MARIGOLD

By the Author of

"JEWEL: SOWERS"

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A Story

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SCENE

LUCIFRAM: — *A World of Shadows and contrariness, situate near to Hell—not meant for an indifferent caricature of another sphere.*

PERSONS

ST ARMAND:—*The voice of one crying in the Spirits' Wilderness. When undisguised, Plucritus, Prince of Lucifram.*

VESTNE:—*His wife.*

MARIGOLD:—*Princess of Ellel (an estate in Lucifram). Subsisting of a "reasonable soul" and flesh to correspond.*

ALICE:—*A lady's maid who, amongst other things, had learnt the art of cooking.*

TIMOTHY:—*One, not by conversion of the godhead into flesh, but by taking of Childhood into God.*

ALPHONSO:—*High Priest of the Golden Serpent.*

VESTASIAN:—*The Supreme Disposer of Gifts to those on Lucifram.*

MR BARRINGCOURT:—*One of Vestasian's household.*

MARIGOLD

AN INTRODUCTION

THE PRINCE OF LUCIFRAM

NATURE, expressionless and even, had obeyed the even rule. Never richest curtain in the hall of richest king fell so softly, in such luxuriance, as this one of dusky night—glittering with diamonds, in the dull, blue flights of space. A million times and more the mute deft slave had drawn the heavy folds, clasped to her ankle-chains, across the spinning world. Tongueless, soulless, brainless, the machine of ordered motion—possessing no heart, knowing no pulse—the world's great mother—most infinitely small.

There over Lucifram, the night descended. The night-winds sang because the angel harps once rustled in the breeze—years since, no doubt. The sound remained, an echo, from which all joyousness had vanished—unutterably sad—and something sweet.

And each went his own way, now that the sober light of day had failed—tired or gay. For being contrary, a portion of them never really lived till the sun set, and then like moths at a candle—having some vague notion of the gloriousness of light.

There in his great palace, turreted, God-built (before the powers of Hell and Heaven had separated, to play the "Human" game on Lucifram), embowered in trees of Paradise, pearl-glistening fountains, the heaven-taught song of birds, and the deep rocks of Hell on the Planet side leading down by steepest paths to that "Silent Forest" with its gurgling streams of pain, and heavy foliage, and deadly paths, and unheard sighs, and the low quivering cry of the heart-broken—there in his dusky palace, glittering with light, subdued and softly shaded, lives the great Prince of Lucifram within easy reach of his little serfdom. You see that glistening sheen of mist, silver, and pearl? That is his web—he, the Great Spider—god-like. See how it wraps around the whole great planet!

Put your jewelled hand upon that flimsy net; how awkwardly it sticks to the gold intricacies! How awkwardly it sticks—like the blood on Bluebeard's key—flimsy as driven

snow and striking to the bone. Draw your hand away! Ah! laughing innocence, there is no terror—it has chilled and deadened—a powerful anæsthetic that makes you brave, even when it sticks—and it does stick so awkwardly.

He loves the night. 'Twas he who helped to plan it—before our worlds were made—the master-mind. The "Great Unknown" for certain unbelievers. Such a proud retreat, as only ostrich brain would share with them. Why the Great Unknown? To *know* it, must you feel it, handle it, decompose it—experiment with it? Oh, sad presumption!

There was once a little ant with a very clever brain (for its size), and one day it thought it would like to find out what a man was like—in what respect he differed from an ant. So it went out and crept on to one—quite an ordinary kind of man, with a skin. Experiment No. 1 must be with the mouthpiece, for it had no finer instrument. The man made a vigorous and violent search—his finger and thumb did the rest, for he resented vulgar intrusion.

Moral:—No, allow me, you are quite wrong—yet remain good-tempered. I was not measuring God's superiority by man's.

To return to the Prince Plucritus. He stood by that same window that commands the whole compass of Lucifram—no disfiguring telescope—nothing but beauty round about. And now that the mists of night have settled, and the web is floating like a veil in the light of the moon, steal up an inch or two with me and look. Will you, or won't you, Monsieur Scientist? Come along with Art, because at South Kensington they've linked you both together, like a household word. Hush! The forest is still! Never shudder at its depths! Hush! Hush! Break no twig, but come inside the magic circle, whoever will. See! the ring wheels round like that at Earl's Court, but with no sound of motion, nor lumbersome effect. Mists and miles are between you and that solitary figure, so there is no sacrilege in that you stare. Mists and miles and the moon! Well, and what is the great Prince like? "No different from a man," you say. No, no different—and you know why, because a man can't conceive anything with an intellect more beautiful than himself. It is one of his limitations—and there is wisdom and beauty in it; and Nature hasn't had a finger in it—only God. So draw a little closer—keep your feet well on the rim, and look through the mists and miles

and moonbeams. You see indistinctly? Here is my hand—*now* is the vision clearer?

Look on that perfect head and graceful figure. You perceive he stands full-length by the full-length window, looking on Lucifram with the expression that Lucifram itself has taught him —Serfdom containing possibilities. For those eyes—do you feel their fascination?—full of intellect, full of soul, full of power, and, far away back under the coldness that looks like softness to the inexperienced eye, full of cruelty, and deep-laid plots and plans — by which the master-game is played. Will you take more, or is thus much of the vision quite enough? A little more? Quick! Did you catch that little smile, the delicate contemptuous curve of that fine nostril — the straight commanding line of a strong nose? But is it *kind*? Still for the mouth. One forgives undoubtedly the man who has a sense of humour—the corners of whose mouth can twist a little humorously, just now and then. Look at this Prince of immortality. Do you not see the thin lips, formed like a fine-strung bow on arrow, twisted into a most interested smile? One shapely corner turning up—one, alas! turning down — a little awry, like the mouths of great men often are who copy him

—unconsciously, of course. For the pride of that downward droop loves not imitation, though the upward corner winks (if the mouth can wink) at the humour of it. There then, the Prince. And you turn away shivering, and blame the cold moon mists and the night-wafted winds. Blame nothing but that face. Look at it long enough, and you will harden into ice, frozen blood and stony flesh—a death-like monument.

The Prince stands full-length, and, though taller and slimmer than men are, he has shoulders that athletes might envy, and artists search in vain. Your women looking at them, however chaste and sober, however work-a-day, would suddenly grow weak, in admiration of so much strength, moulded in God-like beauty. True, he has walked on Lucifram stunted and dwarfed — a joke, a laughable affair—yet, when they saw him, woman-like they loved him all the more—they being contrary, and having the biggest share, the silent share, in the making of the world.

For his dress. To-night he wears the long black cloak — the robe invisible which spirits wear — fastened at either shoulder by three great glowing clasps of ruby-red that shine out danger-signals in the darkness, below the olive face and sculptured neck. And those strong hands, white

as marble, firm as death—instinct with the beauty of a great perfection; and then the ruby ring! The powerful talisman that kings and queens have cried for, statesmen too; and he, indulgent master, has given them a little sham affair, to stop their tears and make a seeming happy world, just for appearance' sake.

There is the picture of the great Prince Plucritus, standing at one of Hell's majestic windows — looking across the Silent Forest — looking on Lucifram. Sheer down below the awful rocks, grey and purple, with the Spirit paths—none other—by which they come and go.

Behind him home. Now, Mr Scientist, what shall it be? You wouldn't feel at home on a golden floor, would you?—A throne's a trivial, irksome thing. Harps?—Your ears were never exactly cultivated to appreciate a tune. Hallelujah?—Such conversation deadens the finer intellect, and reminds one rather of the braying of an ass—omitting fine distinctions, certainly.

No—at home the Prince Plucritus is a simple gentleman, with simple tastes and unchanged fashion. This suite of rooms he dedicates to Lucifram—not neglecting his estates. Here is his study—his own simple, homely room. That chair—he's sat in it over three thousand years —not bad for household furniture. And that

writing-desk was ready there to record in simple language the first effects of conscious sin. "How often used it must have been since then!" think you. Ah yes! and how well it's stood the test of time!

Out there is his experimenting chamber, for you must know he dabbles now and then in science, and he has friends who more than dabble in it. Out there his picture-galleries. All Lucifram's great works—toned to the understanding of the gods. The pictures bought with souls and heart-blood—no trivial affairs—each in itself a silent history — bearing alike the one inscription "Failure" or "Success" — judged from the understanding of the gods.

Through there his library—Lucifram's library, not his own. These being business quarters. So Publishers, beware! As you send out books, so they go up to Heaven—down to Hell, mean I—silently, without comment or criticism.

Over there his music-room—with every tune and song and great composer immortalised therein—and curious little histories attached to each, that Lucifram has never heard, and perhaps will never hear. And so all down the corridor and suite of rooms, with other chambers for every branch of work worthy being called such, and everything in god-like order.

AN INTERLUDE

WHEN God made man, we are next given to understand he paused and, seemingly, he thought. Up to then he somewhat rushed it—the Bible tells us so—and in the rapid race one thing had been forgotten — Woman. But the loving God never yet forgot a thing—even German thinkers tell us that—except the little blue-eyed flower, that gained thereby the loveliest name that coarser sentiment ignores for something showier.

No, last of all came woman — in orthodox religion, the Afterthought. And Adam most thoughtfully had chanced upon an extra rib—in the haste, no doubt, they hadn't counted them. So Adam slept, and woke to find the whole world altered. Thus gracefully, unwittingly, the world's great sage paid the unconscious compliment—erring too much on the other side. Man came from dust—woman from flesh and blood and actual bone, so says the Bible—high in the scale of general development. And for the privilege, the right of "entry," how dearly she has paid!

Man never knows—man perhaps will never know. For Eve was made whilst Adam slept. He should have been awake. Eve was born whilst Adam slept—then as now. And Eve brought Trouble—the rickety ladder before which Jacob's was a child's toy, and the ladder led to Heaven, and many and many a time it fell and led to Hell.

Eve, wide-eyed and untutored, except for certain instincts inherited from man. Eve knowing very little of herself except what man told her; and he—why, he slept whilst she was born—how should he know? And all the time has Eve looked up to man, and God has stood aside—the Afterthought.

And saddest thing of all perhaps—that now the men and women quarrel on equality—equality of sexes—showing how ineffectual is that common chord they miscall love. Think of that little vexing word that rankles in the minds of modern women—the word "Obey." Think of it. That the Church itself should be so blind as to set a man where God should be! The obedience of the Free Spirit is given to God and God alone—who dares say otherwise? And God's laws are so simple, kind, and full of love—a wiping-out of self, the training of a woman's heart, a mother's gentleness and strength. What more would man

have? Some courtesan—polished or otherwise—to trick him when she fawns? To cow him when her tongue is loose in ribald fury?

Let no woman speak then of the word "obey" insulting her. What if it does? The word "obey" goes deeper. It strikes at the authority of God, and has done all the ages down. And now "woman" rises and says, with a womanly desire to squabble with the man, "I'll obey man no longer—I'll obey myself." And God stands by—the Afterthought.

So much for Genesis and the Matrimonial Service.

Suppose you and I go our own way and "believe" to please ourselves.

Suppose we think Adam and Eve were two little monkeys—not big gorillas, they are so very, very plain.

Suppose—no; you are locked in, you *cannot* get away—suppose, suppose one day Eve felt weak and not at all well, and, instead of getting better, she went on day after day. Then Eve would learn what sadness was—a dull, unintelligible feeling to her, poor little animal—but still a real one. And Adam, being a good little husband as monkey husbands go, would feel in his little monkey heart that Eve was—well, he'd have to scratch his little monkey head because

he hadn't learnt to talk—not even to say that little tiny word called "sad."

Eve's suffering was the first tiny ray of light on the Dark Path—very tiny, no doubt, but with a tiny influence of refinement. Man's thumbs developed later.

Now listen! Hark! That is thunder cracking over the Silent Forest. See that forked lightning, like a sword flashed into the dense black night. What if a tree falls? Listen the poor cramped souls what they pray for—air—God's air and light.

Adam and Eve—or, ages long before them, great Darwin's monkey species — who dares presume to laugh? Adam and Eve hidden among the other animals like needles in a hay-stack—Adam and Eve meaning *man*.

Who made them? The God of beauty and love? Oh! tear away that veil and see things as they are. Watch animals — their jealousy, their greed—the way they prey on one another, the monotonous and soulless day. Many are beautiful, some most repulsive. Think seriously about them, and they make you sad—unutterably sad, like their own weird voices in that strange and universal minor key. You say it is because a curse has come upon them—that in the first place they were innocent and gentle too. If it

be so, what a disgraceful mull that God omnipotent has made of His creation—within so short a time everything tainted that once was good. Could God so err with more than *human* foolishness? Could God so err, and pander to the Devil, as, the good books say, unconsciously He has done? Oh, sacrilegious thought! Who made the world? The world of Living Things? Who made it? God, I will grant you — but *which* God? The God—Gods if you will—of Hell.

And Man—the Animal as other animals, lost like a needle in a haystack—ugly and soulless. The Animal with possibilities. Now look on Adam and on Eve, the first gleam of light gained by continuous suffering, not wounds in a free fight. And though Adam gained thus much from Eve, he never saw it, but treated her contemptuously—as through that very suffering and weakness his inferior. And that picture. Think of it, if you have any time for thought. The long, long ages back—the wild, illimitable forests, the jungles that obscured the pure blue sky, the savage, lustful sighs of the great lion, the whining growl of the sinuous tiger, the gliding, silent serpent, the animals innumerable, see how they come in phantom form before your eye. The wicked, impish monkey — most hideous

perhaps of all — the subtle master-jest of Hell. And by the side of it—hidden, almost heart-rendingly hidden—its savage, impish cousin Man —at present unknown—one among many animals. And look! One day, like Satan into Paradise, came Light—the Spirit of Light and Purity, with the magnet Heaven's greatest scientists had taken years to mould, made to attract the weak spot—in the Hell-entangled maze. And the weak spot was Eve, and, through Eve, Adam. And so Eve brought suffering in the world, the real suffering, and thereby incurred Hell's displeasure, and was thereby made the slave of man.

Read Genesis, that little chapter Topsy Turvy, it explains it all.

And what was Hell about to let the other spirits in? It had none of Heaven's "man-theorised" omnipotence. It stood to fight the even fight, by skill and skill alone.

So now you know a little about Eve. Has it tired you? Do you like her less because she once went about like a little monkey, instead of *à la* Milton—I mean a monkey moderate-sized, of course—but they're so ugly.

And the spirit has done the rest. The spirit that Professor Drummond, one of God's latter-day disciples, has learned plays such a great part in the world's sad history.

THE AFTERTHOUGHT

THAT was of Eve; now follow with your best apologies and look across the mists and moonbeams and behold a lady fair. For the Prince stood alone, looking on Lucifram with an expression hardly kind upon his face, when last you stood within the magic circle. And now you see behind him a lesser form though tall—a slightly different beauty. It is the Princess Vestné—bend your head—his wife. Not like him in sombre black, with the bright blood-stones as an only ornament—she stands there the personification of light. A diamond crescent of purest light, as far removed from earth gems as they are from glass, shines in her silken hair, that dusky rich shade, one of Heaven's own hues—Hell's too, for both in beauty are alike. Then for her face—you saw that of the Prince quite plainly—would you look on hers? See, that contemptuous smile of pride has deepened—you may not see so plain—for Heaven seems quite made up of the male persuasion, but that's

because the lovelier half—I mean the gentler, tenderer half—is hidden away from our coarse sight—rarest of rarest visions. Tender and gentle were the words, and yet, look through this gathering, deepening mist that blurs the picture. Your impression of that face? Oh, very cold and proud and cruel, a winsome grace, a silent fascination, that draws every chord of your spirit towards that princely watching-place.

What music fell upon the forest's silence! A laugh that the crawling spirits never heard—hidden under the thick-roofed foliage.

The Princess laughed, and went close up to him, slipping her hand in his, as loving as a child might be, as simple.

But oh! no, no, she *didn't* talk like Milton, because she wasn't dressed in stiff brocade, nor in the naked beauty of long curls.

No; the Princess talked (she was admirably well-bred) just as they talked on Lucifram, because she looked that way, and, as she spoke, she raised her hands and clasped them lazily behind her head.

"The net wants repairing," she said. "I stood here yesterday and looked at it—a beastly little fly has struggled through."

He laughed, as one just married yesterday instead of years past counting, and the humour

in his eyes dimmed for a little time their hardness.

"A butterfly, you mean. I watched the turn-out. It was a radiant one—worthy our—our nephew."

But she shook her head, and answered, with a touch of chilling hauteur:

"He's no relation. On Lucifram he would be called a natural son—or what's that other word? —a rather ugly one. They have so many ugly words, one really loses count of them."

He let the light question pass unanswered, but the smile died from his eyes and lips, and, in response to his changing humour, she changed too.

"I can't understand," she said, with a faint intonation of passion that reached you echoing on the trembling air,—"I cannot understand the fairness or the justness of it. He should be obliged to play upon our side or on the other."

"But he is neutral; equal for both sides upon occasion. It's fair enough. We have him to thank for the gentleness and amiability of the great High Priest, you know."

His tone was hard and mocking; her laugh, a subtler note, not less intense.

"Yes, he has been very docile." She leant out on the balcony, her white arms pressed against the blackness, her face bent towards Lucifram.

"He has been very docile, and he must mend the net. I cannot stand to see flies escaping. You must give him injunctions to tear off their legs and wings first. Why weren't they made like worms?"

"They are worms, dearest—with great capabilities of wriggling upwards now and then. Who but a worm would worship the Serpent?"

"Who indeed? Many a time I sicken of them—the uninteresting swarm! Oh, why did my brother—why did Vestasian play this trick on us, of all gods—he the most trusted in, the best beloved?"

"Precisely why the heavenly Councils hit on him. Now, had it been I——"

"You? But tell me of this net—how must it be mended?"

"Exactly as every other microscopic hole has been, with a damned soul—I mean a well-seasoned one. The worst of it is they take some time preparing."

"Are there none ready?"

"None for that particular hole. It was a rather big one, and will take something pretty strong, I find. A High Priest is the very least I could put to it—it befits his office. In time he shall guard the road to Heaven from all intruders."

"Just in the same way as a High Priest guards the other."

"No, Vestné. There are two put on to guard the other. It was admirably arranged there should be two."

"And they've done their business disgracefully."

"The clergy, with few exceptions, always do. I mean those we are obliged to put on to our business. They soap so, and insolently refuse to be too hard worked."

"Alphonso has not erred in that respect."

"No; he shall be honoured. He shall guard the gate."

"It is no gate. It is a paltry hole."

"Large enough for Vestasian's son to drive through—we must remember that."

"He is no son. Vestasian has no son. I doubt in harder moments if he has a wife."

But he laughed and drew her to him.

"My wife talks for the sake of talking, and I listen because her voice is sweet even in these harder moments. We will guard the hole—we cannot mend it. It is one of the rules of the game."

