CONTINUED FROM FIRST PAGE.

she thanked me with the prettiest air in the world, and went away from me right up the road."

Was that all he could tell? Yes, it was all. He had followed her with his eyes until she was out of sight, not being altogether easy about her, she being delicate-like, and not looking as one might who was accustomed to walking upon stony roads; but he did not see her again, and heard nothing since.

"But"—here his face brightens, as if with some fortunate thought—"perhaps my wife could tell you something more. She too saw the young lady go by from her window. My house is only a mile or so from this, and she had watched her going by. Would you like to ask her a question or two, sir?"

The gentleman would. He turns and follows the man to his home; but from the little trim woman who comes out to meet him there is very little to be learned.

"Ah, sir, what a pretty lady—and so sorrowful! I saw her as she went by this way, passing almost upon the very spot, sir, where you now stand."

Bouverie starts perceptibly and his eyes seek the ground.

"This very spot!"

Did her tender wandering feet indeed touch this place on which he now is standing?

"I watched her, sir, until I could no longer see her. Look! Do you notice, sir, where the roads join—over there to the west? Mayhap not. But I can. I was always a sharp one with my eyes from a youngster. Well, I followed her until she came there, and then I saw she took the road that did not lead to Dorminster. I didn't know, sir, until my good man came home that she meant to go to Dorminster, or I'd have found some way to tell her o' the mistake she was making—I felt that sorry for her! Such a pretty young lady she was!"

"Where does the other road—the one the young lady took—lead to?" asked Bouverie.

"To Thurston, sir. A good town so far as vegetables goes, but nothing to Dorminster."

"Have you a trap of any sort—a horse?" asks Dick, turning with ill-suppressed impatience to the station-master.

"A horse, sir? Yes, but not for harness."

But it is all the same to Bouverie, to ride or drive, so long as he is getting nearer to her. To arrange matters with the station-master about the loan of his horse is but the work of a moment. There is no question about terms. Leaving his card and a sufficient sum of money to buy the melancholy animal presently produced—as surety for its return—Bouverie starts upon his journey.

It is still hot noon, and as yet the sun, though sinking, has not made a near approach to the end of its race, when Dick pulls rein before the wayside cottage where Dolores craved a rest.

The good woman of the house, coming forward, curtsys gravely to the strange pale young man who, dismounting, steps quickly up to her.

"Some time since—a long time since—a month," begins he nervously—"a young lady might have come by your place—she might, I say. Did you see her? Do you know anything of her? If you do"—gazing with heartfelt entreaty into her eyes—"I implore you to—" Here he breaks down for a moment, and, turning aside, makes some transparently unnecessary effort to alter his horse's girths. "Can you tell me anything?" he says presently, in a low broken tone.

"A young lady? Ay, truly, it would be a month come yesterday since a young lady walked in here to me an' asked if she might sit for a bit. A lady she were certainly, an' quite a young thing too—purty, but so silent, an' withal sad, and story in her eyes the while; perhaps it is her you look for, sir?"

"Yes," says Dick hoarsely.

"Ay, so! I guessed she come of decent people, she was that quiet an' reserved."

"Did she—was she—how did she look?" blurts out Dick at last, still employing himself with a fictitious examination of the paltry housings of the animal he has bestridden.

"Main bad, sir—an' sorry I am to tell it to the likes o' you, an' of her—main bad! Her face was white as the driven snow, an' her little hands were trembling; an' her feet——" She hesitates, checked by something in his face.

He has turned completely round, forgetful of his agitation.

"What?" he demands imperiously.

"They were bleeding. Ay, indeed, the poor soul," says the woman, subdued almost into silence by the terrible look in his eyes.

There is a silence that seems long, and then—

"It can't be her of whom you speak," he says, in a low vehement tone. "It is impossible." His face looks ghastly. "Her feet—her little, poor, pretty feet," he murmurs faintly—the very despair in his voice kills the thought that he finds anything to disbelieve in her statement. "She could not have been much hurt. Not much—say it!" cries he, turning suddenly upon the woman with a passionate agony of grief in his eyes.

