In after years she wondered at her own reckless want of thought, her carelessness, her utter disregard of all consequences. "I must have been blind," she said, when I consented—nay, I must have been mad!"

The time never came when she confessed that love of Laurie Nugent had influenced her—of all the motives stirring in her heart and helping her on to ruin, that was the feeblest. She believed that she loved him; yet afterward, when real love came to her—the royal dower of noble women—she knew that for Laurie Nugent she had felt nothing but a kindly, pleasant, almost indifferent affection, and that he had won her by dint of flattering homage and devotion which few women could have resisted.

She wondered, too, that in the long, sad after-years, how she could have so far forgotten her own ideas of right and wrong—how she could have taken pleasure in revenge so unworthy of a Gordon—how she could have been so deaf to all the appeals of her better self, her nobler nature—how she could have rushed so blindly, so madly, on her fate. If she had had the excuse of passionate love, it would have been better for her—it would have lessened her folly, it would have been some excuse for her rashness; but she was not influenced by love.

"Ethel," said Laurie, "you are so silent that I begin to fear. Can you fancy how a drowning man would pray if in the midst of a fierce, raging sea he saw a spar to which he could cling? Yet no such man could plead for life as I plead for one word—'Yes.' O, Ethel! I love you so dearly! Could you live for a thousand years, you would never know such love again. My darling, will you consent?"

Still she hesitated, but she was young, and the passion of his words was beginning to influence her. Her face softened and grew tender, her voice became a sweet, musical murmur; she left her white, jewelled hand in her lover's clasp, and he wooed her with such earnest devotion, his handsome face flushed with eagerness, his eyes and lips elouquent with love—he wooed her with such eloquent words, with such passion, such poetry, such romance, that it would have been hard for her to resist. Had it been in the broad light of noon, in the garish light of day, she would perhaps have hardened her heart against him, and have said "No;" but the hour of night had its own witchery, its own glamour—the air was so fragrant with rich perfume, that light of the stars so tender and so pure, the whisper of the western wind so sweet and low, the silence of the summer night so beautiful, that the place and its surroundings mastered her. She did not resist when he clasped his arms round her, and bending down, kissed the fair face, his heart beating as he thought that the proud young beauty would so soon be all his own.

"You are willing, Ethel?" he whispered, and she replied—

"Yes, I am willing, Laurie."

"You have chosen wisely—and, believe me, my darling, you will never repent your choice. You can imagine what a life you would have had if your father had returned and married Miss Digby. There would have been no love to spare for you. She would have made herself complete mistress of your father's house, and you would have been compelled to submit to her as a little child. You would have found such a life intolerable. Now you will have freedom, liberty, brightness, all that you value most."

Yet even as he spoke he knew that he had bound her in heaviest chains.

"I ought to go in now," said Ethel. "Suppose that I should be missed?"

"Nay, no happier hour will come to us, Ethel, than this. The grand shore of the golden land is shining before us. We may not be happier when we reach it than standing, as we do now, gazing upon it. Stay just a little longer. O, Ethel—my beautiful, proud Ethel—if I could linger here with you while life lasted!"

There was somewhat of pain, of regret, of remorse, of unhappiness in his voice which touched her generous heart more than all his love had done.

"Are you not happy now, Laurie?" she asked; and he thought her voice had never been so sweet.

"Happy, my darling? I am frightened at my own happiness. I find myself wishing that I were richer than a millionaire, so that I might surround you with everything most precious and bright. I find myself wishing that I had the goodness of a saint, that I might be more worthy of you. Happy? Ah, Ethel, I wonder if you will ever know the keen rapture of such joy as mine

As they walked beneath the fragrant limes, and he told her in the most tender and eloquent words he could command, over and over again, the story of his love, she saw how mighty it was—how it filled his heart, filled his soul; and she was touched by the strength of such affection. She was nearer loving him in that hour than she had ever been, and for the time she almost forgot her desire for revenge.

The silence of the summer night deepened; one by one the lights in the windows of the hotel were extinguished, and Ethel suddenly remembered how late it was.

"I must go, Laurie," she said.

He dared not ask her to remain. He must be prudent for a few hours longer, and then she would be his own—he could take her away over the wide seas, where there would be no more need for prudence or restraint. He had deceived her—for in his own mind he knew perfectly well that he had no idea of taking her to Vienna, or of ever allowing her to see her father again—he best knew why. He knew, too, that the imaginary incident he had amused her with—the interview between Miss Digby and herself—would never take place. He meant to marry her on Thursday. They would be obliged to part for a few hours. While those few hours lasted he intended to bind her over to secrecy, and for the rest he trusted to his own ready wit. Let him once make sure of her—once marry her—and he would ask no more.