CHAPTER I

How the bright flowers were springing up after the rain, and how the birds were singing in the sunshine! The Princess of Ellel looked out of a window, and plucked some cherries off a tree and ate them with the appetite of youth. Then she drew in her head and made a wry face at her maid.

"What sickly fruit you grow here; it almost beats your champagne. There's no flavour about it—there's no flavour about anything at all."

"Madam!"

"I'm not. I won't be called names. I'm not married. I never intend to be."

"Marriage is a wonderful sweetener, lady. It takes all the unripeness off the tongue."

"I'll never marry, Alice."

"But why, Princess?"

"Because I'm too—too clever. Why do you smile?"

"I was thinking of the letters, and your royal spelling."

"I never went to a charity school, and the nation didn't pay for my education, therefore my education was neglected. Shall I tell you a secret, Alice?"

"Yes, Princess."

"I'm tired of being rich; I'm tired of being good. Well—why don't you say something?"

"I'm waiting for the secret."

"I've told you it. Why don't you say something?"

"I misunderstood."

"Oh, you uneducated charity girl! you Board-School paragon of perfect spelling! I'm tired of riches, I'm tired of virtues—can't you understand me?"

"Not at all."

"Then listen!" And she rested her rounded chin on a hand you longed to eat ice-cream out of—quite a shell-like miniature affair. "Here you see me dressed in gold and silver, and looking beautiful. Many a time you long to box my ears, but my position and my riches frighten you. Now, I'm going to dress in rags and leave all my money with the estate-agent. But I'm not going to tell him about the rags—I'm going to make out I've travelled back to Fairy Sky."

"Must I come with you, Princess?"

"Of course—but you'll remain a cypher in the background. You needn't dress in rags. You can have coarse fustian, it's more respectable and less becoming."

"I shall be able to look after you better, dressed so."

"I shan't need looking after. However wicked I am, I shall say my prayers night and morning. But I've fallen in love. After all, a man has a certain amount of interest for a woman—if she keeps him at the specimen stage."

Alice raised her hands and eyes in pious opposition—quite unfeigned.

"Alice, listen! I've fallen in love with the great High Priest. Fallen in love with him. I can feel the throb of the pulse in my heart and head now, whilst I speak."

"But—but Princess, he cannot marry. He is too high, too holy."

"Just why I've fallen in love with him. I like highness—I like holiness. You stick a pin in them, and it's wonderful how soon you find the under-surface jump."

"You would not prick the High Priest, Princess?"

"With a dummy pin, Alice. No one would object to a dummy pin, would they?"

"I never heard of one."

"What did they teach you at that big Board-School you say you one time went to?"

"They led us from the known to the Unknown, madam. I am ready to follow you."

"Well, I have fallen in love unfortunately with a man I cannot marry—and he's growing old!"

"The great High Priest?"

"Yes, the great High Priest. Has he not a noble face? Give me that red counterpane. See here, I'll act him for you. I've studied his face so often during the services, his figure too, and the exact way he walks."

"Excellent, my lady, excellent! Who could imagine five feet so like six? Where did you learn it? You had his very nose and mouth, and your eye, as you passed me, made me shiver, just like his has often done. Where did you learn that walk? The High Priest walks like one man in a hundred."

"Bless you, Alice, I learnt it looking at him in the Temple—when the prayers were dull. I haven't come under the Litany headings yet; I haven't need of any of the things they pray for."

"Can you seriously love a man, Princess, when you take him off like that?"

"Believe me it is the only true love. If I were married to a man, I should become his walking

image—that's why I prefer to remain single. He would abuse and neglect me more than his own shadow—and end by killing me."

"Killing you?"

"Of course. Wouldn't you kill your double if you had one?—I mean the one who doubled you every time you turned your back by way of recreation."

"For my peace of mind I'd never turn round to see."

"Not bad for the Board-School at all, Alice. Oh! I love the great High Priest; I simply, simply love him."

"At the Board-School they taught us a little self-control—to make us good citizens."

"Ah! what is self-control?"

"Holding down the boiler lid to keep the steam in."

"And who sits on the boiler lid?"

"Yourself."

"But the boiler will burst."

"Not if the fire is dead. You never sit on the boiler till the fire is out. It is rashness. If there is a fire you must have a safety-valve, and then you may sit on the lid again."

"I like the way they taught you, Alice. The great High Priest shall be my safety-valve, then I will sit on the lid and they will say the fire is out."

CHAPTER II

"ALICE, you are sure there are no mice in this little hovel?"

"There are no mice in the cottage, Princess, and cockroach powder has been laid night and morning for the last month in preparation for your coming."

"There's the bell for vespers. Quick! let me to the windows to see the priests' procession through the cloisters. Alice, you are an angel to have got us this place. I feel like a nun, living thus under the shadow of the Temple. Do these rags become me? Am I dirty enough?"

"I shame to look upon you, Princess, you have disguised yourself so utterly."

"No—no—look at my teeth. Are they not white as ever?"

"Against your dirty face I think they look still whiter."

"And my eyes—are they not still a vivid, verdant green?"

"They sparkle more in contrast to the dulness of your skin."

"And my hair—but it must be dyed. It must, or I shan't wash it for a year. My hair must be dark like my face, if I am to be a *proper* beggar girl."

"Touch your hair by so much as one thread, Princess, and I leave you here alone to the mice and cockroaches."

"Oh! Alice! the High Priest hasn't come. There's only two big Golden Ones. Oh! Look! Yes! There he is! Ah! my darling! Till I have kissed your lips the boiler lid is a dangerous position."

"Kissed his lips?"

"Of course! Why not? Isn't it legitimate to want to kiss the man you love?"

"Yes—but his lips look as hard as marble."

"All the more pleasure in softening them with a kiss. And if that won't do—put him in the boiler and boil him. Science explains exactly how he must be treated."

"Princess, he is holy. It shows a want of reverence to speak of him as you are speaking."

"Ought you to respect the man you love?"

"I know no other meaning for it."

"What a fat uninteresting Jonathan you'll marry, Alice—and what fat uninteresting children

yours will be. Now, to fall in love—down to the very apex of your heart, means having no respect for yourself, and less for the man in question. As soon as you begin to have respect, all love vanishes."

"Princess, you have had a better education than I—I cannot argue the point."

"What time are vespers over?"

"When the High Priest goes they are over in twenty minutes. He isn't fond of a drawling service."

"And he doesn't approve of anything nasal, I hear. On opinions of Service he and I are married already."

"You could never marry him, Princess. It's against the law."

"There are no laws. A strong man is a law unto himself."

"Heaven protect us during this mad whim of yours! Heaven protect us, I say! Remember we have not now the shelter of the Palace."

"But who dare come where there are cock-roaches—and at one time even—even mice," and she lifted up her dainty rags — for they were dainty — and shivered to her dainty finger-tips. "Where is my old straw hat? Find it me, quick. They'll be out before I'm ready."

"Ready for what?"

"Ready to go and look at him. Did you seriously think I meant to stay in this little cottage all the while? I want to go and stare at the big man just as a poor girl might, to see what it is like. Thanks. I never wore a twenty-guinea hat with half the pleasure as in this crack-brimmed sailor. Ugly! Ugly! Ugly isn't the word for me," and the door slammed to behind her, and Alice sat down by the fire with tears and laughter and no small amount of fear in her eyes.

"Ugly? No—ugly isn't the word. Why don't the women of fashion take a change and dress themselves in rags? But oh! Serpent, why was I put to look after her, when she even talks of boiling the great High Priest? Thank the Serpent's three tails I went to the Board-School and learnt self-control and morality, and—and—increased the taxes."

The Princess of Ellel once out of the shadow of the cottage, crossed the narrow street into the precincts of the Temple. The air was crisp, and the sun setting in accordance with the vesper hour; and she walked up the broad front steps with a heart that beat with much more anticipation than actual love. She had not been there long before the High Priest's carriage drew up in the spacious square below—and an extravagant

lamplighter began lighting the round-glassed street lamps. All this excited her curiosity, for she was young enough to notice everything, but her ears followed the rumbling of the organ inside, and by it she judged the progress of the Service. At last it was over, and the few people who had been in attendance came away. Then a pause followed, and at last the smaller door was again flung open, and this time the High Priest came out, followed by those personally attached to him. For a moment she was seized with such shyness that she stepped back quickly into the shadow, but this was momentary, and the reaction absolute.

"Sir! I beg a penny of you. Please a penny. My mother is dead, my father is drunk, my little sisters and brothers are dependent on me. Please give me a penny, sir; just a penny."

So she followed him down the many steps with frequent repetition, but he—being a great man—was eaten up with thought, and his Chaplain tried to rebuke her, but she paid no heed. At last, when the august foot was placed on the carriage step, Marigold could stand his absent mind no longer—her tiny fingers clutched at the long sleeve of his gown.

"If you have no copper, sir, give me silver; if no silver, gold. We are dying of hunger, and the

Serpent is kind to the poor who believe on him. Sir, if you have none other, give me gold."

Thus adjured, Alphonso stood and looked at her — the hard, disappointed eyes into the enigmatical eyes of youth.

"Gold!" replied he, with great displeasure and rebuke. "In rags, and asking gold! What is Lucifram coming to? Tell her, Eaglestone, she may come round to the Palace for a bread ticket," and he got inside.

"Young woman," said the Chaplain, not unkindly, "the side door of the Palace is open every day at noon that bread and soup may be distributed. Bring your children then—they will be well fed if they are hungry."

"But supper," she cried, tears rising in abundance; "we have no food, we have eaten nothing all day. We'll be dead to-morrow," and her pretty shoulders shook with the grim hardness of it.

"Eaglestone! I have a meeting at eight. No time for my dinner, absolutely no time. If you've promised her the ticket, come."

"My Lord, she says they've nothing in the house to-night."

"I don't approve of the colour of her hair—I——"

"Oh, sir, I don't approve of it myself. I hate

my hair, I always have done. Take it if you will, only—only give me something in return."

The High Priest's face relaxed almost to a smile—the suffering of beauty is not unpleasant, especially when beauty is in a reckless generous mood.

"Here! silly child, take this silver. It is against my rule to give beggars anything but bread. Get what you want, and thank the Serpent."

"Indeed I will, your holiness. Indeed I will. I will do both."

And laughing and smiling, holding the coins to her bosom—its loveliness the more revealed by rags—she watched them drive away.

And the High Priest leaned back and laughed, and rather wished the Chaplain were not present. For what had taken him back to over twenty years ago, he a younger man in the zenith of his power? Why, nothing that he could unravel; only, as they neared the Palace, he suddenly sat up, banging the light stick he walked with on the ground.

"Damn it!" said he, as when Mr Barringcourt's disciple, "where have I seen those eyes before?"

CHAPTER III

MARIGOLD flew home, up the respectable little alley, where their cottage was, with feelings altogether mixed.

She threw herself in the easy-chair that Alice had enjoyed so lately, and sighed and laughed in a breath.

"Oh, Alice! I don't like him! When you come near him, he is like a bit of stone—a bit of crumbly stone. I wouldn't mind if he were marble. I would throw my heart against him and it would break, and then the poets would club together and write nice things about me—and so I'd easily become immortal."

"I knew your royal highness would soon be cured of your infatuation."

"My—my what?"

"Your love."

She leant forward dreamily, and looked in the fire quite a long time, and you noticed the extreme delicacy and beauty of her face, and, above all, the sweetness and the merriness and

recklessness so finely blended—that, whilst you thought one was uppermost, you found the other laughing at you right ahead.

And at last, looking up at the more stolid woman, she said slowly:

"All the same, I cannot help myself. I shall behave exactly as if I were in love."

"The Serpent will certainly punish us for this, Princess. I feel somehow you're not behaving right."

"I'm playing a game. I feel like the queen on a chess-board. Somebody nips me up between their fingers and thumb, and then I'm off—all over the place, you know."

"Take care you don't get nipped off the board."

"Yes. For then the king would be left unprotected. And if—we—were—checkmate—I —wonder—— Oh, Alice! if—we—were—checkmate I should die."

"Princess, are you ill? You're not accustomed to wandering through the streets in rags. The High Priest or his servants have spoken roughly to you."

"Indeed, no. Not more than I deserved. But give me your hand, Alice. It is so strong, and big and unbeautiful except to such as me who have no strength. Alice—do you ever feel

you *have* to do a thing, and you hate it very much?"

"Yes; I hate this cottage business."

Marigold laughed.

"Ah! but I mean something unseen—something spiritual."

"No. I went to school when Materialism was at its height. We were taught to subdue the spirit and pay proper deference to the flesh."

"It would keep you from hysteria and hysterics, did it not?"

"Yes. For myself, I always consider the spirit more dangerous than the flesh."

"So do I. Now, I haven't much flesh, Alice. Look at me. I'm not big in any way—and I'm not heavy. But oh! Serpent of Lucifram! I am weighed down with spirit. I feel everything — from the sight of a cockroach up to the Silence in the Temple."

"It is a form of hysteria, madam. They taught us so at school. Make up your mind and you'll feel nothing."

But Marigold shook her head.

"I was born to feel, and I pray God the Serpent, that as soon as I cease to feel I may die."

"Then there is no hope for you, Princess. If you will pet yourself up to insist on feeling,

you will either die of a broken heart or become the—the—the——"

"The biggest actress under the sun."

"Heaven forbid! They are a bad lot — a shocking bad lot—and they have to act pretty strong things before people admit they're big at all."

"Well, if I were put to it, *I* could act something strong."

"Your character's gone as soon as you've acted it well—*really* well."

"I don't require a character. I don't make my own living. Respectability is no necessity to me."

"You'll need a character for Heaven, Princess."

"But that's just it, Alice. You know I think all the people on Lucifram were born to go to Hell. No—don't exclaim—I really mean it."

"My mother heard the angels sing before she died. I am certain she has gone to Heaven."

"What was the tune like?"

"Madam!"

"Your mother was unkind and selfish. Had I been dying and heard the angels sing, I should have come round again just to write out the score. It was the echo of an anthem at the Temple that she heard—no more."

"Now, Princess, *you* are the Materialist."

"I liked your mother, Alice. I don't think she went to Hell. I think she went — nowhere."

"She was a most religious woman."

"Most women are. It's born in them. But it won't get them to Heaven. It is the common form of hysteria — the big deception. Oh dear! the Shadow of the Temple affects even one's conversation. If I live here much longer I shall turn nun."

"That necessitates an orthodox religion."

"I *am* orthodox. I love the great High Priest."

"But you must love the Serpent."

"It isn't in the nature of a reasonable woman to love anything reasonably but a man."

"Then I hope the great High Priest, through the Holy Serpent, will teach you differently."

"When he sees me—as I really am—he will forget the Serpent for a time."

"Do you mean when he sees you as a Princess?"

"Oh no—my nose is just the same, beggar or Princess — so is the whole of me. I mean when he sees *me*—not the little nonentity in rags he saw this afternoon."

"How is he to see you?"

"I'm going there for a bread ticket to-morrow afternoon."

"Going with the beggars to the Palace?"

"Why not?"

"But you will not see the great High Priest."

"I shall see his Chaplain anyway. I liked his Chaplain. Coming down the steps he said to me: 'Go away, little girl, go away'—just as in the comic opera. But afterwards, when we stood by the carriage, he couldn't make out for the life of him what I was—girl or woman—neither could the bigger man."

"I also often wonder which you are."

"You must go on wondering, Alice, dear, and then some day you'll find out—and so will I. Perhaps the big man will tell us."

CHAPTER IV

WHEN Marigold awoke, it was not to the beauties of a palace grounds — nor yet to silence and privacy. She had slept long and peacefully in a bed as hard as it was clean, and the carpetless boards showed evidence of recent scrubbing. Neither cockroach nor mouse had disturbed her slumbers, and from below came the appetising smell of approaching breakfast. It was not the sunshine which awoke her — it was the matins bell of the Temple, and, unlike the clanking single bell of most churches, it was wondrously sweet—so sweet and pure that she stood by the tiny opened window a long time listening to it, and her light eyes were dark with untold thoughts.

The ragged costume arranged with a gleam of white arm here—and bosom there—she went downstairs, still laughing at the novel situation. The smudges on her cheeks could not hide the soft flush of health, nor the fair brow, nor the

delicate blue shadows round her eyes, not the outcome of sickness, but of that thoughtfulness which in the midst of merriment had often made her sad—the tiny shadows that enhanced her beauty, the nearest approach to womanhood she yet possessed.

After breakfast both she and Alice put on plain jackets and hats and went into the shady, silent grounds of the Temple. The roar of the city round about was not heard here. The birds twittered and quarrelled about the grand grey walls and lofty trees as importantly as if man were out of the consideration altogether. The grass was green, and smoothly kept; and over all there hung the spirit of a great refinement—the brooding master-spirit of the ages. The leafy courts were quite deserted —men were at work, women at home, children at school. From an open distant window came the clear voices of choir boys practising scales —just now higher and higher, then gradually down. A wondrous red creeper covered this southern wall like a heavy curtain, vying in colouring with that richer one that hung before the glittering God within.

"I think when you are poor you see things differently. This great building seems alive with majesty to-day. At other times I have

felt its beauty and a certain grandeur, but never as now after our simple cottage."

Just then, on passing through a ruined arch overgrown with ivy and red sprays of creepers, they came upon an artist sitting making sketches. He was a little man with white hair and intensely black eyes, and a crooked thin-lipped mouth, very humorous. His hands were long and claw-like and very white, full of an intellectual beauty. He was sitting on an old tree-stump, that had big gnarled roots sprouting away from it like coils of serpents. His whole appearance presented some subtle jest — to Marigold at least. She could have laughed—was laughing—when suddenly the cold blaze of those black eyes turned on her as he looked up for the moment from his work. The spirit died out of her laughter, though her lips still remained parted in a smile — a frozen, mirthless kind of thing to the observant eye; and suddenly she put her hand in Alice's — Alice, so big and broad and unbeautiful, brought up a Materialist, with vague ideas of Heaven for all that. And Alice, slow to feel, yet very motherly with all her limitations, pressed the soft white hand in hers, unconscious of the suddenly chilled blood running in her mistress's veins. Marigold hastened her steps with the

intention of passing him, but once having looked at her, he continued doing so, and he took no pains to hide that her evident embarrassment amused him.

"Good-morning, ladies," said he, and there was a certain richness in his voice that almost miraculously attracted one. "You have just succeeded in spoiling a very pretty picture."

What was there in his tone that set all Marigold's blood rebelling? She so free from vanity, yet till now so gaily beautiful—what childish, wrong desire perhaps, to throw away the stiff hat and formless jacket and clumsy clogs, and stamp her pretty feet and make the picture still more beautiful? Was it some subtle poison in the words, or something else? But now she reddened and suddenly pitied the poor who have no tricks of graceful dress to help them in their actions. And it was Alice, stolid and fairly insensible, who replied with sturdy nonchalance:

"I was just thinking the same of you, sir."