Then, suddenly as it came, all the passion dies from him, and, letting his arms fall upon the seat of his saddle and his head on his arms, he bursts into tears.

"An' the best thing that could happen to him," says the excellent Mrs. Burnet to herself; and, as if to show how sincere she is in her belief, she takes his recipe herself, and, covering her face with her apron, sobs unrestrainedly for several minutes in the most comfortable manner possible.

"Take heart, dear," she says, after a while. "While there's life there's hope, you know, an' she may be found yet—leastways, if you an' I be thinking of the same young lady. A white frock she wore, with ribbons on it blue as her eyes, bless her. Pale blue they were. May happen her eyes were gray to some."

"Yes, gray," says Dick; then with a forlorn reproach in his tone—"Why didn't you keep her till we found her?" he asks miserably.

"Because she was bent on goin'," says Mrs. Burnet. "An' who was I to try an' stop the likes o' her? She was for ever startin' an' turnin' too, an' looking' up an' down the road, as if expectin' some one to overtake her. You—you don't mean her ill, do you?" says the good woman, regarding him searchingly.

"I don't know how I could," says Dick simply, "when I love her as I do."

"Ay, so!" says Mrs. Burnet admiringly. "An' are you her man?" She pauses a while, as if lost in the vastness of this new knowledge; and then—"I wish I could help you, sir," she says sadly; "but indeed I have no more to tell you. She left me without a word that could give me a hint as to where she was goin', except that she asked me how far it was to Thurston. She was the sweetest creature I ever saw, so gentle, so grateful for the little I could do for her. Here at the door, when she was goin', she turned an' kissed me." The good woman's eyes fill with tears again at the recollection, and she wipes them hastily with her apron.

"Thurston?" repeats Dick quickly.

He flings himself into the saddle. He has long since squeezed something into Mrs. Burnet's hand, and now rides up to her gate eager to pursue his search afresh. But, as he stoops to lift the tiny latch with his whip, he hears her voice calling after him, and sees her running towards him as fast as age and a corpulently stoutness will permit.

"Stay, sir," she says; "there is one thing—it comes to my mind now. A while ago I heard, through one of the neighbours, that a strange young lady had come to stay at a house about four miles from this. I asked about her, being curious-like, an' it seemed to me that she was like the young lady who came here. Had she relations in those parts, sir?"

"No," says Dick—"no, it could not be she."

"Still what they told me of her was like her," persists Mrs. Burnet eagerly, "an' there seemed to be something mysterious too—queer, as it were. 'Tis on your way, sir; why shouldn't you see if it might be she?"

"On my way?"

"Yes, sure, to Thurston. I had thought many a time to go over there myself—to the Cottage, I mean—that's what 'tis called—to see if it might be my young lady—beggin' your pardon sir—but I have so much to do that spare moments is almost unknown to me. An old gentleman lives at the cottage; very charitable he be, though given to solitary habits, an' never mixin' with the neighbours round; an' so I thought as how——"

"Yes, I'll go there," says Bouverie.

Turning in his saddle, he smiles down at her. There is a brightness in his face she has not seen there before—a sort of vague unsatisfactory hope that still has comfort in it.

"Why, there now—I'm glad to see you smile at me," says she kindly. Then—"Go your ways," she says, waving him onwards, "an' I'll pray Heaven you may have some'at better than me to smile at before you find your bed this night."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

The dying sun is glinting through the waving trees, casting warm patches of light upon the mossy sward. There is no sound upon the calm evening air save the murmur of the stream and the gentle movement of the boughs and grasses. Just here the lawn is lost in a dense shadow cast by the branching trees that grow low down until their drooping leaves reach even to the water's bosom.

The inexplicable sweetness of the air, the softness, the purity of tone, the depth of the greenness that lies within that charmed range of firs upon the right hand, who shall give voice to it all? It is indeed a perfect evening, a lingering remembrance of a most perfect summer.

"Sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things."

Dolores, standing in the foreground of this charming picture, with her hands clasped listlessly before her, looks as though her pale young head has been already bound by that sad wreath. A slight willowy figure she appears, gazing with sorrowing eyes into her past, and forgetful for the moment of a future that can contain for her no hope.

She is clad in a white gown—the same white gown in which she left her home, now made fresh and pretty again as Mrs. Edgeworth's hands could manage. The last beams of the sun are dancing brilliantly about her head, which is scarcely a degree less sunny than they; on every branch the birds are chanting their evensong, but all unheeded by her. Her thoughts are far away—lost in mournful memories of home—of him!

Her gaze is fixed upon that tiny speck of the great ocean that shows clearest through the break in the beech-trees. She is so thinking of a day now gone, when the valiant hand in hand with one most dear to her along a gleaming shore, a lovelight in her eyes brighter than "saint-seducing gold?"

She is quite motionless. Not a movement betrays the fact that she is living. Her soul is wandering, and the body waits in silent ecstasy for its return. Her fragile form resists the evening breeze; her face—too thin, alas, and worn, and too full of spirituality for this gross earth!—is slightly raised, so that one watching may mark the ravages that grief and illness have laid on it. There are no tears within her eyes; but there is a sad wistfulness about her earnest mouth more pitiful than any weeping.

Now she sighs faintly, and her eyes wander to the yellow hills beyond, on which already the mists of evening are descending. Perhaps there, just behind them, lies her home—dear word!—and all that made life sweet.

How long is it since last she dwelt with those she loves? Four weeks? Nay, a century rather! What a world of time has passed her by since then! Must all her coming days be dreary as these last, all colourless, all blank? She trembles as she pictures to herself the terrible monotony of the gray existence she has sketched out for herself, an existence barren of love and tender ties, and such fond trivial things that serve to make life bearable.

Well, it is better so! The twining fingers clasp each other with a fiercer warmth, and the throbbing heart beats back a growing sob. And it is all so long ago now, and no word, no sign. Yes, they must deem her dead! No doubt they now think of her as one lying in her quiet grave, with all life's torments ended, and the sad stain upon her name lost, left behind in the world's hurry as it marches ever onward in hot haste.

And indeed, if by this time they have begun to think of her as dead, they have not so very far exceeded the truth. Another faint deepening of that heavy fever, a few days more of exhaustion, and she might have been reckoned with those who are no longer amongst the living. So near she was to the end of her life's journey that almost they might believe she had reached it.

Oh, how cruel were the kindly hands that had pulled her back from the grave! What an irreparable injury did these good Samaritans do her when they raised her from her sick couch and rescued her from the arms of Death, into whose embrace she would so willingly have sunk.

Now, even now, she might have been at rest, lying with straightened limbs and feverless brain, with nothing to press upon her heart save the cool earth and the throbbings of the gently-growing grasses. Under the dewy sods she would be resting in a great peace, her soul in heaven.

She clasps her little slender hands and sighs convulsively. In heaven home might have been found again, and the dear Father of all would have forgiven her sins. She had been wicked perhaps—yes, often; but indeed she had tried to be good—only there is so much always to be longed for here, although so little to be gained.

"To live as we should always die,
It were a goodly trade;
To change low death for life so high,
No better change is made.
For all our worldly things are vain,
In them there is no trust;
We see all things a while remain,
And then they change to dust."

How still it grows! How long the shadows lie! Already Apollo has sunk in a crimson glory behind the nearest hills. How quickly the stars are coming out to deck the summer sky! Is it as being behind those stars that they dream of her at home? Has even Dick come to think of her as dead? Oh, dear, dear Dick! Did he know how she loved him—that it was for him—to save him from the dull burning pain that will live in her heart for ever—that she left all, all?

A dry but passionate sob breaks from her. It seems to agitate all her delicate frame. The eager longing of her spirit is almost past control as she dwells on what is and what might have been, had not those past days, so rich in gladness, been overshadowed by so cruel a cloud.