"Ethel, before you go, will you listen to my arrangements for you?"

She stopped and he never forgot her as he saw her then, the starlight falling on her upturned face, showing every exquisite feature in the soft light, the dainty head held proudly up, the shining folds of her dress falling around her, and her white hands clasped. He could not quite understand the expression of her face; he read on it the simple faith of a child, mingled with the dawn of tenderness—no anxiety, no fear.

"To-morrow will be Wednesday, and I will devote the whole of it to making arrangements. You have heard of the pretty little town of Holmleigh—not far—not above two miles from St. Ina's? It has an old church called St. Ann's; and I thought, Ethel, my darling, we would be married there."

She did not reply. The marriage itself did not interest her so much as the interview with Miss Digby which was to follow it.

"I will procure a special license, so that we shall have no difficulty, and I will, with your consent, my darling, arrange the time for half-past 8 on Thursday morning. You can rise as early as you generally do; and it is no unusual thing for you to take an early morning ramble. Suppose you do so. Miss Digby will think you have gone out into the woods. I will meet you, and we can walk to Holmleigh Church. We are not likely, in this quiet place, to encounter any one, or to be seen—and the church stands quite by itself, you know, at the foot of a hill just before you enter the town. We can return by separate roads."

"And then?" she questioned, eagerly.

He knew well of what she was thinking.

"Then we can have the grand interview with Miss Digby," he said—"and very amusing it will be. I can imagine so well what she will say, and how she will look. After that, my darling, we will lose no time—we will start at once for Austria."

The untruth did not trouble him. He found her so easy to manage that he felt sure when they came out of church, he would be able to invent some story or other that would satisfy her.

"Do you consent to these arrangements, Ethel?" he asked.

"Yes; I cannot object. You are quite sure it is right, Laurie?"

"I am certain it is," he replied, with a ready confidence that cheered her; and then, bending over her, he wished her good-night.

She preferred to go back to the house alone. He stood and watched her, his heart thrilling with the thought that in a short time that fair young girl would be his wife.

It seemed strange that when he entered the hotel his first question was as to whether any strangers had arrived. "No," was the reply; "St. Ina's has never been more quiet."

"I am safe," he said to himself. "If there had been any truth in that report, they would have been here before this. Give me forty-eight hours more, and I shall be over the sea with my proud, beautiful Ethel."

Little did Helen Digby dream of the conspiracy forming against her. She was happier than she had been since her arrival at St. Ina's. She believed Ethel was beginning to like her; there had been more of gentleness in her manner, and something which Helen could not define—a shadow of regret. Ethel herself slept well; it was wonderful how blind she was to the enormity of the step she contemplated. Laurie Nugent was the last person she dreamed of; her father, Helen Digby, even Lady Stafton, occupied her thought more often than he did. Laurie was to prevent her father's marriage—Laurie was to restore her to her own position at Fountayne—Laurie worshipped her more fondly and truly—so he said—than man ever worshipped woman before; so she was grateful to him. He had been the first to give any romance to her girlish dreams; it was from him that she had first learned how bewitching and charming she was; he had ministered to her pride, her vanity, her love of power, and, therefore, she was grateful to him, and had consented to marry him with far greater heedlessness than she would have promised to walk out with him.

(To be continued.)

England is suffering from an inundation of French pennies. They are being imported on a large scale by advertisers who stamp their advertisements upon the coins before putting them into circulation. They dare not use English coin for this purpose because there is a law against defacing current coin of the realm. But French pennies circulate in England as easily as English pennies. The public do not like these advertisements any more than they do the circulars thrust into their hands on the streets, and which they generally throw away without reading. They do not throw the pennies away.

The cost of the last Lord Mayor's pageant was $19,000; $8,570 on dinners, $5,125 on the procession, $2,180 on decorations, $300 on music, $1,325 on printing and $1,675 on general expenses. Of this the new Lord Mayor contributes $10,000 and each of the sheriffs $5,000. These figures lead London *Truth* to remark that there may possibly come a time when lord mayors and sheriffs will be elected for some other reason than they are prepared to spend money on such tomfooleries.