For one second the dark eyes rested on her, then back to Marigold, and, for all his movements were so rapid, there was a deliberation in them quite unaccountable, so that he seemed to have given Alice the coolest of long stares, and it affected the easiness of her tongue somewhat—a certain frozen feeling settled there.

With the same easy, graceful motion, almost like a serpent's movement, he bent forward, leaning his arms upon his knees, finger-tips lightly touching, looking still up at Marigold.

"It's strange that women, who were originally intended to be so beautiful, have such a knack of spoiling things. Is it not?" he said.

"I do not understand you, sir," and she walked on quicker past him, her head suddenly drawn up as by some invisible bearing rein—her hat, coat, and clogs taking on a dignity it had never been their province to wear before.

When they got to the corner, Alice, in curiosity, peeped discreetly round. There he sat in the distance, going on unconcernedly with his work, taking no further notice of them.

"It is all right, ma'am. He's forgotten all about us. Of all the eyes——"

"Be quiet, Alice! Not a word! Take me home —take me home quickly."

They were scarcely a hundred yards from where they lived, and Alice, well accustomed to the city, soon led her there. The door closed quietly upon them. Then the storm burst.

Marigold flung off her hat and jacket—the one in the fire, the other in the coal-bucket; the clumsy clogs followed suit — anywhere so they were off.

"I'll never go out like that again! Never, never! I'll be a beggar or I'll be a princess, but no respectable, thick-set, clumsy-looking charwoman. I looked a fright, a perfect fright—and —and—and he was laughing at us. He was laughing, Alice."

"Let him laugh," answered Alice sturdily, now that the eyes had gone recovering somewhat her customary sturdiness.

"No," retorted the Princess, clenching her white hands and knocking one lot of ivory knuckles on the table, "he had no business to laugh—no right to laugh. The get-up was absurd —a cat would have laughed at it."

"That's what I say. Let him laugh."

"That I, in my position, should have come to this—to be laughed at by a man!"

"Yes—Royalty escapes a lot that ordinary folk have to go through every day. It wasn't his laughing that I objected to—but his eyes. Did you notice them, Princess?"

"Don't call me Princess; haven't I told you not to?"

"His eyes were the softest and most beautiful I ever saw."

"Alice!"

"Yet for all that he made me feel cold. Perhaps it was damp under that arch. There's

been a lot of rain lately; I expect it was damp. Your hand was quite cold, Princess, when you took hold of mine."

Then suddenly Marigold stood quite still, and the restless air of violent temper suddenly left her. Her face was pale, and her eyes looked bigger than usual as she turned to her companion.

"Alice, if I get knocked off the chess-board, that man does it."

"What do you mean, Princess?"

"I instinctively disliked him when I saw him. You say the place was damp—where he was it was deathly cold. And yet — and yet — Alice, have you the sense to understand me?—had he been younger, less wizened-looking, I think he might have gained the kiss I've promised to the great High Priest."

Alice, usually so dense, simply nodded.

"His eyes made you feel like that—did they not?"

"No—I disliked his eyes. They were deep and dark and treacherous—no, no, not treacherous, but heartless and cold. It was his voice. It was the nearest approach to one I have always heard in my dreams. It was the kind of voice that could persuade you or compel you. If you closed your eyes it would be a pleasure to give way."

"He didn't ask anything of *us*."

"No; and whilst I have my eyes open he never will, the Serpent helping me. But clean rags and soft shoes for me in the future. I think the very —very devil got into those clogs—they were like millstones round my feet—a perfect nightmare. Tooth of the Serpent! what exquisite torture the poor must undergo!"

CHAPTER V

Now, the High Priest's Palace was situated about half a mile from the Temple, the grounds of the one meeting the other. The park surrounding the Palace was a very noble one, and spread far out into the suburbs at the back, whilst at the front it consisted chiefly of gardens and a fine avenue.

It was customary every day at noon for the poor of the city to come here for a meal, and by means of tickets to take away what was specified for those unable to attend themselves.

So it was that some time after eleven, dressed in becoming poverty, Marigold set out, taking no children certainly, nor yet an empty stomach, but a mischievous untrained heart, looking for fun and excitement.

The day was so beautiful, the breeze so fresh, that it brought more than the usual colour to her cheeks, and more than the usual light to her eyes; or perhaps the episode of the earlier morning still lingered in her mind, for why should Marigold so

often stop to frown, and then move on again laughing.

"Frightened of a man! and such a little wizened-looking thing," said she. "I believe he wasn't much bigger than myself. And his eyes were as expressionless as those of an ox, and his voice like an old tin kettle. It was seeing him so unexpectedly that frightened me, in that big gloomy archway with the red creepers."

She forgot that seeing him had made her laugh till the expressionless ox eyes turned on her. As she turned in one of the sidegates of the park, she met many poor and wretched-looking creatures going in the same direction as herself, and, seeing some of the coarser faces and the deep dirt that surrounded them, she began to wish she had never come, yet persevered from reasons unintelligible even to herself.

"Wealth isn't such a disagreeable thing after all," thought she. "I wonder, if I'd tried being agreeable to him from the Princess side of me, if it would have been easier. But a Princess must be so highly respectable, and a beggar needn't be."

At last, with many others in close proximity, she came at the large side door leading to the public dining-hall, and was allowed to pass in, for none were denied admittance.

Once in, she put a little butterfly handkerchief, that had mercifully been scented, up to her nose, for, though the large rooms were well ventilated, the very poor bring a somewhat different odour from the rich, and the smell of food mixed with strong breath was less than pleasant. Poor Marigold! had she been a simple romance-seeker she would have fled there and then, for this was grim reality; yet she never thought to turn back —not even when they set her down beside an old man who appeared to be suffering from a severe cold.

As for the food—that was naturally beyond her. Everything was orderly, yet here the art of politeness had certainly not been brought to a fine point.

One man helped himself to potatoes with his fork, then passed the dish to her, meat being already provided, so much on a plate. Thus the first course passed, untouched by Marigold, who every moment began to feel greater distaste and in an utterly false position.

The pudding was of plain boiled suet containing currants and raisins, and was very good, had its surroundings been more appetising—indeed, everything was good and suitable to the company eating it, but Marigold was not of the company.

Now, it was customary for the High Priest to

occasionally visit the dining-rooms during meal-times, and it chanced that to-day he paid one of his visits. He brought with him a guest—a friend who had lately come to stay with him, and, as it was not usual for the people to make any demonstration when the High Priest entered, Marigold was unconscious of his presence till they were almost opposite where she sat.

Then, looking across over the heads of those opposite, she saw both him and her acquaintance of the early morning—and the three pairs of eyes met instantaneously.

Now, on Lucifram there was not much diversity of tongues so far as foreign lands were concerned, because they had never exactly had a Tower of Babel, but there were two distinct languages spoken for all that—one by the rich, one by the poor. The High Priest and his friend were talking familiarly enough, but the wolfish eyes and empty stomachs didn't understand, didn't care, so long as their appetites were satisfied, which was really very sensible of them.

Now, for the second time that day was Marigold caught in a position altogether distasteful to her. Had her companions been clean and respectable, like the ideal charwoman she had set up for herself, she might not have cared at all. But alas! the poor of our imagination, and the poor

of reality, are so totally unalike! Many of the riff-raff were gathered here. Till now she had not understood the meaning of the word. But at least she herself was clean and beautiful—as beautiful as the atmosphere allowed, and no respectable ugliness hung about her hat. Those round her had not noticed her appearance—if asked, they would probably have preferred a little more dirt for actual beauty. Such is the strength of custom.

"There is a little girl I met last night," said the High Priest in a lower voice to his companion, presuming that Marigold, being poor, could not understand.

"Ah! and I met the same little girl this morning," replied the tin-voiced man in a peculiarly soft tone. "Only, poor women are like rich ones in the matter of dress—they like a frequent change. I only recognise her by her extremely colourless eyes."

"Last night she came and begged gold of me. I was astonished and displeased that any one so young could be so bold at begging."

Marigold sat and listened; it scarcely seemed to her they were speaking of herself—she heard as a rather interested third person might, with an occasional deeper prick.

She noticed a sudden interest come into the

other's eye — as again he looked across at her, his mouth smiling, his eyes not troubling to.

"Asked gold of you? Ah! I forgot. Your position makes it quite respectable for her to do so."

"Oh, quite. It was not on those grounds I objected. Though I believe she is not the one to have discriminated as to whom she asked. Any man catching her eye would have been met with the same request."

"I hardly agree with you—hardly agree with you. Why did she want gold?"

"The old tale—mother dead—father drunk—a large family."

"There are none here beside her to-day, I notice."

"Now you mention it, I notice also. Pierman, just step across to the young girl yonder with red hair, and tell her I wish to speak to her when the meal is over."

Marigold noticed the smile had travelled for a moment to the other's eyes—then, as if it never had been there, it vanished.

She received the message calmly—once in a day to have shown the white feather, or even a vestige of it, was quite enough for her. She laughed to herself, enjoying the situation — a

certain something running riot in her blood. She with such a saintly face—and prayers night and morning.

The High Priest had retired to the upper end of the hall; soon grace was said, and the satisfied crowd prepared to depart in order. Then Pierman, the attendant, came once more and conducted Marigold away from that part of the building altogether, through baize doors and long stone corridors, till the smell of dinner and diners had disappeared through open windows and doorways, and only what was spotlessly clean and beautiful met the eye and nose.

Then, when they came to the large library, Pierman withdrew. Marigold found herself in a vast chamber with wide open windows opening on grass-covered cloisters. Two secretaries sat writing at oaken tables, matching the panelled walls. Eaglestone was going over a list of engagements with his superior; the guest stood a little apart, a cigar between his teeth. The fragrance was particularly delicious, and she noticed the curious red glow at the end of the stump; also on his long white finger she noticed a blood-red ring. Again the persistent eyes sought hers, and this time Marigold drew up her head and looked back at him—and, because he smiled very pleasantly, she smiled too. Then,

and not till then, did he remove the cigar definitely from his mouth.

"You will object to this pernicious habit?"

"No—please don't. Remember I have been in the poor people's dining-hall, and it positively reeked of typhoid."

Her voice was low, but there was a sparkle in it. The curious eyes seemed to hold her like a doll in the centre of a target, yet Marigold stuck to her ground, and the good people would have thought the something running in her blood was very, very bad, and the bad people would have misunderstood it too.

"You must not let the High Priest hear you speak so. These dinners are his pet charity."

"Ah! and a very gracious charity too, sir," and she clasped her hands in a certain mocking humility and looked up at him. "We who are very poor, only know how gracious."

"You enjoyed the roast beef and suet pudding?"

"Indeed, I was very hungry. But the old man next to me would use his fork to the potatoes instead of a spoon, and the man with a wooden leg on the other side—oh! he was worse. He had a cold, and he has given it to me—I *feel* he has."

And Marigold sneezed from sheer naughtiness,

and everybody in the room looked up, and everybody smiled — and then the High Priest came forward with the stately walk that she could imitate so well.

"My child, I wish to speak to you," said he, and laid his hand solemnly upon her shoulder. This she had never been prepared for. In connection with herself she had always looked upon him as a man—and—and—here he was acting the priest. In her astonishment and silent laughter, she quite forgot to appreciate the condescension, yet with a miraculous suddenness liked him sincerely for his way of speaking.

Acting, which was no acting, came as usual to her assistance.

Never humblest, shyest beggar girl looked more sweet than she, as she glanced up at him.

"I've brought your holiness the change back out of six loaves of bread. The children thank you very much for them."

"I said you were to keep the change. Why have you not brought the children here to-day?"

"I thought only the grown-up people came to the dinner. I thought one had bread tickets for the children."

"Only the very young ones. Those over eight come here; they have a table to themselves."

"All mine are under eight."

"How many are there?"

"We have—six. Five with the baby."

"And you—how old are you?"

What indignities the poor must undergo!

"I—I really don't know how old I am. Mother lost the birth certificate, and father knows nothing at all—he never did."

Then the guest laughed, and the High Priest followed suit.

"You mean you don't intend to tell us?" said the former.

"I mean I really don't know."

"You are in an enviable position for a woman. Now, can you tell us your address?"

She looked at the High Priest. He was certainly easier to deal with than his companion, but he also seemed to expect this information.

"We live in a very poor part, your holiness. Father's drinking has brought us to it. We were quite respectable at one time."

"Still, I should like your address. I think if you were put under suitable care you would promise better things than a beggar girl. It is a disgrace you should be one." Here he glanced at the fine old clock between two windows, and continued more hurriedly: "Give me your address, and I will see what can be done for you."

Marigold went a trifle pale. Like most people who don't scheme deeply, and like some who do, her plans seemed just now rather shaky, but she answered at random, and recklessly: "3 Mouse Court, Midget Lane."

The High Priest was about to copy it, when his companion interrupted him by a laugh.

"There is no such lane or court in the city," said he. "The little girl has made a mistake."

And here Alphonso looked at her, and his face took on the hard look that was habitual to it, and with much excuse.

"You understand, of course, to whom you are speaking?"

Tears were in her eyes.

"Yes, indeed. I live No. 5 Friar's Court, just outside the Temple Close."

"Thank you!" Then he rang a bell, and she was dismissed.

CHAPTER VI

"ALICE! Alice! where are you? Come quickly."

And Alice appeared at the head of the narrow stairway and came accordingly.

"Alice! I am quite returned to my old way of feeling. I love him adoringly—all the better for that horrid feeling of coldness I had last night."

"Is it the High Priest you have seen?" Alice asked, with as much superstitious horror in her voice as is consistent with materialism.

"Of course. Did I not say I should see him? And oh! what I went through first! Rags and dirt and vulgarity and bad language—actual bad language though they spoke it low down. And soapy potatoes—at our table anyway. And—and—oh! Alice, what *do* you think?"

"I think nothing but ill-luck to us, Princess!"

"Don't be dull! Think! Whom do you think I saw there with *him*—with my star of Eden?"

"Indeed, no one short of the devil under the circumstances—and I speak with piety."

"Never heard of the devil. He isn't fashionable with educated classes — not on Lucifram. Now guess again!"

"His Chaplain?"

"No. *The man we saw this morning under the archway!*"

It is no exaggeration to say that Alice both started and turned pale. She put her hand up warningly.

"Remember what you said — about being knocked off the chess-board, Princess!"

"Oh! I've forgotten about that. He was quite fascinating. Not any more ill-mannered than he could possibly help being!"

"Did you speak to the High Priest?"

"Yes. I went into his own private rooms— just imagine it! The sensation was delicious. I don't suppose many women have often gone there, do you?"

"None except in a religious cause, I should think."

"Well, my cause wasn't religious. He sent one of the attendants to take me to him. And he put his hand on my shoulder ever so nicely. No, don't open your eyes. It was quite in accordance even with Board-School etiquette; there were four there besides himself and me."

"Did you curtsey to him?"

"No, I did better still. I looked as if I simply worshipped the ground he trod on. And I felt it too—really felt it."

"With other people present?"

"Of course. It would have been too dangerous otherwise. And then he asked me where all the children were."

"What children?"

"Oh! I said I was one of a large family, you know: drunken father—and six children—me the eldest—the next one about eight."

"They never believed that?"

"Of course they did. The only time men don't believe you is when you're speaking the truth—at least, taking them out of business hours. They're worse then; they won't even believe you then when you're telling lies."

"And that was all of your visit. You came away then?"

"No. He—he wants to reform me—make me give up begging. I think he thinks I would make a good nun. He says it is a disgrace anybody should be dressed in rags."

"He is an honourable gentleman. I always knew it. I wonder your royal highness does not shame to behave as you insist on doing?"

"There was never any shame attached to

royalty. It's a base feeling that belongs purely to the lower orders. If you are *really* royal you are born without shame, live without it — die without it. Don't speak to me about anything so plebeian again, Alice."

"Then you have promised to reform?" said Alice, much sat on, and but imperfectly understanding.

But Marigold's face beamed out once more all smiles and dimples.

"Oh no; he is too *clever* to believe in promises. He has asked for our address."

"Sakes alive! Sakes alive! Princess, we're done for. All the priests knowing where we live. And that white-haired man with the little body and big eyes. Oh! I daren't stay here any longer, I dare not really."

"Alice, you are a much braver woman than you take yourself to be. You will certainly stay."

"Not if he is coming."

"Which *he*?"

"The man we saw this morning."

"No one will ever think of coming except a very respectably dressed priest of the lower orders, or perhaps a sister from the convents. And they have most of them very sweet faces. I think I should like the sisters."

"They wouldn't like you, if they knew what you are about."

"But I should never tell them. All the same, I hope they don't come. Women won't laugh and be easy with you—not religious women. When the High Priest asked me my address, I was so afraid I told him wrong, and he would have believed me, only his friend laughed and said there was no such address in the town. Then he was very displeased with me. He spoke to me as if I were nothing but the poorest beggar, and he—oh! far above me; and then was when I loved him. I suppose it *must* be love, for I felt I should never leave him — till — till he knew I was a princess, even in my rags. He had no business to speak to me so, even if I had told him lies. I am too beautiful. I can speak his language better than he can speak himself—I wasn't made to be spoken to harshly, and I won't be."

"Did you tell him all that — and with the others present?"

"No. I looked as if I were very sorry for what I had done. I never bullied any one but you, Alice, even in my own Palace." And Alice looked as self-consciously proud as if she had been paid the greatest compliment.

"Now, bring me my lute, and I'll pass away

the time singing a song. But don't be very long over getting me some tea; remember I've had nothing since breakfast — nothing but disagreeableness, however hard I've tried to think it otherwise."

CHAPTER VII

THAT night it was as usual near to midnight when the High Priest finished his daily routine of work. Incessant meetings, incessant functions of some kind or other, kept him busy, month in, month out — and yet the hard lips never grumbled, never complained outwardly against this tread-mill of Fate. He had given a great deal for it—its greatest value being that other people thought it more than what it really was, to him at least.

So the big stable clock was striking twelve as the fine bay horses swung round to the Palace steps and the High Priest alighted. He passed at once to his own private rooms — brightly lighted, warm, luxurious—yet with the chill, silent shadow settling there—unperceived except in that occasional weariness that of late oppressed him oftentimes.

Supper was laid for two—a repast to please epicures. And waiting him was that guest of the morning — sitting comfortably beside the

blazing fire, with little curls of smoke, like little serpents, wreathing from his lips — the room filled with a delicious perfume passing even the finest aroma of cigars.

"Is it possible," said he languidly, "that you never get back here till this infernal hour?"

"Often it is later; I count myself fortunate to-night to be here as the clock strikes twelve. Have you been in long?"

"Just about twenty minutes. I took a stroll through the city. It hasn't altered much. That is its greatest charm. None of those absurd electric toys about yet?"

"Not yet, but there is talk of them. It's strange, but to-night I envy you that quiet walk through the streets, St Armand. How many years is it since I walked the streets alone? Never since I took up quarters here, I think."