With a little gesture full of despair she turns as though to go indoors. Her sudden movement prevents a young man, who for a long time has been watching her in a nervous anxiety that has checked his desire to advance, from falling back into the shadow of the evergreens behind him. Thus surprised, he wisely stands still, and lets his longing eyes seek hers.

Then all in a moment she sees him. Her mind flies back from distant thoughts of him to the knowledge that he is here before her, standing over there in this most blessed twilight.

He comes quickly up to her and holds out his arms, an agony of love upon his face. She runs to him; she flings her innocent arms around his neck, and clings to him as a tired child might cling who in its weariest hour has regained its parent's breast.

No tears fall from her; no word escapes her. She lies within his arms quiescent, her breath hardly seems to pass her lips.

"My darling, my soul!" exclaims the young man, with uncontrollable emotion. "Speak to me, let me hear your voice!"

As though the sound of the well-loved tones has power to rouse her, she stirs within his arms, and a heavy sigh escapes her. For a moment she regains consciousness.

"It has been a long, long time!" she whispers, so faintly that he has to stoop to hear her.

"Too long!" returns he, with vehemence.

He might perhaps have said more, but something—some slight lessening of the hold of the gentle arms—tells him the truth. Gazing with anxious haste into her face, he sees that she has fainted.

Lifting his shadowy burden and holding it close to his heart, Bouverie moves towards the house. Holding thus the thing he loves best in the world, he learns with a bitter pang of sorrow how light his burden is—so light that it can hardly so be called. How white she looks—how still! Is it only unconsciousness, or is it——With a look of terror upon his face, he hastens his footsteps.

Perhaps it is the rapid movement through the air, perhaps the beating of her lover's heart so near her own, or the more consciousness of her presence, that revives her; at all events, before he has half covered the ground that separates them from the house, she is restored to life again.

She struggles faintly to her feet, and, still leaning heavily against him, sighs softly—

"Is it you then, Dick, and no dream?" she whispers at last.

"It is I, my darling."

"Don't take me to the house—at least not yet. The soft air does me good; and there are so many things I must say to you alone."

She sinks upon a garden-seat near her, and he, wrapping a loose shawl that is lying there very tenderly around her, seats himself beside her. They are so hemmed in by the rhododendrons that they are quite hidden from the outer world.

"You are sure you are better here than indoors?" he asks her anxiously.

"Quite sure. It was only a momentary weakness. It is gone now. You startled me a little"—with a wan smile—"not you so much perhaps as the strange fear that what I saw was merely a vision, and that I should wake from it presently to find you as lost to me as you were before."

"You have been ill?" says the young man abruptly, unmistakable anguish in his tone.

"Yes, for a short time. But never mind that now. Tell me of——"

"I must mind it. What is it that has made you the wreck you now are?"

"A fever of some sort. But it was nothing much, or I could not be so well as I am now. You can see that for yourself."

"I can see that you are but a shadow of your former self."

"A very substantial shadow. Oh, Dick, hear me! I will tell you all you want to know afterwards; but first tell me of Lallie."

"What of her?"

"She is well?"—with tremulous anxiety.

"Well as a distressed mind will let her be. You alone fill her thoughts night and day. Think then if she can be altogether as well as you could wish her."

"You are unkind," says the girl, with a quick sob.

"Just now she is buoyed up with a hope, which, thank God, will not prove an altogether vain one. But, if I had failed to find you—Oh, dear, dear love," cries he, with passionate reproach, "how could you so have trifled with what was all the world to us, your life?"

"I didn't invite the fever to visit me," returns she, in quaint defence. "It wasn't my fault that it came, though in truth I am very much obliged to it in many ways. Those first days of happy unconsciousness, and those others, when I was too weak to feel anything but indifference, killed the time that lay for me between then and now. Had I been in my proper senses all those interminable hours, I should have been driven to my death by fretting and worrying and longing for you! But yet"—steadfastly—"I believe me, I should never have sought you or recalled you—never. I would have lived my pain through, even though my life should be its cost. And now"—sadly—"it has all to be done over again. My past trouble goes for naught." She catches her breath heavily. "Tell me," she says presently, "how it was I failed, how you discovered me?"