"How many years is that?"

"Almost twenty-five. They were in favour of a young High Priest. I was, myself." (Here they both laughed.) "Now I think there is some wisdom in an older man. He has less years of——"

"Of celibacy."

"Oh no; not that. I never had any great

weakness for the society of women. He has less years of the very soul of vanity!"

"They say outside you are the most successful man they've had for ages. They call you great, learned, even *wise*—the last and greatest of distinctions!"

"Ah! yes—*they*—they chatter like magpies. It's a pleasure to them to hear themselves talk. In the day-time it pleases me, but at night we are different!"

"Still, with a chef like yours, and such cellars, you can afford to stand a little tedium outside."

"Of late my appetite has gone, and even wine has lost its flavour. I am becoming, I fancy, rather quickly either a dyspeptic or an aged man."

"Dreadful things those, Alphonso! You must cure them! 'Youth to the end!' One of the mottoes of the Gods! Badly carried out by mortals, but still—ah! of course I forgot you are mortal yourself. So am I—so am I; for the moment I forgot!"

The High Priest neither smiled nor commented; the pallor of extreme weariness was on his features—the weariness of work and years. So once more St Armand continued.

"I came back by Greensward Avenue to-night.

There's a building there rather took my fancy, though it was too dark to see it properly except with a pair of highly-polished glasses I possess. Black marble—red blinds—aggressively red, seeing I consider that colour my monopoly —the western windows brightly lit—the eastern ones dark."

Alphonso looked up at him across the polished silver vessels and costly china, and the expression on his face was more attentive.

"Marble house lit up in the western wing! It has been empty for years!"

"Indeed! how many would you say?"

"Nine, at the least. Let me see. Barringcourt went back to Fairy Sky just after my installation. Eloped with a girl who — why do you smile?"

"Nothing! Nothing, I assure you. The frivolity of an elopement, I suppose, in these days when women may be had so cheaply!"

"Be that as it may, he was the most fascinating companion I ever knew. I think if I ever came near to loving any one it was he. And yet we quarrelled, over a girl too."

"That is not uncommon."

"Indeed, it was more uncommon than you'd think. She had committed sacrilege, and should have suffered imprisonment for life. Had I had

my way, she should have been in prison yet. But he, for no reason, suddenly developed an interest in her, behaved like a fool on more than one occasion, and ended up by running off with her in the teeth of the law."

"Exactly as his parents did. It runs in the spirit—damn it! I mean the blood."

"You knew him?" asked the High Priest with surprised interest.

"Only by hearsay—purely by that. He was wealthy. That's enough, you know—Lucifram's a small place."

"Yes, he was wealthy. But his wealth was the least thing about him," and suddenly the High Priest stretched his arms out on the table.

"I don't know how it was, but, when he went, all my youth, all my real life, went. And others have remarked the same thing in themselves. With him there came a brilliancy. I felt when he was gone how much of it had all been borrowed. This perhaps sounds strange to you, a stranger to these parts. But he was young, easy, free, generous to a fault, or so it seemed till near the end. And now, when I look back, I wonder if it is not the dream of years since. For it seems often there was something dark in that visage—something hard

behind the merry laugh — something sinister under the fascinating smile—some fierce temper behind the contrary outbursts of youth."

The big black eyes were fixed on him, listening to every word.

"Then this man—Barringcourt—leaves other than pleasant recollections with you?"

"He leaves the memory of a time when life was life. That surely is bitter pleasantness enough. Perhaps that bitterness has now pervaded everything—moths and perpetual rust."

"Was he a believer in the Serpent?"

Alphonso smiled almost indulgently.

"He is the only unbeliever I would have spared the rack. I can almost excuse him, High Priest as I am, believing solely in himself. Yet he attended the Temple regularly, and gave large donations often privately. And he had the three sacred tails incrusted with jewels at his own expense. 'Twas marvellously beautifully done by some workers brought by him from Fairy Sky."

"And his character? Was that above reproach?"

"I never enquired into it; I fear I was busy with my own affairs just then. He never confessed to nor confided much in me. I believe it was the other way about."

"And after he left—who were the next tenants?"

"It remained empty three years. Then a foreign nobleman and his wife rented it. She died about nine years since, and he soon followed her. Unsatisfactory people, I believe. They worshipped some flimsy unseen fetish—nothing definite or concrete. But then Marble House is cursed, you know. It was built sacrilegiously—the strongest foundationed house in the city. No one has lived in it since."

"Has it stood empty since the foreigner's death?"

"Yes. There was some talk of pulling it down a little while since; the grounds were all overgrown, and no one could get entrance into the house. It was brought up before Parliament—to be turned into a museum; but a curt note arrived from Mr Barringcourt—I saw the handwriting, so can vouch that it was his—asking them to kindly leave his property alone till he was good enough to die. That shows he is still somewhere; though, so far as any one could make out, the note might have dropped from Heaven."

"What is the meaning of the lights to-night?"

"That is one of the mysteries. In the dark hours of early morning it is often lit up thus—

at least, the people say so. I have never seen it, nor have I believed the gossip till now you speak of it. All kinds of curious tales have been afloat of late. That Geoffrey Todbrook was seen looking out of an eastern window. That at midnight all the eastern windows are lit up with a weird dusky blue. That on stormy nights piercing shrieks and hollow moans are heard from the same quarter; and that one day a lad fond of adventures and climbing, scaled the high slippery garden wall, and was found lying, later on, on the pavement, in a pool of blood, his neck broken. Taken on the whole, such stories are not lively, their only redeeming feature being that they are false."

"You know them to be false?"

"All except the boy. But that was a natural accident."

"I see. You attach no importance then to my seeing the lights to-night?"

"It is the first time I have given the story any credence. I should not think you were troubled much with imagination?"

"No; I distinctly saw lights in the west part of the house. To-morrow I shall walk round again and enquire further."

"Twenty-five years ago! By now he will be

middle-aged—and I am growing old. I wonder if we should find one another greatly altered?"

St Armand leant forward smiling.

"Remember the Gods' motto — 'Eternal Youth.'"

CHAPTER VIII

NEXT morning at breakfast Marigold said to Alice:

"I did not sleep at all well last night; I heard a child coughing and then sobbing in the darkness. And when one ceased the other began —and I kept waiting and listening for the sounds, and at last I buried my head in the pillow and cried as well."

"In the dark, sounds like that are more distressing," said Alice sympathetically. "It's the woman next door—her child, I mean. She goes out washing and charring, and has to leave her little boy—he's a cripple, and consumptive."

"How did you find out?"

"Oh! she came in this morning early, and asked me would I go in and see to him once or twice in the day as he's had an extra bad night, and the neighbour on the other side is bad with rheumatics?"

"I wonder if she would mind me going to see him?"

"She wouldn't mind — but you are safest

here. They're saying now consumption's infectious."

"Sure sign that to-morrow they'll say it isn't. I should like to go. I wonder if they eat when they're consumptive?"

"A bit now and then."

"What have we in the house?"

"Cold chicken—a shoulder of lamb—pine-apple jelly, plum-cake—ras——"

"I wonder if he would like plum-cake?"

"More like the jelly for an invalid."

"But children are not like grown-up people, Alice. I love the plum-cake myself—that is why I never eat more than one slice. I am sure he would like the plum-cake."

"Well, there'd be no harm in trying him."

"Let me go and ask. He won't know one of us from the other."

"It's the infection I'm thinking of."

"I'm wearing my jewelled amulet. I'm going, so you needn't say another word about it. If ever I begin to ask you *should* I do a thing, you turn a regular tyrant. That's how it is I have become so despotic." So, when breakfast was over, Marigold set off with a slice of plum-cake on a fascinating china plate, that had a story on it almost as good as our own willow pattern.

She tapped gently on the door and then walked

in. The little kitchen within was tidy, though poverty-stricken. A round deal table, one or two straw-seated chairs, a deal dresser, a two-shelved plate-rail, a diminutive fireplace—little else except the occupant.

There he sat beside the fire, the coal-bucket near at hand, and he in the comfortless arm-chair without a cushion. Marigold looked at him with an interest even unusual in her.

He looked so young, and yet so death-like—so near the mysteries of age, and yet so far away. He might be anything from eight to ten, though he was altogether wasted and fragile. The bright brown eyes looked big and unnatural, the small mouth was drawn as if by constant pain, the waxen fingers twined and intertwined as, without speaking or moving, he sat and looked at her.

His little coat had been patched and repatched, and his slippers were a woman's worn-out pair—Marigold noticed it all with a big gulp in her throat. It was the first time she had come so near to the tragedy of youth and its simple silence. From her—at last—his eyes wandered to the plum-cake, then back to her and at last he smiled. But, when she saw the light come into his sad eyes and his pale lips part in the childish smile, then a big tear rolled out of both her eyes,

and she shut the door and ran across to him laughing.

"Oh! you naughty boy! Why didn't you smile before instead of frightening me so? See, here is a piece of plum-cake. Do you like it, or don't you—or would you rather have something else?"

A shy colour had mounted in his cheeks, and he leaned rather to the far arm of the chair.

"I like it. Thank you, ma'am."

"You mustn't call me ma'am. See, I'm in rags—all in rags—worse than you."

This time he turned a little more and looked at her—and then he turned his eyes on himself. And then, with a queer little smile, he looked up at her.

"Yes. I'm not in rags; I'm in patches."

And Marigold laughed, yet said to herself:

"Who *is* he like? I love him, I love him better than the great High Priest. He's more human, poor little fellow, although he's so near death—nearer my own age, too."

"That's what we'll call each other," she said aloud. "I'm Rags—you're Patches. Now Patches, does your mother allow you a whole slice of plum-cake, or have you only to have half?"

"The doctor said I might eat anything I liked, thank you."

"Fancy a doctor saying that! What a nice man he must be!"

"He's only come lately. The one I used to have got influenza in the winter, and has had to go away. He was a very nice man. He didn't charge mother much, and he often came to see me; but *this* one—the *new* one—he doesn't charge a penny. He told mother he was a quack—and that the quack was the poor woman's friend. And he found her work at a rich lady's house. And she gets real good food there—she didn't always at the other places. And sometimes they send something home for me." How earnestly and eagerly he talked, as if trying to get everything in before the long silence came.

"I'm not very fond of quacks," said Marigold seriously. "As a rule, they're ignorant, meddlesome men who know nothing—after the style of some dissenting clergy."

"You couldn't help liking him. He tells such lovely stories. And when the pain is bad he always takes your hand—and it all goes away. Only I never like to leave off his hand when once I've taken hold. I feel weaker than ever after."

"He wasn't with you last night."

"How do you know about last night?"

"I heard you coughing and—and——"

"Crying! I could not help it. I was very tired, and the pain wouldn't let me go to sleep whichever way I turned."

"Have you often bad nights like that?"

"No, I haven't had. But mother says father got pretty bad before the end. He was like me, you know. I'll eat the plum-cake now, if you don't mind."

"What are you fondest of? Do you like reading?"

"My eyes get tired soon. I like thinking best."

"What about?"

"Kings and queens and big soldiers. If I had lived I should have been a big soldier. When the soldiers went to the war, and the bugles sounded, I limped after them and got lost. It was very cold and snowy, and I was out all night till a policeman found me. That is how I began to be ill. And Dr Quack, when I told him, said it shows I was born to be a soldier. He says it's the next best thing to being killed in the war—because I'm going to die, you know, through following the soldiers. It's over two years since that they went

away. Dr Quack says they'll be coming back now soon."

"His real name isn't Dr Quack, is it?"

The boy nodded seriously.

"He said it was himself. He told my mother—and he never smiled once, so I know he spoke the truth. Mother doesn't like him half so much as I do, because he likes the windows open and she doesn't. And mother says he isn't easy to talk to. But I think he is. She says father was a very comfortable man, and had some consideration for her feelings—about the draughts, you know."

"I don't think draughts are pleasant things myself," said Marigold. "You don't want draughts, you want fresh air."

"Yes," said the boy, looking up at her eagerly and feverishly, "I know. And he says that soon he is coming to take me away to a place where the air is beautiful and all the houses big and fine. And I shall have a sword and learn the proper way of fighting like a man. But if he isn't quick I'm afraid it'll be too late. It was Monday morning he told me of it all, and I felt that I was getting better. And then last night I was all alone in the dark and nothing seemed true, and I kept calling out for him to come—'Dr Quack!'

because he had said he would come when the night was darkest. And it was very, very dark, and yet he never came at all."

"Perhaps he didn't know you were so bad. You'll have to tell him when he comes again."

"Yes. Do you live next door?"

"Yes, we have a little cottage just like yours."

"Who else lives there?"

"My—my aunt."

"Is she good to you?"

"Very."

"Who is it that sings, and laughs, and makes all the noise—thumps up the stairs, I mean, and thumps down them?"

"Well, I expect that's a mixture. Part me and part my—my aunt."

"You do the singing and laughing, don't you?"

"Yes."

"I like to hear you laughing—then I laugh too. But I love best to hear you sing. That's the way my queens sing when I'm thinking. Only they don't laugh so much. You see the kings are off at the battles fighting, so they wouldn't feel inclined."

"No, of course not. But do you really think that I could sing like a queen? Remember, Patches, I'm nothing—only Rags."

"I mean their voices are very sweet like yours. Of course they're not like you in looks. They're all tall and beautiful."

"And what am I?"

"I don't know," he said, looking at her in a puzzled way. "I'll explain you to Dr Quack, perhaps he'll know. Anyway, you're little to start with, and you're very ragged. But—but," with sudden impulsiveness, "I like you. I think you have a lovely face. When you looked through the door I didn't think you were real at first. And I never knew you were in rags till you told me so."

"When my aunt thumps up the stairs, does it annoy you?"

"No. It's company. I like to imagine what she's going up for. She goes up so often."

"It's bad management on her part, I suppose, but I never interfere with her. She will be coming in to see you some time to-day. She makes the most lovely jelly. Do you like jelly?"

"Yes. I like everything."

"You haven't eaten all your cake."

"No; I'm keeping part for mother. Please don't be angry. I can't eat much at a time, and there isn't much I can keep for her, and she often keeps things for me. Let's put a saucer over it.

She'll be *so* surprised, and I'll make her guess who gave it me." So saying, he wriggled down out of his chair—one leg being withered and short, as Marigold had noticed as he sat—and, with various contortions and a rough-made crutch, he sidled toward a cupboard for a saucer. He came back to his chair very exhausted, yet with a shy, sensitive expression on his face, and he turned half away from her as he spoke, and he said:

"Dr Quack says he's seen many a big soldier after a battle-field with less of a leg than I. Bullets, you know" (he had turned round to her); "and you never know your legs are off till after — and then! oh my! it hurts you fearful."

"It must do," said Marigold sympathetically.

He sat down, with an air of weariness suddenly overcoming the second's animation. He closed his eyes and leant his dark head against the shabby cushion, and all the tenderness in Marigold's heart made itself felt in the gentle hand with which she took his hot one.

"I'll sing you a song," said she softly, "and you shall go to sleep. You'll feel better after you've slept a while."

So then, sitting beside him on the stool beside the fire, she sang a gentle lullaby they sang the babies far away in Fairy Sky.

"The drowsy flower-bells nod and sleep,
The sun has gone to his cradle,
The tiny stars all drowsily peep
At the moon now creeping over the deep
As fast as she is able.
The little green men come out of the woods,
The pink men slide from the clover,
And all the elves in little blue hoods
Patter along as the moon now floods
The land all over and over.
The sun is down, and the moon is up,
And all the world is sleeping;
The fairies drink from a golden cup,
And sing sweet songs as they daintily sup
In the moon's all-powerful keeping.
And you, my flower-bud, while they sing,
Nestle against my bosom,
Sleep! and smile through the magic ring
That the fairies every evening fling
O'er my love, my sweet home blossom."

So Marigold's sweet voice went softly up and down the old-world monotone, and she sang of the little men as feelingly as if she knew them all by name and loved them. And when she had finished, he said:

"Sing it again—just as slow—I'm sleepy."

So she sang it again, and before it was finished he was asleep. And Marigold sat for a little while all by herself and cried very silently. Then, hearing Alice's homely foot upon the stairs next door, she got up quietly and went out, closing the door very softly, to caution her against letting the world in general know how heavy she was.

And Alice saw the tears, though she wasn't supposed to, and she felt thankful—because she believed that with women tears are the best safety-valve for the position on the boiler lid.

CHAPTER IX

AMONGST the High Priest's many estimable qualities was this, that he got up moderately early—not officiously so. And having got up, he gave an hour to light reading or recreation of a simple character. Here the clever men as a rule leave recreation till the last thing at night—that is how it is they are often so evil-tempered first thing in the morning. Now St Armand knew this, so half-past seven saw him wandering through the cloisters. He had not slept well—in fact, he hadn't slept at all—yet he looked none the worse for it. Had you been out in the silent streets in the dark hours of early morning, you might have seen him once more strolling down Greensward Avenue. You might have seen him, as a boy might, scaling the high wall of the near garden, surveying the country beyond. And despite his white hair and dignified appearance of age, with what a neat jump he again reached the pavement. Twenty feet! and as gracefully as one of the gods descending the steep rocks of Olympus. And with what

wonderful gift of second sight must he have been possessed, for suddenly you saw him stoop—the wrinkled smile on his lips and at the corners of his eyes deepening. He touched a certain spot of the ground with the toe of his boot.

"Here's where the little ragged rascal fell and broke his neck. Impudence, I suppose—looking into a garden of the gods. Poor little Humpty-Dumpty! How his mother screamed, I make no doubt, when they took the news to her, and ran out into the streets regardless of appearance. What a merciful dispensation it was that created women with a great capacity for making scenes!" Then he went on, the episode forgotten, and turned now toward Friar's Court. All the blinds of the cottages were drawn—all lights out, the owners fast asleep. Except at one window, where a dim light burned behind the curtain.

"The beggar girl," said he, and scaled the wall again, no leave asked. But he found only a consumptive child, just now sleeping restlessly—a tallow candle in a bottle keeping guard. Yet the windows were so near that it was but the work of a moment from one window to the next. The blind was down, but this was no hindrance; the window open just a little way.

"Bad practice this," said he, smiling; "they die just the same when the time comes, open or not."

And he slipped in easily, with no humiliating contortions of the body, but a grace that never left him, creeping through holes or scaling precipices.

And Marigold lay fast asleep, contentment and healthy comfort on every limb and feature. How different from the little wasted form beyond the wall!

"A very pretty girl with a decided power of acting, if I judge rightly, and not exactly a beggar except in Alphonso's eyes. What inhuman things these priests become! That he should let her come away so coldly yesterday, and never a word about her since. But all last night harping on Barringcourt, who surely set him the best example so far as women are concerned."

He stayed for little more, for now the dawn was breaking on the Temple's roof. And next you see him in the Palace cloisters, next in the sweet-scented rose garden, the sun risen and shining down upon his shabby morning-coat. Soon he espied the High Priest sitting under a broad chestnut tree—preoccupied with nothing but his thoughts; and towards him with no great haste—if anything, more slowly—he bent his steps.

"After all, Alphonso, there is much in life to be thankful for. This garden, this fresh morning

air—the flowers and birds—they make a charming paradise."

He noticed as he spoke, for little escaped him, that the night's rest had brought little return of health to his host's face. He looked unusually spiritless. Yet, as one taught to respond unconsciously to the world's salutations, he smiled as he answered:

"A charming paradise! Yes, a charming paradise! Yet the morning air, the flowers and birds can pall on one. I've heard them in this same garden twenty-five years. Before that in other gardens forty years. The birds sing all alike. Even the larks become monotonous."

"Have you slept well?"

"Excellently—with a touch of nightmare."

"An interesting nightmare?"

"One respecting my age, St Armand. There are some men who grow old and childish, imbecile. The world laughs and suffers them. There are some men grow old in heart—the head left unaffected. With them all feelings, all desires, all passions die long before the body. I spoke of it last night. I am one of those few men wearied of life. No passing weariness. The chilliness has entered to my heart. I have asked what the world could give—and it has given freely, generously. Now, still young, comparatively

young, a sudden languor has caught me under this outward shell of routine; it saps my energy, my spirits—turns the gay brightness of this sky to greyness, makes every golden hue the veriest dross. It is not discontent—it is that I have *lived*, and left the power of feeling far behind me."

"Was that your nightmare?"

"No! That is my life — nightmare enough when one has realised it. My dream was this; I tell it for the humour it contains. Last night I saw two portraits, one myself—lifeless, shadowy, frozen ice where blood should flow, incapable of motion—and underneath, these words in plainest lettering, 'Aged 65.' And the other was that of Barringcourt, and there came the rub. He was as I last saw him twenty-five years ago—if anything, more full of life. At that age when all the graces of youth meet the more lasting ones, and neither are obscured. The blood ran in his veins, sparkling like that ruby ring upon your finger. He had power to feel, to enjoy, to fight and battle life for the pure pleasure, as it were just beginning — whilst I—— And underneath in plainest lettering, the words 'not registered.' A feeling of envy like the stab of a knife ran through my icy veins, pricking like crystal needles. The only life I felt was pain—pain of

the lower order. And with it I awoke suddenly, feeling a presence in the vast empty room. But there was nothing. The grey, uninteresting dawn was struggling through the blinds—the deadening treadmill starting once again." He paused, and a silence followed. What matter if the birds sing and the sun shines to the frozen-hearted?

At last St Armand spoke in a low, musical, sympathetic voice.

"You've lived too hard, too strenuously." His mocking eyes were fixed upon the ground, his tongue lied gracefully. "To remain young you need light recreation. I scarcely wonder if your dream of Barringcourt is true. He essentially took life easy if all the tales one hears of him are true. Did not shut himself up in a monastery, lived for himself as well as others, was never the slave of appointments and meetings and ranting faddists, combined business and pleasure to an exact degree."

How truly he spoke, how very truly, and only once at the end did the big black eyes turn on his listener—then, for the moment only. What a subtle, persuasive note ran in the simple words spoken so quietly.

"You are right. He did all this, and made a toil of nothing. But he had wealth and no ambition." (A smile flickered on St Armand's

lips.) "Life brought him all he wanted easily. With me it was one long struggle—and always has been—a long successful struggle."

"And what were your ambitions, may I ask?—if the question is not impertinent."

"To be what I am. The head of our Church—with power, and a name known throughout the nation. The power is mine. Our Church is in better order than for centuries—idle priests are at a discount. We are making converts in all lands, and wealth pours in upon us from all sides. All this is something. It was something, at least, till the greater something came and robbed me of my power to appreciate it."

"You are suffering from overwork; I should advise a holiday. It will bring back all the old zest of living, and renewed energy."

But the High Priest shook his head.

"I have less heart for a holiday than my work. Holidays belong essentially to youth—to build light castles in the air. Believe me, the little holidays I enjoy are these chats in leisure moments, held with you."

But St Armand shook his head, though he smiled.

"I am much older than you. Next year I celebrate my eightieth birthday. Yet I have zest and life enough, I think, even to tire out

some of the young. Believe me, you're moping; your illness is more of the spirit than the flesh. You're jaded, overworked, run down."

"If I admit it, what's the cure?"

St Armand leaned forward, his finger-tips touching, the sun shining on his white hair and noble head.

"Recreation, physical exercise. You Priests imbibe too much spirit. It isn't good for you in too large quantities. Animals can't stand it." His tone was serious, even earnest, so that the High Priest, somewhat dumfounded, sat still.

"Spirit and body together are all right, but they must be exactly balanced. Let one slide down the scale ever so little, and the havoc begins. Now, it seems to me, in your life especially the body has been left out of account altogether. You have been brought up in an atmosphere so spiritual, that it has become unhealthy."

"If you mean I have given my life to the Serpent, you are right; but I have not felt the fleshly sacrifice such a great strain upon me."

"No, I hardly thought you would. It has been comparatively easy for you to sacrifice to your god. It is for all great men, else there would never be any. But tell me this, Alphonso —and I ask it as a friend, with no idle prying into your private life—has it ever struck you

lately in these hours of depression that come upon you, that there has always been one icy gap in your life that has tainted all the rest, and changed it into what it is ? "

"There is in every man's who feels as I feel. I may have felt the gap. It is not so easy to account for it."

"Supposing that cold place had been warmed by a wife you loved, and children, the evil might never have spread."

The High Priest shrugged his shoulders.

"I weighed all that when I stood for the Priestship. I had weighed it all before. I never met a woman for whom I entertained any serious affection."

"And now you are too old."

"Now it is against the Law of the Temple."

"For a wife, yes. I shouldn't advise a wife at your age."

"St Armand! You forget my position."

"It is too spiritual — and, on the other hand, you take me to be too fleshly. There is no law forbidding you to make a friend of a woman."

"The situation would be compromising. I am not a great advocate of the Platonic friendship. Besides, where is the intellectual woman I am to treat as a friend? She would bore me with her

pedantry in five minutes. That cure is out of it altogether."

"You don't need an intellectual woman. For intellect go to the men. You want a woman to amuse you."

"Were my blood not so cold that would sound dangerous. I am afraid the situation would be compromising."

"You wish to remain young? To keep the old zest of life? How has Barringcourt done it?"

"I don't know that he has, except in my dream."

"I think somehow you will find it true."

"Then he has done it by never caring, never worrying, never drudging, as I have had to do."

"And women? Surely you will allow them some little share in this successful living?"

"He was even less fond of women than I."

"Ah yes—'women.' I never advocate women to any man. You want some one to amuse you. Make a study of a life entirely unlike your own—the simpler the life, the more innocent, the better. You say women have never interested you—but here and there, just where you wouldn't expect it, there are very interesting specimens of womankind. Your age and position are safeguards sufficient against any deeper feeling. Or, did you ever feel it, you are strong enough to resist temptation."

Thus he spoke, plausibly and hollow—the High Priest, with half-closed eyes, listening the persuasive voice. How easy it all sounded! What would he not give to get back his old powers! How sympathetic St Armand was! And he so old — must from experience surely speak the truth, for his preservation and love of life were wonderful and quite intact.

"Your proposition is certainly novel—to one of my life at least. I am thinking of the families round—the lady who has most tastes in common with myself."

St Armand noticed his mind was not exactly travelling where he wished it, but was too wise to speak. But he said, speaking softly, the tone in his voice almost a command:

"She must be young."

"Impossible. The younger generation are frightened of me. They speak to me in monosyllables only."

"For all that, she must be young. You will understand some day what I mean, Alphonso. A young woman is the most wonderful preservative of life a man can have. Do not misunderstand me. The relationship need not be a very near one; the majority of men are kept young by their own children—you have none."

Then suddenly Alphonso got up.

"I must be going. I will see you again at breakfast. Thank you for your sympathy and well-meant advice."

He moved away with his customary stately tread, and St Armand looked after him.

"Truly I am taking Mr Barringcourt's place," said he, "and turning Father Confessor to the great High Priest. So he is going to begin to look out for some one in his own position, for a woman friend. Some stout dowager-duchess or philanthropic princess—highly respectable, that all the world will approve. Well, the dowager-duchesses and the princesses might amuse *me*, but I'm afraid he'll hardly find them funny enough—too like himself, inclined to be pompous. However, I must keep to the principle of 'Suggestion' with him—keep him from seeing what he is running his head into—the girl too."

And the High Priest went away to matins, and thought calmly and seriously about the friendship with a woman—innocently too, with the marvellous self-confidence in temptation of some of the spiritually great. After all, women were sympathetic and kindly — there was something in the plan, but then he didn't understand the plan, he only felt it.

CHAPTER X

It was breakfast-time, and Alice said to Marigold:

"Will you be going to see the little cripple to-day, Princess?"

"Of course. I want to see what he thought of you and the jelly. He told me I had a lovely face. I like little boys so much better than full-grown men. They always look as if they meant exactly what they say."

"I notice, Princess, that anything in the line of a compliment always pleases you."

"Of course, Alice, you spiteful bitter-sweet! Especially when the compliment hits so near the truth. I'm sure he would have made a fine soldier had he lived and not been crippled. It takes a brave man to tell you in simple, straightforward language that you're beautiful. Good-bye, dear, and cook a nice dinner, for perhaps I'll ask him in."

So Marigold ran away into the next house, and a sunbeam got entangled in her hair and

couldn't get out again, so played about there all the morning.

"Patches, I've come to see you. I've brought a few grapes this time to pay my entrance fee."

She noticed the spiritless, sad little face light up as she entered, and the quick, delicate colour mount to his cheeks.

"Mother liked the plum-cake very much, thank you, and she guessed Dr Quack and the district visitor. But—but I'd rather you didn't bring the cake and things. I haven't anything to give you back, neither has mother. If you would come now and again just to—to—to sing, I would like it best of anything."

Marigold sat down and laid her soft cheek against his hand as it lay on the chair-arm.

"I'll come sometimes without bringing anything, Patches; but when we have them, I might as well bring them. Grapes will be good for you, dear."

"Your hair is just like one of my queens—the sunbeams are playing about all over it"—and Marigold felt the other hand steal gently across and touch her hair very softly, and she thanked the Serpent that she had been made so beautiful to give pleasure to this one little cripple child.

"How did you like my aunt?" she asked aloud.

"Very much, thank you. She is so strong and kind. She carried me to bed quite easily, and mother said it was wonderful the way she did."

"Did Dr Quack come yesterday?"

"N—no." And suddenly Marigold felt something drop into her hair, but was too tactful to look up, and a tear gathered in her own eyes. "He hasn't been for three days now. I expect he's got tired of it. I've been frightened all along he would. If I had both legs and was strong, it would be different."

And suddenly a pair of tender arms were holding the wasted body very tight.

"Don't talk like that, Patches; it isn't kind. If he's a good man, he would never get tired of coming to see you when you're ill. But anyway, I'll always come. Perhaps if I sing, it will be the next best thing, won't it?"

"Yes, it's very kind of you. But you won't ever get tired, will you—not till I die?" and the little thin hands caught hold of hers with a terrible weakness and fear, and the big black eyes looked into her sad ones.

"No, I won't leave you," she said, a sudden unaccountable passion trembling in her

voice, "not—not till you *live*. I won't talk of death—I don't understand it."

"Don't you? But I do. It comes like a great suffocating wave and presses against your chest and face, and your arms and legs get weak and cold, and your brain keeps going round in weak whirls so that you can't think or see properly, and the pain goes the same way. That's how I was the night before last once, and that's how I was once before, and poor mother was so tired she slept through all the coughing, though her door was open that leads in to me. And oh!" he continued in a whisper, "it isn't mother I want at times like that, she's too weak and tired and her arms are so thin. I want—I want Dr Quack—I'm frightened all alone—I don't know how it is, but I'm frightened."

And he turned away from her to the other arm of the chair, and gave way to a violent fit of crying.

Then Marigold pulled herself together with inward reproaches and some alarm. What had she been about to allow him to get into this state?

"Patches!" said she, with fear and entreaty in her voice, "Patches! *don't* cry, please don't —I can't bear to see you cry. See! Look!

I've brought my tambourine — I'm going to dance for you, a dance I learnt far away, in a land where people never die till they get grumpy and old and disagreeable."

And as she rattled the bells, taking it from the case, he looked up, and by degrees his sobs subsided.

Then Marigold pushed the table and everything else as far back as possible, and arranged his chair in the best position for him to see, and executed one of the prettiest step-dances imaginable, singing lightly all the time. And how quickly he forgot his tears in watching her! And when it was over, and she sank laughing breathlessly into a chair, a charming heap of rags and golden curls, how he clapped and banged with his little crutch, so that Alice, basting the chicken next door, smiled and was well satisfied, feeling the High Priest quite forgotten.

"Oh! I would like that again! I would like that again!" said he. "It was beautiful."

"I know some that would please you still better, only you have to be dressed in yards and yards of silk for them—rags won't do."

"I like the rags best, then I can see your feet too. How is it you are so beautiful? No one else along the row is."

His eyes were sparkling, and he leant forward

in his chair as he asked the question, expecting her to give him some solution to the puzzle. But before she had time to answer—if, indeed, she could have done—the latch was again lifted and the door opened quickly.

Marigold, still panting, looked across, startled, and an electric silence settled on the room, as the stranger looked in surprise from one to the other. Personal descriptions are somewhat tedious, you have been introduced to Mr Barringcourt before. And not only surprise, but some displeasure, came into his face. Both of the inmates noticed it, and it brought a restraint into the room that was entirely foreign to it five minutes since. But for all that, he said easily enough:

"Good-morning, Tim! You've made new friends, I see," and his voice was pleasant.

"Jealous," said Marigold to herself wisely; whilst Tim answered shyly, looking at her appealingly the while:

"Yes, sir—it's Miss—Miss Rags."

Marigold by this time was standing, her hands folded in front of her, in the delightfully innocent position that so perfectly suited her.

"And he says you're Dr Quack, and I've christened him Patches, to make us a trio," and she looked up at him roguishly, innocence and fun shining in her eyes.

But the stranger was not melted by her manner, and did not even take the trouble to smile in reply. He began setting the room to rights, and at the end said to her:

"Before you begin those antics again, you'd best sweep the floor well. This kitchen's full of dust and stew."

Marigold made ready to answer, but he had turned away from her, and was sitting on the table before the fire, his back turned in her direction.

Was ever anything more rude, more pointed? Tears of anger were in her eyes, yet she opened the door quietly and slipped out home, closing it as quietly behind her.

"Where does she come from, Tim?" asked Mr Barringcourt, nodding his head in that direction when she had passed the window.

"Next door," he answered, still shyly. Somehow he felt childishly and unaccountably that he had not been as faithful to this oldest friend as he might have been, and oh! how pleased he was to see him again, to know he was actually in the room, strong and healthy, so unlike himself.

"Has she been there long?"

"No—they came on Monday. She lives with her aunt. I—I—thought you'd like her."

"She would be all right if she took more pains

to dress herself decently. I don't approve of women being in rags. What does she do?"

"Nothing, I don't think. I liked her being in rags, it made us more friendly. I thought she was an angel till she told me to look at her dress, then I knew she was only poor like me. But indeed, Dr Quack, she is very clean with the rags; and when you put your head on her shoulder, it is as sweet as violets."

But the doctor shrugged his shoulders, as if this scarcely appealed to him.

"Who brought you the grapes?" he asked, looking round.

"She did."

"Where does she get her money from?"

"I expect when people see how beautiful she is they give it her. She can dance and sing, you know."

"Umph!" Then in a different voice he said: "Well, what have you been doing since I went away?"

"Have you been away?"

"Yes. I was called away uuexpectedly, that is why I never came to see you. Is the cough better?"

"It gets worser, I think. The night before last it was very bad—so bad, that I thought you'd be sure to come for me."

Their eyes met—the wonderful shadowy eyes with their marvellous depths of beauty and expression, and the brilliant fever-stricken ones with their haunting expression of weakness and disease.

And then very quietly he got up off the table, and lifted the boy very gently out of the chair, and sat down himself, setting him on his knee. It was plain little Tim had been there often before, by the way he nestled up to the broad shoulder, and the look of peace and satisfaction on his face. And the strong arm went round him as tenderly as a woman's.

"I'll come for you some day, Timothy, all in good time. You'll have to suffer a little bit first, but you'll be brave over it. We all have to suffer sometimes, you know; and yours will be less than others have to bear, and you need not fear, for when you really need me, I shall be with you. Now it's bedtime, you can sleep as long as you like. I've got all the morning papers here with me; whilst you sleep, I'll read."

And soon the little head was still, the eyelids closed, and the hard, heavy breathing alone broke the silence.

Thus over an hour passed away—Mr Barring-court, preoccupied in reading, quite unaware that Alice had twice come and peeped discreetly

through the window. Then at last the child moved, and presently awoke.

"Over an hour this time, Timothy. You will have less pain to-night. You see this little bottle? Ask your mother to give you a teaspoonful in water. You'll sleep like a trooper then—snore like one too."

"If I snore I'll disturb Miss Rags. She sleeps in the room next mine. She heard me coughing and crying the other night—that's why she came in to see."

"Miss Rags is young and healthy. A sleepless night will do her no harm, now and then. It might move her to get up and mend her clothes."

"Do you think she ought to mend them really?" he asked wistfully.

"I think so certainly."

"You like her, don't you, Dr Quack?" he asked again, this time sitting up and looking at him intently. "You like her, don't you? She sings beautifully—about the fairies dancing in the moonlight, and she is good and kind. You don't mind her coming to see me now and then, do you?"

The other smiled.

"No, Timothy. She may come as often as she likes, so long as she goes when she isn't wanted.

She looks lively enough to be good company for you in your duller hours. Good-morning! I'll be round to-morrow, certain sure. Tell her the time, if she comes in again—half-past ten, and if she's sensible she'll take the hint."

CHAPTER XI

THAT evening, as was his usual custom, the High Priest went to vespers. St Armand also went, and walked through the city first, entering the Temple just as the service was beginning. The service was exquisite, though short; the singing beautiful, worthy the splendid building; yet the High Priest never heard it, for, as he sat there on his magnificent throne to the side of the golden steps inside the sacred railings, his mind was wandering again over the conversation of the morning. In the early part of the day he had almost forgotten it, but now, as the magic of evening settled, the lights in the Temple, the music, all things subdued brought back to him the utter empty coldness in his heart—the icy burden so intolerable to the Living man.

That day he had met a lady, a life-long friend of his—and half-seriously had thought on St Armand's words, forgetting the chief stipulations. He had found her dull, heavy, flabby, though considered handsome and even clever by the

world. Impatiently he snapped his fingers at his guest's suggestion. Women! to the initiated still more uninteresting than men.