"It wasn't I," says Dick. Then he laughs with an irresistible merriment. "I give you a guess," he says, "as to who was the real finder."

"Audrey?"

"No—Sir Chicksy. There! Did you ever think he would rise to such a height—to be regarded as a person of vital importance, the actual discoverer of our little deserter?"

"You mustn't call me names," murmurs she, with a faint return of the old pretty mischievous spirit.

This gleam from the far-off days strikes with a certain sense of pain upon Bouverie's heart. His eyes fill with tears.

"I have answered all your questions," he says. "Now answer mine. Tell me how it is you are here, and with whom——"

In a few words she makes him master of all her actions from the hour she left Greylands until now. With simple but earnest gratitude she dwells upon the tender care showered upon her by these strangers into whose life she has fallen.

"Without a hesitation, not knowing who or what I was," she concludes, "they took me in and tended me with a carefulness, a sympathy, not to be surpassed. So long as I live I shall bear in my heart the memory of their good deeds to me."

"It is well to know that their reward is sure," says Bouverie solemnly.

There is silence for a while, and then suddenly, as though some thought he has been harbouring has been too strong for him, he turns to her with a curious anger in his eyes which is still overpowered with love.

"What did you mean by treating us as you did?" he says. "Did you understand? Did you do it wilfully? Or is it possible you could not guess at the depth of the misery to which you consigned us? It was a living death we endured from day to day. Did you know how we suffered?" He lays his hand upon her shoulder, and compels her to meet his burning eyes.

"Yes, for I suffered too," returns she gently.

"Not one-hundredth part so much as we did. I tell you it was horrible, the doubt, the despair, the everlasting fear!"

"Ah, do not scold me!" entreats she lovingly. She nestles closer to him. She steals one hand round his neck, and with the other turns his sad face to her own. "Dear good Dick!" she whispers wooingly, and presses upon his lips a little soft fond kiss. There is a pause, and then—"I do think," she says, with flattering conviction, "that you are the very handsomest and nicest face in all the world."

What man could withstand this? Bouverie, in spite of his stern endeavour to the contrary, smiles broadly.

"There now—see how conceited we can look," says his temptress, meanly taking advantage of his slight dereliction from the cold paths of virtue. As she speaks, she blushes generously and laughs aloud.

But this very giving voice to her mirth murders it. She starts as though struck by some unknown hand. The mere sound of her own merriment has frightened her. She checks it and pales again.

"I do not think I have laughed," she says, in a troubled whisper, "since last I saw you." Some painful recollection returns to her, and she shudders. "Oh, those last days," she says, "If I could only forget them. If I might blot them from my happy past. But they spoil all."

"Our past may not be altered," says Bouverie. "But to compensate for it, there is always the bright possibility of a glad future."

"The future! To me it brings no comfort," returns she, with lowered eyes and tone.

"It shall!" says Dick stoutly.

At this moment a voice comes to them across the scented lawn.

"Miss Dolores, Miss Dolores!"

"I am coming," returns Dolores quickly.

"Oh, come, come, come! Do my dear. The dew is beginning to fall."

"It isn't, you know," says Dolores softly, smiling at Dick; but Mrs. Edgeworth hates to see me out after sundown."

"She is right. Yes, come in," exclaims Bouverie repentantly. "How mad of me to keep you out all this time. Come, darling."

"Not until you say you have forgiven me. You were angry with me a moment since. I cannot bear that. If I have caused you pain, Dick, try—try to learn that it was for your own sake I inflicted it."

"I suppose you meant it so. But what a mistake it has all been. And how could you keep silence for so long? Why did you not write?"

"I have told you. I wished you to forget me. And then I fell ill; and then—then I hoped you would believe me dead."