Thus, as he thought, his eyes wandered down the Temple aisles to the choirs, and in his reverie he became aware of the presence of St Armand, also some others, men and women, whom he knew; and as his wandering eye scanned the groups of worshippers, he became aware in that front pew of the little beggar girl he had seen twice lately, sitting alone. Almost unconsciously he fixed his eyes upon her, wondering idly why she, in rags, had presumed upon so prominent a seat. And at last she looked up from the book she was holding — right across the choir-stalls and attendant clergy towards the High Priest's throne, and, seeing him looking back at her, like a child who considers pleasantness the acme of good manners, she smiled. It was a smile purely friendly, a little shy, and greatly serious; it gave a sweet and winsome expression to a face quite sweet enough before.

Alphonso, it is needless to inform you, did not smile back. He looked away for a little time, and even went so far as to examine well the ceiling; the morning's conversation had completely died from his mind. Yet he did look back again, and from curiosity alone, when they

were kneeling. Her face was buried in her hands — only the gleam of golden hair under the old straw hat, and the slope of a graceful shoulder. Once more during the anthem their eyes met again, but this time she did not smile.

"Very sensible of her," thought the High Priest, and gave his attention to the service, for the moment only. Yet it was nothing more than a professional interest that he began to take in her. Had he not promised to try to raise her from the beggar state? and how soon had he forgotten! Had she not come to the Temple that evening, he would have remembered her no more. She was a pretty girl with a sweet face; he must see what he could do. Having some business to attend to after the service, it was rather later when he left the Temple. St Armand had gone home, and he and his Chaplain came out together alone as the dusk was settling. And suddenly a great longing for freedom came over him. Why could he not walk the streets unmolested by attendants, as St Armand did? It seemed to him, standing there on that top step looking out on to the busy, restless city, that could he once break through the trammels of his hard-set life, he might regain the power of youthful feeling— the thing he had lost, and only lately felt. He

had no particular work that evening, he remembered—nothing till nine o'clock, and dinner was at eight.

"Eaglestone," he said, as they went down the steps together, "you will drive back to the Palace alone—I am walking. There are some matters I wish to think about; I shall be home soon after you arrive." He watched the carriage drive away, and then himself set out in the approaching darkness.

"Friar's Court"; why not perform his own errands, instead of eternally commanding? For the first time in his life for years back, he felt a quickening pulse at his unusual action. It was easily found, and the distance very short. How homely all the little houses looked, with their drawn blinds and red lights! He felt for one moment envious of the poor. Number 5: he soon found it, and gently knocked. It was opened by Alice, peering out into the darkness, not recognising who it was who stood there. Unaccustomed to thus visiting the poor, he now felt somewhat at a standstill. His errand seemed absurd; he remembered he did not even know the name of the girl for whom he had come to enquire. Yet now it was too late to draw back, and once more he settled into the cold man of the world he really was. His tone, if anything, was more than usually

proud. He remembered with irritation that unaccountably he had stepped from the dignity of his position.

"I have come to enquire about a beggar girl who is reported to be living here. I have brought her a Form of Entrance for the 'Poor Sisters' Home.' You will perhaps give it to her." So saying, he took out a book of forms he kept already signed, and handed one to Alice.

But just then Marigold's form appeared behind the stouter woman, and her voice entered into the conversation. "Will you come in, sir? The house is quite clean and tidy inside, though it's small."

Again the longing to break through forms and ceremonies overcame him, just as suddenly as it had disappeared. After all, that was the voice he wanted—the voice that failed to remind him he was stooping near the ground in thus visiting the very poor.

Yet his tone was just as cold and even, as he said: "Thank you! For one moment, I will step inside. I remember I must fill in your name, which was not given me when I saw you at the Palace." He came in, and the little door closed. He was inside a kitchen spotlessly clean and very bright. A meal was on the table, and everything looked very nice and cheerful too.

But how tall he looked in this little doll's house, and how novel to him the situation!

Marigold ran and brought him a chair, and dusted it off with her own apron as she had seen the poor folks do, and did it all with such a charm of manner, that—well, he sat down on the chair, if only to see what it felt like doing as he was bid.

Yet never did he smile, but took the chair with the utmost condescension, sitting there condescendingly. She stood back a few steps, her hands folded, waiting demurely, but with an exquisite colour in her cheeks. "Your name?" said he, placing the paper on the table and bringing out a fountain pen.

"Marigold, please your Holiness."

"Marigold what?"

"Nothing but Marigold, please your Holiness."

"But," said he, and looked at her, and somehow almost forgot what he was going to say, "you must have another name."

"Yes, I *have* another name, but I'd rather not give it you. Not just now!"

"Where are your brothers and sisters?" he asked, suddenly remembering them.

"I was telling you lies; I haven't any."

She was looking down on the ground—the

most exquisite picture of shame and contrition he had ever seen.

"And your father?"

"I haven't one; I made that up too," and suddenly a pair of eyes, very serious, flashed up to his—one minute, then down again.

"What possessed you to be so—so wicked?" He tried to speak severely, and succeeded except for one false note—and that the last word—the sternest one that should have been.

"I wanted to come to the Palace to see what it was like, and they said you couldn't come unless you were poor and had a lot of children, so I made the tale up to get there—and—and—and I got."

"What was there at the Palace to interest any one so young as you?"

"Oh! everything. It was beautiful. I dreamt about it afterwards. And I saw you, and the three gentlemen writing, and the one smoking! And the lovely room with all the big books."

What big beautiful eyes she had, and how young and easily impressionable she seemed! What a child-like, innocent face!

"And could you dream about such trivial things as those?" said he, a tone almost envious in his voice.

"Why, yes," she answered shyly, "because I saw *you*, and you're not trivial. You are one of the greatest men in all the land, and every one respects you."

He laughed, almost forgetting to be condescending. Then, suddenly remembering his errand, he said:

"But if you will not let me have your other name, I cannot fill you up the form."

"I don't want to go to the Poor Sisters' Home. I want to stay here with my aunt, near the Temple. I love the Temple. I wasn't born to live in a convent—I feel I wasn't."

There was nothing flippant in her tone, for she was very earnest; and he persisted no further, but got up to go.

"Good-night! and if you ever want help or need advice of any sort, you can always apply at the Palace for it. My Chaplain or one of my secretaries will see that you are attended to."

And then he held out his hand — greatest of condescensions, yet from the weakness of curiosity, not quite from charity—and Marigold's hand was as soft and pretty as she herself was charming, and all the way back to the Palace the pressure of the tiny fingers lingered in his palm.

Then, when the door was closed, Marigold and

Alice sat down to supper together, and for a little while neither of them spoke. At last Alice said, wiping the perspiration from her brow:

"Who would have thought it! The great High Priest himself!"

"I wasn't a bit surprised," said Marigold. "Do you like him, Alice, or don't you?"

"He was very nice to you, Princess — very fatherly and nice, I thought."

And Marigold burst out laughing.

"Why don't you say *grand*fatherly? One's just as bad as the other, you know; and the last time I spoke to him he was even nastier to me than he was to you at the door. I think he must be falling in love with me, and I like him more than ever."

"Oh! Princess, don't talk so!" said Alice in grief and pain. "Remember he is a holy man, and quite outside all earthly affections. If you must fall in love, let it be with one of the golden priests whom you may marry honourably."

"Be quiet, Alice! when you whine it gets on my nerves. Now listen! I want you to go to the Palace—*my* Palace, not his—and bring the patchwork quilt, the one worked in little silk sixpences by my godmother, the one that is all the colours in the universe from sunrise to sunset, with the rainbow thrown in."

"But why?" said Alice, surprised at the sudden change in the conversation.

Marigold put her elbows on the table and rested her chin on her clasped hands.

"Because it's highly respectable—tiny patches and not a single rag."

Alice still stared, not understanding; and Marigold continued, a curious expression in her eyes:

"You know I went in to see little Patches again this afternoon, and he told me the doctor didn't approve of my appearance. He said a decent woman wouldn't dress in rags, and he said he was coming at half-past ten to-morrow morning, and hoped I'd take the hint. Patches repeated it all angelically, like the little cherub he will be so soon."

"I liked the look of the doctor," said Alice sturdily. "As I peeped through the window he made a rare picture, with the little cripple crept up so happily against his shoulder."

The proud lips closed rather tightly. "Oh yes, I dare say he is very clever and very kind, and he didn't look exactly like a quack, but—but he is horribly rude — rude and unkind, without occasion."

"He didn't approve of your dancing. No religious man would. That twirling and twisting was never meant for righteous people."

"He never saw me dance—and it wasn't that. He was jealous of me, Alice."

"Jealous? A full-grown man jealous of a woman, Princess?"

"Why not? The little cripple boy loves me; before, he loved no one but him."

Alice looked perfectly unconvinced, and Marigold continued:

"You don't believe me, yet it's true. But still we won't argue it. I want you to bring me the patchwork quilt. I'm going to make a dress of it as neat as neat can be. It will please little Patches to see all the pretty colours, and as for Dr Quack — actually he told me to sweep the floor, and called my dancing antics."

"And you mean to go in to-morrow when he is there?"

"Oh no. I'll make the dress to-morrow, and go in the day after."

And so not long afterwards they retired for the night.

CHAPTER XII

"I HEAR you walked home from the Temple," St Armand remarked lightly. "Now, that's what I call sensible. Nothing like a healthy walk! It stirs the megrims."

"I almost agree with you. I enjoyed it, I believe — if I remember anything about enjoyment. And on my way home I paid a call."

"A professional one?"

"Well, partly. Yes, wholly, I suppose. I called upon the beggar girl."

"I saw her at vespers to-night. I like the little beggar girl. She has a rather interesting face."

"She is scarcely more than a child. When you see her with her hat off, she looks ridiculously young."

"Pretty?"

"Yes. I should say very pretty, and an exceptionally sweet voice. But she reminds me of some one—I cannot think whom; but every

now and then her eyes bring back the strongest recollection of—I don't know what."

"Some half-forgotten love affair perhaps."

"No; the only woman I ever cared at all about had dark eyes."

St Armand did not even smile; you cannot afford to be flippant when you are acting Father Confessor to the highest priest.

"Then I can make no other suggestion. What is the colour of her eyes?"

"Truth is sometimes stranger than fiction. If they were not green, I would swear they were blue. As it is, I believe oftentimes they are the next best thing to black."

"You say her eyes are green?"

"I'm bound to say so."

"Whom do we know with green eyes?"

"No one with pretensions to any beauty—no one at all."

"Except the Serpent." How easily and subtly the words fell out, linking the two names together—woman and the God of Lucifram!

"Ah, yes! the Serpent," said Alphonso, almost with a start. "But her eyes convey no impression of power—only beauty."

"When will you see her again?" St Armand asked the question thoughtfully, as if taking it quite for granted he must see her soon.

"I do not know. Perhaps never. Our lives lie so very far apart."

The other's lips curled almost, yet not quite imperceptibly, and he knocked the ash from the end of his cigar. "Why should the lives of the poor always lie so far from the lives of the rich? Can't you make her into a respectable woman?"

"I believe she is respectable. Her aunt with whom she lives looked bourgeois and respectable enough for the most fastidious."

"Oh, I thought she lived with her father and a large family."

Alphonso laughed. "I'm afraid it was all a pack of lies—from some childish whim to gain admittance to the Palace."

"When will you see her again?"

"I'm afraid I shall never see her."

Then for the first time in their short friendship —for their personal introduction had taken place within the month—St Armand turned the blaze of his strong eyes on to the less powerful ones, and from them gleamed all those strange passions and desires that men feel in their weaker moments and scarcely understand. And as he looked into the human eyes before him, probing their weakness with no mercy nor forbearance, the High Priest's shell-like armour invisibly gave way. Neither shame nor dismay came over

him; he did not know the shell was broken—he felt only some tight band had loosened, giving him—was it relief? And how the dark eyes fascinated him! He read in them so many things long since forgotten—so many feelings years since passed away.

And then they blame a woman—her beauty or her fascination—and God, the Afterthought, stands silent.

"Can it be you don't intend to see her after going this far?" He spoke with neither passion nor hurry, neither contempt, only wonder perfectly feigned—and his eyes turned slowly to the fireplace, his hand shading his face.

Alphonso sat still looking at him, wishing weakly the eyes would turn again back towards him. But, as if reading his thoughts, St Armand continued:

"She has very pretty eyes, and she is fond of you. I think, child-like, she would never tire of looking at you, and you would learn from the changing light in her eyes all that a man has ever need to know. I am old, my eyes are growing dim and duller; but she is young—what she has not learnt you can teach her it, and grow young again listening to the light chattering of youth."

The other moved restlessly in his chair.

"I can never see her, St Armand. I am bound

in by priests and servants and machine-like routine."

"I think I will be your servant. As your friend I will walk out with you. For a week or two you shall take the light holiday that your state of health requires. Give Eaglestone a rest; I will become Vice-Chaplain," and he laughed a light, pleasant laugh suggestive of good-nature and light-heartedness.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that in the morning you and I shall take a stroll through the Temple Close. I am engaged upon a few poor sketches to fill my leisure hours. We shall neither of us find the time dull, I promise you."

Just then some guests of the evening were announced — high dignitaries in that golden church; and all were stiff and formal like their master.

But before his eyes all evening danced a vision—a pretty face, a sylph-like figure, fairy fingers, and a voice ridiculously sweet and child-like too, and above all, the blazing coal-black eyes, blinding his vision, yet compelling him to feel as they dictated—to *feel*, the first time for over twenty years.

CHAPTER XIII

So next morning, when Dr Quack called upon Timothy, he found no rival, nor stew, nor upset kitchen—only the little sufferer quite alone; and little Tim was worse that morning, for he had such a nasty pain when he coughed, and he looked thinner and more wasted than ever; and Marigold, tired of cutting and sewing, went out for a ramble all alone amongst the Temple grounds, whilst Alice cooked the dinner. And Marigold, being one of those people who can't keep away from things, wended her way towards the creeper-covered arch, the splendid ruins of a portion long disused. The sun shone in all its glory, yet without any of that stifling and oppressive heat that so often characterises our climate here on earth, and the quaint broken arches cast long shadows on the sunlit path. And there was no Alice there, the Board-School product of materialism—no one but Marigold. And as she came along the pathway, she saw St Armand sitting there on the gnarled tree roots, a sketch-

block on his knee; and there beside him, the great High Priest upon a camp-stool. For men who sit on thrones rarely get the pleasure of sitting on the ground, and if you sit on a throne long enough, after a while you don't appreciate the pleasure of it—the ground, of course. But Marigold did not draw back. Why should she? She had just come away from a looking-glass, and seen a picture through it that she kissed to annoy Alice; and so she called out gaily to the artist, not the priest:

"I've come on purpose, just so that I may spoil your picture."

"On the contrary, you've just brought the finishing-touches."

"You didn't say that the last time I came here."

"I believe you wore clogs and a jacket, and worse still, you brought a companion who was thick-set and uneducated."

"No; she has been very well educated at one of the best Board-Schools."

"Sure sign she knows nothing. They fiddle too much at the Board-Schools—make too much fuss over teaching, and neglect the learning."

Marigold was not interested in this, so she turned to the High Priest, and smiled a little more sweetly, and certainly a little more shyly, than at St Armand.

"You will find it very cool and shady under this big tree," said she; and the octogenarian bent his head and went on with his sketching, for of all things he was a humorist, and never failed to find human beings amusing in their love affairs.

"Yes, we are taking a morning's holiday—the first with me for, I might say, many a year"; and he rose from the camp-stool and stood looking down at her, with an interest Marigold noticed was different from any he had ever taken in her before—different even from last night.

"How you must be enjoying it then," said she. "But I thought you would have gone a long way off from the Temple for a holiday; people generally do go as far off from their work as they can."

"A priest's work is slightly different from that of any other calling."

"Yes; you're never done, are you? even on Sundays when everybody else is resting."

No one could have resisted Marigold's tone; it was not familiar, it was full of delightful sympathy. Alphonso smiled. He could have gone on listening to that voice indefinitely, so long as the subject was himself.

"No; I'm afraid we're never done. Now your life, I suppose, is one long holiday?"

"No; I've been dressmaking ever since six o'clock. I came out because—oh! because of the

sunshine, you know. I love it best of anything."

"Yes, I think you must have borrowed all this pretty hair from the sun."

"You said once you didn't approve of it."

"When can that have been?"

"The first night I saw you—when I begged the money off you."

"Yes, I remember." And then Marigold laughed, and, wonder of wonders! he laughed too.

"I like coming here," said she; "you quite forget there are hundreds and thousands of people all round you. I wonder how it is the Temple is so very, very beautiful?"

"The Serpent made it."

"Yes," said she, a mystic kind of beauty creeping in her eyes, and she looked at him with reverence and awe, but with beauty uppermost.

No man could have easily stood that glance of Marigold's. It was as if she had set him on a pedestal, not too high, and worshipped him from not too far a distance—almost as if the golden hair fell on his feet and the soft lips kissed them. So felt the great High Priest, changed from last night into a man again, no more the frozen statue; and neither of them noticed the silence following, for in love, that kind as well as others, closer bonds are knit in silence than in any

sparkling talk or thrilling conversation. And St Armand sketched them as they stood there, so oblivious were they of his presence—sketched them, laughing the while. But shortly another step sounded on the gravel, coming towards the archway; Marigold turned, St Armand looked up, the High Priest likewise.

"Sacred Serpent! Barringcourt!" said the latter in electric accents.

Marigold heard the old man at their feet give a low whistle, and saw him close the sketch-book quickly; and she herself felt a wave of faintness for the instant—something like little Patches spoke of, but perhaps from other causes than affected him. So they all met face to face—three on the one side, one the other. The High Priest hurried forward with outstretched hands.

"Barringcourt! This is the greatest pleasure of my life, after your long absence!"

Marigold, quick to see and note, detected the cold, contemptuous under-stare and the top graciousness in the doctor's manner.

"And one of the greatest pleasures in mine, Alphonso. We are met again!"

And again Marigold, hearing the tone so hollow, yet the words so sweet, said to herself: "I'd rather be told to sweep the kitchen floor than be spoken to like that"; and another wave passed

through her, this time of unaccountable anger, that he should speak to her lover so.

"Where have you been all these years? Surely not in Fairy Sky, without a line of intelligence to any one?"

"Oh no; mostly I've been travelling."

"Twenty-five years travelling on Lucifram! Good Lord! the 'Flying Dutchman' isn't in it." This from St Armand, still sitting on the roots, by now engaged in smoking, eyeing the newcomer quizzically. Here Mr Barringcourt turned to him, laughing—a genuine laugh, so it seemed to Marigold, though, as their eyes met, a blaze of light as of swords crossing in a lightning storm leapt out from each.

"Small planet, isn't it, to need so much globe-trotting?" said he.

"Alphonso here gives us to understand you went off on a honeymoon. Perhaps, in defying the fashionable short rations, you've managed to defy time too."

The Master came up and stood close beside him, laughing down at him—much more at home with him, so Marigold perceived, than ever he had been with the Sacred Priest. Yet, was it friendship, or only the familiarity of equality, that brought them thus so easily together?

"Has he spread that report? I suppose, if one

runs away with a girl on Lucifram, the only honourable course left open is to marry her"; and here, not by accident, yet very naturally, his laughing eyes fell upon Marigold, and a wave of shame—the first she had experienced in her short and happy life—followed the other two. Why should he lay such stress on "honourable," and then on "marry"; or, if he must do, how dare he laugh the while in that contemptuous way, as if—as if——? She closed her mind with a snap, not knowing for the moment whom she hated most—he, or the High Priest, or—or herself—and wished she were away from this laughing group—away back with Alice.

"That's the High Priest's solution," said St Armand, "for your difficulty, at any rate."

"A very honourable solution, anyway. Don't you agree with me, Miss Rags?" and again he turned to her, no more troubling to be serious than before. But Marigold was in a strange, unaccountable mood that morning, and the feeling of nervousness and anger now bubbling up in her had taken every vestige of colour from her face.

"I—I think," she said, her teeth half-closed, her voice trembling, "if you loved your wife, you would talk less about it—her."

"On the contrary," replied he, suddenly serious,

yet not seriously so, "I've never mentioned a wife. It is a mistake shared by no one but you and his holiness the High Priest; but women and clergymen invariably err—if they *do* err—on the side of morality, not common-sense."

"And quack doctors," said she, not knowing nor caring what she said, "err on the side of brutality."

Here St Armand laughed:

"Quack doctors? Who is the quack?"

"Oh! this gentleman," she answered with the malicious fury of a child, bent only on hurting if she could. "He—he comes to see a little sick boy next door to—to us, and he gives him medicine that makes him worse. I know it does. Last night he took some, and this morning he is worse than ever. Quacks are all alike." Thus Marigold—with the instant reaction so that she could have hated St Armand too for his smooth question, and she felt the utter punishment of meanness; her eyes were fastened to the ground, she dare not raise them. Yet she kept saying to herself:

"He hurt me, and he had no business to. Why should I not hurt him back?"

And the sun still shone—shadows and white patches. And next she heard Mr Barringcourt's voice speaking easily and unconcernedly to the

High Priest, and therein to her came the greater punishment.

"Let us take a walk through the Temple as in the olden times. I should like to see Crockerby's panels that he was busy on when last I stayed here. He's been dead near fifteen years, I hear, and he'll have left a big gap even in this crowded city. He was a man who lived."

"Yes; and along with him went many of the old lot. You'll find the town altered since you went." And so together they turned and went away, leaving Marigold open-eyed at the ease with which her—yes, her lover—had deserted her. And suddenly St Armand sprang to his feet with an energy that startled her.

"*Damn* him!" said he, with a force so unnatural that the great tree seemed to creak and groan and sway with it.

"Oh, no, no!" said Marigold just as suddenly, her fingers flying up to her tiny ears. "No, no! Damn *it*! Damn it! Don't damn *him*!" and she kicked a stone flap against the archway.

St Armand opened his mouth to answer, then closed it to hide a smile, and looked at the little beggar girl narrowly.

"Marigold," he said at length, very kindly, "do you know what they're doing in there?"

"N—no."

"Talking about you—laughing, most probably. Barringcourt's fond of laughing — keeps him young."

"I have done nothing to make them laugh," she said, the sensitive colour rising to her face.

"No, you have done nothing, but Barringcourt is jealous—one of his many little weaknesses. The High Priest at one time was his slave, now he bids fair to become yours. That will not please him."

"*Is* he jealous?" said she, dubious now, though so certain the night before.

St Armand frowned.

"I tell you he is jealous. He is also jealous of you and the sick baby—sick child."

"How—how do you know about that?" she asked in weak surprise.

"I know a great deal," he answered whimsically; "people's faces are like books to me." Then again softly:

"Marigold."

"Yes."

"It was intolerable the way he spoke to you—under—under the circumstances."

The colour ran in her cheeks again, and her voice trembled.

"Yes, I know it was." Then suddenly, her head thrown up: "But I—I deserved it."

"For why?"

"Oh, because—because I ought not to have done as I have done. The High Priest should be a stranger to me."

"The High Priest is your slave. Think of it! And a clever, influential man is the most interesting toy a clever woman ever possesses. Nothing else in life ever comes up to it."

"Oh, please don't! I will not listen to you."

"And I am your friend, Marigold. The quack doctor is clever, but he has his—his limitations. Dislike of you, for instance—cordial dislike, for no earthly reason." And suddenly Marigold took to her heels and ran, and left St Armand standing there.

CHAPTER XIV

ALICE was just steaming the potatoes as Marigold entered, and she did not turn her head till they were done to a nicety; but Marigold had run upstairs to remove her hat, and when everything was ready, Alice went to the foot of the stairs and called her. But when she came down, it was not with her usual gaiety and lightness, and Alice's watchful eye detected traces of tears about her eyes—yet she passed no remarks except those in general, till she became aware her mistress's plate had never yet been touched.

"Are you not well, Princess?" she asked with anxiety.

"Ye-es. No. Yes. Alice, I don't like being a poor woman. You haven't half as nice a time as when you're rich."

"Then let us go back, Princess. Indeed I am tired of it too. The kitchen is like an oven after dinner has been baked in it."

But Marigold shook her head stubbornly.

"No; I'm going to stay—till—till the end."

"The end of what?"

"I don't know. Don't ask questions, Alice. What time did Dr Quack go?"

"Just about half-an-hour since. He came in here to ask for some filtered water."

"Did you give him it?"

"Yes; and he asked would one of us go and sit with Timothy this afternoon. He says he's getting too bad to be left long."

"Why didn't he stay himself?" asked Marigold in a hard voice.

"I don't know. Oh! he said he was busy. A great deal of sickness about, and he was needed."

"I don't believe him."

"I do. I went in after him with the water, and I never saw any one so gentle or clever with a child. He had a bad spell of coughing on, and it was frightful, he was in such pain."

"Poor little Patches! I'll go in and sit with him this afternoon, unless you'd rather go, Alice. Perhaps both of us might. But, oh dear! I *do* feel tired, somehow or other."

"Did you meet any one outside?"

"Ye-es. I met the High Priest and his friend, the one we saw under the archway—and—and this doctor—Dr Quack."

"Did any of them speak to you?"

"All three; and I like the doctor the least. He is very stiff and proper, and believes in every one being kept in their right place."

"Did he snub you again?"

"Don't, Alice; he takes everybody from me—and now I believe he's even taking you," and she pushed her chair back and went and stood over by the fireplace. But Alice loved her so well, she could not bear to see her in this quiet, distressed mood, so she got up and went and stood beside her.

"No one will ever take me away from you," she answered sturdily. "My business in life is to look after you, for you don't seem able to look after yourself, and I'll do it to the best of my ability."

"But I am going to turn over a new leaf. I am going to do nothing but nurse little Patches."

"Serpent be praised!" said Alice. "I knew that whim of yours about the great High Priest would never last."

Marigold gave a movement of pain, though she laughed immediately after.

"Yes, it was very silly of me. I believe now I've taken a fancy to his friend."

"The one with the black eyes?"

"Yes. Alice, he has the most beautiful voice I ever heard."

"So has Dr Quack. On my word I never remember noticing the difference between one voice and another till I heard his."

"*Mine*, Alice?"

"I mean Men's voices. Was the High Priest's friend very gracious to you then?"

"He made me feel that to sin in my position, and with my beauty, was in reality no sin at all."

"The wicked man!"

"He doesn't like Dr Quack for some reason or other—that is why he said it."

"And did you listen to him?"

"No. I ran away. If I had stayed any longer I would have done as he advised me."

"How?"

"Oh! I—I would have hated and suspected the doctor even more strongly than I do. He told me he was jealous of me. Just what I said myself last night. And it is not good, Alice, to hate any one. If he is rude to me—and he has been—I have at least dignity enough left in me to forgive him. I may appear frivolous and vain and foolish on the surface, Alice; but oh! great Serpent! I am not underneath. It is because I feel so much that I laugh and act continually to hide it."

"No one but a simpleton would ever take you for anything but an angel."

"Don't, Alice!" she answered in real distress.

"Any one hearing you would think you wanted your salary raised."

"I think I'll finish the dress, Princess, this afternoon. I'll soon run it up with the machine now. You take your lute and play for Patches. He's fairly gone upon your singing."

"Yes. I'll go and sing for him then, for I don't understand the machining."

And with that she went upstairs to her own room.

But it was some time before Marigold came down again—for every struggling passion, good and evil, seemed let loose in her.

A hundred times, with a burning feeling of eclipse and failure, she saw the High Priest walk away, forgetting her, the beggar girl who had smiled, and given him a greater intimacy than ever any man before. Again she heard the doctor's laugh—that light insolence that galled her spirit to the quick, and called up all the long centuries of fighting pride that mingled with her blood.

And again the soft voice tempting her to fling aside all the carping responsibilities of life, and take a side in the big game—winning or losing. To fight against the Master, this Mr Barringcourt, this quack insufferable—to fight as spirits do—the body, that tame servant, working its little part in the big argument, for the universal end.

"What is my body?" said she, laughing at her reflection in the glass. "Something that will wear out and die, and never come again to me. Something I may give away to any man, provided that I don't forget and then repeat the gift to some one else—like some kind ladies do. Why should I feel his laugh this morning? I should have laughed as well. I'll give my body to the great High Priest, if he begs hard enough—only if he begs very, very hard; and I'll keep my soul to give to no man—not even elderly gentlemen who sit on camp-stools to escape the indignity of sitting on the ground."

Thus was Marigold, so lately doleful, once more herself again.

With ribbons and strings and laughter she set out to sing for Patches, dancing all the way.

Like those who are very, very ill, Patches looked worse to-day, though yesterday you would have thought he never could look worse. Yet his face brightened up wonderfully when she appeared.

"I knew you'd come," said he.

"Of course," said Marigold. "I couldn't stay away, because I've really come to love you, Patches, dear."

"To love *me*?" he said, looking up with big dark eyes.

"Yes. You're good, and you make me feel good. When I go away from you, I begin to have

all kinds of see-saw feelings—up and down, every way. I think you must be one of the little green men who live within the magic circle. That's how it is you know so many kings and queens, because kings and queens always like to be where no one else can get, though they don't always manage it."

"Do they have any pain in the magic circle?"

"No, never. There's a big notice on the outside ring, saying 'Pain not admitted on penalty of Death'; and so he keeps out, because he wants to live like most things else—though it isn't very kind of him."

"Then I'm not a green man, because I have pain?"

"Well, if you're not, you will be some day."

"Miss Rags," he said, suddenly sitting up in his chair eagerly, "I'll—I'll tell you what I'll do. When it comes my turn to go in, I'll grab hold of Pain ever so tight and not leave go of him, and then he'll be forced to go in with me—and then they'll kill him—and everybody else outside here will be quite safe then."

"But how brave you'll have to be to keep tight hold of him!"

"Yes, I know. But if I'd been all right and had my leg, I was going to be a soldier. Why—

why—do your eyes keep filling with tears, like that?"

"Oh! I don't know. I expect I'm not the right one to come to you. You should have Dr Quack all the time. He's got a big hard heart, and he doesn't know how to cry, so—so he can't."

"No. He never cries. I wouldn't like him to. But you're different. I don't mind you. It's company for when I do myself."

"Timothy, which of us do you like best—him or me?"

A silence followed—and Marigold wondered why she should hear her own heart beating so in the stillness.

At last he said:

"I love you both. But I love him best, because he found me first—and he is strong and kind with me."

Then Marigold was silent, with a dull disappointment, because, unreasonably, she had hoped so much from this reply.

"Yes," she said at length, "he is strong and kind and good to you. And I am frivolous and giddy. But you like me second best, don't you?"

"Yes, second best. Mother I love different, you know."

"And even if Dr Quack doesn't like me, you will still let me come, won't you, Patches?"

"Oh yes. But I think he does like you—at least, I think he doesn't mind much, either way. He said this morning if you would only dress respectable and be tidy, you might make a very nice little nurse — seeing I'd taken a fancy to you. He told your aunt when she was in here and they were talking."

"Oh! and what did she say?"

"She said she'd argued with you every way, but that you had never had any taste in dress. And that's all they said about you."

"Would you like me for a nurse, Patches?"

"Oh! I should love it."

"But if I'm the nurse, I'll have to stay in when the doctor comes."

"I expect it will all depend on him," said Patches. "Perhaps, if he once got used to you, he'd like you—especially if you only had another dress."

CHAPTER XV

THAT night the patchwork dress was finished, and it was really very beautiful. It just cleared the ground very gracefully, and it was so plain that it showed every line of Marigold's exquisite figure off to perfection. Alice laughed when she saw it on, and shook her head and said:

"Well, I never!" and "On my word!"—but got no further.

That night also the High Priest and St Armand sat after dinner, all alone once more, St Armand smoking.

"Your dream was true enough, Alphonso," said he presently.

"You mean in connection with Barringcourt?"

"Yes. He has certainly not altered in the least—or, if at all, much for the better."

"And I——"

"Am older. When you stand together as this morning, the difference shows at once. I marvel that you never felt it."

"I did at first—when first he came to us. But

afterwards, our conversation took me back to the days when I was young."

"In memory only, not reality. And to be young in memory is to be old in years. Youth lives in the present, not the past. To-night you look older than ever I remember seeing you. Do you think it wise, this friendship with so young, so well-preserved a man?"

"Why not? If only to discover his great secret that brings redoubled youth when the first wear and tear of age begins to creep out from its sad resting-place."

"*He* will never give you the secret, you may depend upon it. Mr Barringcourt is not your friend; remember you parted quarrelling twenty-five years since."

"But he's forgotten that, and so have I."

"Oh no, he has not forgotten. You hunted down, in bigotry and high-handedness, a girl who was peculiarly his property. He is not so easy-going as to forgive you that."

"Then why should he appear so pleased to see me?"

"Because, being your worst, your subtlest enemy, he perceives you are nothing but a wreck of what you used to be."

The deep, dull colour of anger rose in the High Priest's face.

"He may be mistaken in that, as he has been in other things."

"How will you prove it to him?"

"Advise me."

"Then you remember the girl we met this morning?"

"Sacred Serpent! how you do harp on women!"

"Sacred Serpent! were you born a man or a stone?"

"Go on. Go on with your advice."

"You remember the girl this morning?"

"I remember her, and I must say I felt her—her fascination—till—till she showed such unmannerly temper before us all. Passion of any sort in a woman is fatal to beauty both of mind and body."

Now St Armand, as a rule, had great patience with his—his followers until they were well disciplined and broken in to obedience. But occasionally he was known to laugh long and heartily, especially when they passed some wise remark.

And he laughed now. He laughed so long and so genuinely, that the High Priest began to feel uncomfortable, and thought over what he had said once more, but could find no fault with it.

"Be careful, Alphonso! Soon they'll be

christening you the great High Hypocrite, or, worse still, 'the sleeping mole.' Women have been developing all kinds of things since you last looked out upon Lucifram with fleshly eyes. However, if you object to temper, Barringcourt doesn't. He admires the little beggar girl."

The stray shot hit.

"Pardon me, you're wrong. He spoke to her with absolutely no respect."

"Will you get it out of your head once and for all" said St Armand abruptly; "you're looking for a *wife*? Meek temper and respectability are insufferable in any other woman. But you've given up the beggar girl, and he will step in to gather the plum you've let slip so easily through your palsied fingers."

"I have not let her slip."

"Indeed you have. Did you not walk away this morning without one look, one word of farewell? Did he do so? No. His last look was to her, his last smile."

"He does not know her."

"Oh! he is young. He makes friends easily. He has not got the ice of age clinging round him as you. He does not love her, but he will win her, whilst you grow cold — shivering on the brink of passion."

"He shall *not* win her. She is mine, since I

looked into her eyes in the Temple close this morning. He has robbed me of many things—now I look back on it, he has robbed me of many, many things—but he shall not take this last. She shall belong to me—to me alone!"

"Are you going now?"

He looked up involuntarily at the timepiece.

"It—it is after ten o'clock. It is too late."

"Yes. Now the respectable community is making ready for sleep, and the other half is only just awaking. I, too, am respectable. I go to bed. Life in a monastery is dull at times, and deathly fatiguing."

And so he left the room, and went to his own bed-chamber.

And there alone, with no borrowed, artificial light but that subdued from his own presence and the signet-ring, he sat and wrote a letter to his wife—in the surrounding darkness. Often he laughed—sometimes he frowned whilst writing—and of the great High Priest he said, with other things:

"He is worse to drive than a young calf, and worse to lead than an old bull—so that, even with the ring in his nose, I can never be quite sure of him. I have taken so much pains with him, that at last I have become impatient, and I find it does not answer badly. But these simpletons are

really too much trouble. He is insolent enough to take anything I give him, without so much as 'Thank you'—but in that they're all alike. He forced my hand the other night into giving him some of my own power of feeling, but that hasn't answered—it rarely does unless, of course, the girl were present—which she was not. And this familiarity—this living with an awkward brute who fancies himself infallible, and who, I am beginning to find, has only the one weak spot, vanity, like his less cooped-up neighbours—is beginning to tell upon my temper. Had I not you to fall back upon in reverie, I should throw him up and be quit of him; for breathing the same air with these mortals for any length of time is insufferable — they contaminate everything. But when I think of you——"

Was it not Merriman—so lately dead; by some, perhaps, soon forgotten—who, in that last, sad book with its prophetic, mournful ending, even in light, spoke of the sacredness of certain letters—even mortal?

CHAPTER XVI

NEXT morning, Marigold, in the patchwork gown and a pretty muslin apron, went in very early to take Patches his breakfast. He was still in bed, so she went upstairs, calling:

"Patches! here's your breakfast, and the nurse."

It was such a little cupboard of a bedroom, and such a tiny make-believe of a bed, and everything was so poor and shabby, that Marigold's throat went quite lumpy again.

Only, on the wall, opposite the bed, was a beautiful painting of a woman's head—a very tender, delicate face, with a haunting look in the eyes, half-laughter, half-tenderness.

When Marigold saw that face, the lumps went out of her throat, and she felt very jealous. "Who is that, Patches?" she asked, standing to look.

"I don't know," he answered; "Dr Quack brought it, and set it up there for me to look at when the night is long. He says she was

a very good woman, and she died a long time ago. He says she was so beautiful and good, that even the Serpent loved her, and she went to Heaven."

"Are you sure she's dead? It seems to me I—I know her. Her eyes—they seem to follow one so."

"Yes; and the longer you look at her, the more you love her. I've made her my best queen. But oh! Miss Rags, how—how prettily you're dressed. You've all the loveliest colours, no bigger than sixpences—and—and you haven't a rag."