"What cruelty can lie behind a little saint-like face!" exclaims Bouverie, taking the "saint-like face" between his hands, and regarding it long and earnestly. "My sweetheart, how pale you are," he says presently. "Surely the cruelty I spoke of has recoiled upon yourself." Oh, my poor little pallid love!" Then, with a sudden triumphant change of tone—"But what does it all matter," cries he, "since you are alive—alive, and in my arms?"

With a rush of the most impulsive, tenderest passion, he catches her to his beating heart, holding her there closely, as though to assure himself that it is indeed she, the woman he adores, changed perhaps and saddened by her swift glance at life, but still her very own self.

"Come in," he says presently; "you must not remain here any longer."

"Well, now let me introduce you to Mr. Mildmay," returns she; and, slipping her hand into his, she conducts him across the lawn and through the tiny garden to where a glass door stands that gives access to Mr. Mildmay's study. Two stone steps load up to this door.

"Keep a little behind me," she whispers, with a pretty half-mischievous smile; and then, opening the glass door, she steps lightly into the room.

At her entrance a old man—as he appears to Dick—rises from his seat and advances to greet her, with the gentle smile of welcome upon his lips he always has for her.

"I have come to bring you such news—good news—really great news!" says Dolores, with charming excitement in voice and manner. She throws out her hands a little. "Dick has come," she says—"Dick!" She is evidently of the opinion that "Dick" is a person of world-wide renown. "He has found me out. He is here—see,"—as Bouverie comes slowly into view, smiling also. "This is Dick." It is with unconcealed pride she thus introduces him. "Come in, Dick; you may come quite in. Oh, dear, dear Mr. Mildmay, aren't you glad?" She throws her arms round Mr. Mildmay's neck as she says this and gives him a warm hug in her great joy.

"Some one from your old home? This is indeed a happy occasion," says Mr. Mildmay gently, though perhaps he does not look altogether so happy as he could wish. Is his little bird of passage to be so soon borne away from his glance as he turns it full on Bouverie. "I bid you welcome, sir, although our little friend"—patting her soft curls with a loving hand—"has omitted to tell me aught of you except your Christian name.

"My other name is Bouverie," says Dick with a courteous bow.

But the word has scarcely passed his lips when a change comes over Mr. Mildmay. He starts as if hurt, and a leaden hue covers his face. He tries to say something, but fails; and then all at once Dolores feels him grow heavy as he leans against her. He shudders, and, but that Bouverie catches him as he sways forward, would fall inertly to the ground.

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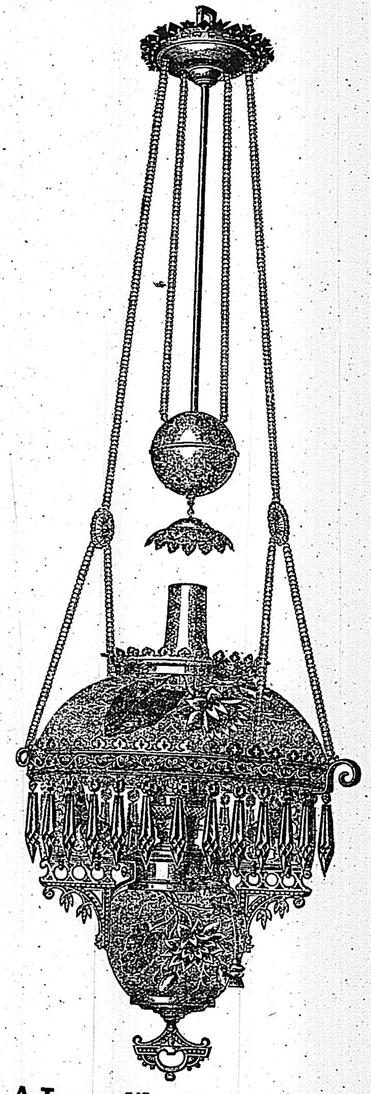

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SPECTACLES AT C

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