"I know. I'm respectable now. I've turned nurse in earnest. This cap makes me look quite matronly and old. You've to have your breakfast, and then I'm going to wash and dress you, and sit with you downstairs. And this afternoon I've got a treat in store for you. But I'm not going to mention it till I've asked the doctor, in case he says 'no'—but, if he says 'no,' then I'll find something else just as good."

"But you're not going to stay with me all day?"

"Yes, I am, and all night too. You want some one in the night, and your poor mother's too tired. I'm going to send her to sleep in my room, and I'm coming to sleep in hers."

For a minute he was silent, then he said:

"That lady looks after me at night."

And Marigold said quite softly and wistfully:

"She won't mind me. If she is so very good, she won't mind me at all."

So she gave him his breakfast, and dressed him, and washed him, and she brushed and combed his hair very gently, and ended by pinning a red rose in his little coat. And Patches, who had felt rather shy at first, soon felt all right—and quite happy and thankful, because dressing had been a very big business lately. And when they got downstairs, what was his surprise to find all the little kitchen beautiful, and lovely flowers on the table and the dresser, and in his arm-chair a lovely patchwork cushion, like Marigold's dress, as soft as soft, and with the scent of wood violets.

She sat down on a chair by the fire opposite to him, laughing at his surprise.

"The little green men brought the flowers last night when the moon was shining, and laid them on the doorstep. My aunt and I found them this morning, and brought them in."

And then he looked at them as if he more than half believed her.

"I'm not going to be called Miss Rags any longer," she said, taking up a woollen comforter that she had brought for knitting. "I'm going

to be called Mrs Patches. Mr and Mrs Patches we shall be—because you're to be my sweetheart. I haven't got a grown-up one."

"But you wouldn't care to have a cripple for a sweetheart?" he asked, the childish flush again dyeing his cheeks.

She looked up at him, a strange kind of power and beauty filling her eyes.

"You haven't got a crippled soul, Patches. You'll make a really beautiful spirit—and who cares about the body then? There was a wonderful man came on to Lucifram once, and he did nothing but talk to little children, and he said they'd best be lame, without a leg, and go to Heaven, than, having both legs, go nowhere, or even worse than that."

"What did they call him?"

"They called him the Son of the Serpent, and some people said he came from Hell."

So on they talked, each interesting the other, till, with a start from each, the door opened.

If Mr Barringcourt felt surprised, he had got to that state of perfection when, unless he wished to, he did not show it.

Marigold got up from her chair with a dignity it was quite impossible to mistake.

"I have come to nurse Timothy. You said he was too ill to be left long, and my aunt is busy."

"That is very kind of you," he answered simply. "Did you bring the flowers and the cushion?"

"Yes, and his breakfast. I think we will look after him altogether now. He has been so neglected, except when you have come." And then she sat down again.

Mr Barringcourt looked at her and bit his lips; and suddenly she got up, with her eyes on the ground, and said very nervously:

"Let me stay. If I go away, I shall only go into the Temple grounds. I would rather stay."

She never knew what it was that prompted her to speak so—not till long afterwards.

And looking up for the answer, she caught the look of utter surprise in his eyes, that her dress and neatness had not occasioned. He looked at her more closely, then he said quietly:

"Yes, you may stay. But this is a very uninteresting hour to the outsider. It is Timothy's bed-time."

"You see it's like this," Timothy now put in for himself, having been long enough out of the conversation. "When I sleep at night I'm more tired than ever after it. When I wake up, all my bones are aching, and all the perspiration is running out of me, and from being all hot and steam, I go quite cold. But when I sleep, and Dr Quack stays awake to look after me,

then I waken up all right, as if I really had been asleep, and I'm not all trickling in big drops."

"You see," said Mr Barringcourt, speaking quietly and looking down at her, "I am a quack, and so I believe in faith cure. I am strong, and Timothy is weak. When he knows my arms are round him, then he feels safe, and therefore happier, so what time I can in the day I spare to him." And so saying, he sat down in the chair and took the cripple on his knee.

And Marigold, being no more than a child in heart, and just past the verge of womanhood in years, thought how nice it would have been if she could have taken the other knee — if — if only they'd been friends. And then she sat up very straight, feeling real annoyance at her own want of dignified emotions.

"Would you like a paper?" he asked, drawing a bundle from his pocket.

"No, thank you. I don't understand the art of reading newspapers. It's a man's work."

He took her at her word, and passed no more remarks, but was soon lost in the contents. Only, when he wanted the paper turning, she got up and turned it for him. Twice she did it, and twice he thanked her very pleasantly and kindly. And, after a while, he laid the paper down, Timothy still sleeping, and said:

"This little boy is very ill."

"I know."

"He won't last many more weeks, and he won't be able to get up much longer."

"No."

"You intend to nurse him to the end, I suppose?"

"Yes. I am coming in here to sleep to-night, and his mother is going into our cottage. She has enough work without having restless nights tacked on to it."

"You cannot nurse him both day and night."

"Oh yes, I must! His mother never hears him."

"I think you must not. And to-morrow I am sending two nurses in from Todbrook's home —night- and day-nurses."

"But *I* mean to nurse him."

"No doubt. But he cannot exactly be left to your tender mercies. Whilst the novelty lasts, I don't doubt you will be untiring; after that, you will want to return to your usual occupation—gallivanting out after questionable companions."

"No. I will nurse him till he dies. You must not send the nurses."

For some time he sat looking at her, then he said:

"I will send one for the night. It is absurd your trying to do both; I doubt if you have the strength to carry out one successfully."

"I love him so well that I don't feel it a trouble at all."

"Women, such as you, shouldn't talk of love. You should say you'd taken a fancy to him."

"Why! what kind of a woman am I?"

"Very shallow—easily moved by flattery—the shallowest flattery."

Marigold sat silent, too dignified to speak or to show any annoyance, and again he spoke.

"I think perhaps I should be honest with you. Personally, I do not want you nursing this sick child. I would prefer to see you in your own house, minding your own business. But you have come, and he likes you, and it would be cruel to him to send you away. Not only that, but here you are out of the way of mischief for a time, for women of your stamp often work more havoc than they ever think. But listen. Promise me, as long as the child lives, you will see no more of the High Priest. You will promise to forget him, otherwise you can go. I will not have you round here, even for the child's sake, with the sacredness of death shadowing the house, with that man's presence to contaminate you."

And Marigold got up, and she said very quietly:

"I will promise you. But I think you do me a great wrong in—in——"

"You forget. I saw you yesterday before you saw me."

"Yes. Perhaps you are right then. But I will nurse him to the best of my ability, and I shall not tire. And for the rest, I am not really what you seem to think. I was trying to find out what the High Priest was like—I meant nothing more."

Mr Barringcourt raised his eyebrows.

"Then I should advise you never to make ignorant experiments with humanity—the most explosive of all substances."

"Do you think so?" asked Marigold seriously.

"Think? I am positive."

"Then perhaps he *isn't* human."

The unguarded laugh that followed from her companion awoke little Patches, who smiled too, well pleased to find himself, on waking, in such pleasant company.

And then Marigold disclosed the treat she had in store—that she and Alice might take him out for a short time in the afternoon in a bath-chair they had borrowed. And the doctor agreed. Yet, when he went away, he seemed more cold and distant than ever, so Marigold thought, though to Patches he was just the same.

"I don't believe he likes me," she said to herself very sadly. "He thinks—I don't know what dreadful things he thinks of me. I think he is prejudiced against me, for some reason I can't understand."

CHAPTER XVII

And now Marigold's days were fully occupied. The nurse came at ten, and stayed till nine in the morning, and after that Marigold's duties began, though she invariably went in before with breakfast, and scraps of news, and to have a talk with the nurse, from whose experience and professional knowledge she learnt a great deal concerning the management of the sick.

Each day Mr Barringcourt came at his accustomed hour, and each day, no matter how bad little Timothy might be, he slept peacefully and happily in the strong arms that so tenderly held him.

Marigold, during this time, would sit in her seat beside the fire, sewing or knitting; very quiet, as unobtrusive as the best-trained nurse could ever hope to be.

And Alice noticed the gradual change in her, the paler colouring—the rounded contour of youth being moulded to a more delicate and classic moulding. And sometimes, as she heard the merry laugh less often, and the quick tongue

slower to answer and more gentle, she felt the shadow of anxiety creep over her, and then she would say:

"She is better there. Work is good for her. This little boy was sent by Heaven to take her mind off the High Priest and her infatuation." Thus did Alice reason, wisely yet foolishly, and only feared the strain upon her mistress's health —forgetful that the young are strong. Yes. In the little cottage there was much to alter Marigold, for in the magnitude of splendour it was a palace.

The little crippled child—so patient, so winning, so clinging, so interested in life, so swiftly passing towards Death's solemn secret — how much he taught her every day! unfolding as a rosebud opens, and with silent pain, every tender passion and all the mother-love stored in her nature. But that was only part of Marigold—only a part, though an important one, and in itself complete. But something deeper grew as well, strong and more painful—something that she scarce believed, and did not, would not, understand.

For here had come into her life, just at that headlong stage when the world is a plaything and life a toy, the strong current that starts with love, goes on to pain, and, for the strong, ends in life that is not borrowed nor restricted.

She would sit and watch the Master as he played or talked with Timothy—the forgotten third, greatly remembering.

At first she had smiled as she bent over her sewing—the High Priest far in the recesses of her mind—smiled to think how she would defeat the Master by no other weapons than those easily at hand—beauty and tact and fascination. So from the first, after that little outburst near the Temple, she had taken his criticisms meekly—half acting, half really feeling, as the true actress must ever do. And therein lay the first great germs of danger, that latter half.

And each day went by slowly, and each day he came, with the same coldness for her, the same tenderness for little Timothy. And, as the days went by, Marigold felt it very hard to stand. It was as if she were left outside the gates of a sunlit garden—alone in the wilderness—with no one, whilst they two had each other.

And by degrees, as he took no notice of her, she took to studying the Master—his fine head, the eyes in which she read all that dangerous tenderness, not meant for her—the whole fascination of a personality no human being yet of Lucifram ever withstood.

Why would he not treat her as a child too, and let her join them in the conversation? At times,

it was almost more than she could bear—this love of his for the little cripple—this coldness to herself. No wonder that the child-like, merry laugh had vanished — the merry answer from a merry tongue—and the round pink cheeks of happy, thoughtless youth.

One day he had come in again in the afternoon, and Timothy's wooden soldiers were out upon the table. He had sat down beside him, and had arranged them all for marching, and then he told a story about each one—their big adventures—how this one lost an arm, that one a leg, this his nose, and this his head. He told them with such realism and sympathetic feeling, that Timothy sat entranced, Marigold too; she had never heard the Master telling tales before, and had realised only the two extremes of his nature—coldness and tenderness. But now she saw the playful humour in his eyes, watched his power of mimicry, and that great understanding of human nature that underlay it all; and she found herself wondering many times who could he be?—where, after all these years, had he suddenly come from?

Sometimes during his visits he would turn to her with an occasional look or word, and now and then their eyes would meet; but, with a sickening feeling of disappointment, Marigold would notice the hard, cold look that immediately stole into

his — repellent almost in its severity. Why? Why? Was she not behaving to the best of her ability? Behaving perhaps too well—for it all came so naturally, no acting now—except the forcing back of all feeling—for pride's sake, yet not quite pride alone.

To her, untamed, wholly impulsive, the fight with nature was well-nigh unendurable. Yet who could have passed through that icy barrier he had set between himself and her? And, on the other hand, was Timothy, teaching the big lessons of silence, self-control, and non-complaint.

So Marigold passed through the first great fire —the first passion of unrequited love—and came out partly purified.

At last there came a day when Timothy could no longer dress and come downstairs. The shadow of death was gathering round, cruelly, slowly—some weeks yet, no doubt, before the lingering end.

For the first time in Marigold's presence there, the doctor came upstairs, and she heard his step upon the steep wooden stairs with more than usual beating of her heart.

As he entered the door, their eyes met. He was looking in the best of spirits, yet she had expected to find him sad.

"Timothy is too tired to get up to-day," she said gently.

"And some one else looks tired too," he answered, the first attention or kindness he had in any way bestowed upon her. Who can blame Marigold if, from the pallor of waiting and watching, her cheeks flushed a rosy red, or if her eyes having once looked up to his, should suddenly sink to the ground again, and the deep colour die away, leaving her deathly white?

And then he sat down on the low bed by the cripple—and she knew instinctively that he had felt annoyance at her confusion.

Timothy was too weak and tired that day to sit up at all. He held the doctor's hand very tightly in his hot fingers, and looked up at him with big, pathetic eyes.

Suddenly he said:

"Dr Quack, when I go away, will you get another little boy?"

"Why, no," he answered; "you're not going away. You're coming to live with me, Timothy—coming to live with me."

The big eyes were still fastened on him.

"But I'm dying, ain't I?"

"No. You're living. That is why I come to see you so often. If you were dying, I should stay away."

"You're sure I'm living?"

"Certain."

"Even when I feel bad?"

"You won't feel bad much longer, Timothy. Some day now soon you'll have a big turn for the better. Then I'll come and take you away."

"And Miss Rags? Has she to come as well?"

"No. I think she'll stay here."

"But you said she was tired too. I think I should like us all three to be together."

"We'll see about her then."

"Dr Quack, have you heard Miss Rags sing?"

"No."

He turned his head to her side of the bed.

"Sing, please. Dr Quack's never heard you."

But Marigold could not even speak, and the doctor came to her assistance.

"Now I think of it, I have heard her sing, Timothy. I remember she has a very pretty voice."

"It's lovely. Dr Quack, you know my best queen, don't you?"

"Yes. What of her, little one?"

Marigold had never heard him speak so before. His voice was so soft it scarcely rose above a whisper, and he bent nearer the little figure on the bed.

"Well," continued the child, a certain excitement in his manner, "Miss Rags is just like her. She grows more like her every day."

"I think you're mistaken, Timothy." He had never spoken so coldly to the invalid before, and he moved back stiffly.

"No. No. I'm not! Last night, when everything was quiet, she came down out of the picture—right down—and she came and sat on the bed and took me in her arms—and I closed my eyes and leant up against her—and—and I know it was Miss Rags. No one else feels like her—no other woman—not mother, nor nurse, nor Aunt Alice; they're all kind and nice—but they aren't half so soft to lean against as Miss Rags. They aren't really."

Then this strange and unaccountable man got up, for he was acknowledged throughout the whole of Lucifram to be eccentric, and he went and stood with his back to them, looking at the picture a long time. And Marigold watched his face, and understood the meaning of it—and from it, part of the reason of his unfailing coldness to her—yet not the whole of it. And suddenly she went up quietly and stood beside him, looking also at the picture; and she said almost in a whisper:

"Timothy gets strange ideas now and then.

like most sick people do. I know I am not like the lady there, for she is good, acknowledged good, and I am only struggling to be."

And the haunting eyes, half-tender, half-laughing, looked down on them.

And again, still very softly, she continued:

"Did you love her?"

And he answered sternly, turning to look down at her:

"I still love her. What is that to you?"

But Marigold's face was very white and beautiful as she looked back at him, and she said:

"I asked, because she is so very beautiful." And, forgetful of her own beauty, went back to the bed.

"It's like, isn't it, Dr Quack?" piped Timothy's feeble voice from the bed.

"I don't think so even yet." And he turned very deliberately and went out of the room, even without saying "Good-morning" to them.

The look of pain on Timothy's face was to Marigold well-nigh unendurable.

"Where—where's he gone?" he cried, raising his head from the pillow.

"It's all right, Patches, dear. He's busy."

"No. No. Miss Rags, he's angry. I feel he's angry. Because—because I said you were like my best queen."

"You shouldn't have said it, Timothy, dear. I'm not like her. She is in Heaven, very, very good—and I'm not good, though I try to be."

"But I love you even if you're bad—it doesn't make any difference that."

And then he relapsed into silence. But all that day he fretted, and twice Marigold found him with big tears in his eyes. And she sang for him every song she could think of, repeating often those which were his favourites. And just about four o'clock he called her to him, and he whispered: "Miss Rags, will you send for Dr Quack?"

"I don't know where he lives."

"But I do—it's at the back of that picture."

So Marigold went and found, as he had said, "Marble House, Greensward Avenue," and she remembered noticing the building many times.

"What shall I say to him?"

"Ask him to come back. Say I'm very tired, and it's making me tireder."

But the message never went, because the doctor came before it got away.

"I've come to stay the evening, Timothy, to make up for running off this morning—I've come to stay till twelve o'clock."

"No!"

"Yes. We'll give Miss Rags an evening holiday, because she's tired, you know."

"But—but she always stays, and she always sings the evening hymns for me."

"Do you wish to stay?"

"Yes, I wish very much. I won't have him much longer—not—not if you are going to take him away. He—he loves me. So few people ever do that."

"Then," said he grimly, "you'll have to sing the evening hymns for me as well as Timothy."

And she answered very quietly:

"I sing the hymns to God."

CHAPTER XVIII

So did Marigold pass through the second fire, and came out partly purified.

Timothy lingered a few weeks in bed, suffering now more from actual weakness than pain, and every day for hours the doctor would come and sit with him.

During this time Marigold would sit silently sewing at the foot of the bed, ready to smile if ever Patches looked at her—content to be ignored by the doctor, whom she felt came purposely for so long a period, so that she might slip further back in the child's memory. It was a bitter thought to Marigold, yet she stifled it bravely. What a tale of silence those neat little stitches might have told!

"I think, Princess," said Alice one morning, "you ought to take a holiday to-day. You look simply worn out. We'll have you ill next. Suppose you take a holiday to-day, and I'll go in to Patches; he'll take on properly if you're laid up through him."

"I don't think perhaps he'd care, Alice. He has taken so little notice of any one these last few days—except—except the doctor. But I cannot stay away; it can't be much longer now. And I don't know what I'll do when he has gone. I've got so used to him, I love him so."

And so saying, she got up and went into the next cottage, for Patches had got past breakfasts now, and the nurse had had hers long since. She went upstairs with a curious tight feeling in her heart and throat, the little cottage seemed somehow so empty and forsaken and quiet, and even Patches' breathing that met her on the stairs seemed different this morning.

But when Marigold came to the door of the bedroom, she understood where the difference was. The little child was lying on his back, propped up with a pillow, and on his face were the unmistakable signs of fast-approaching death. The nurse was sitting watching him, and, as Marigold entered, she rose from her chair and came toward her softly.

"I'm afraid he won't last much longer—only an hour or two at most. He took this turn just after twelve last night."

"Why—why didn't you come for me?"

"The Master's orders. No one was to be disturbed at night."

"And his mother—is she here?"

"No—another order. She was not to be kept from her work on any account. I thought she would have wished to stay, but she did not seem to notice that the child was worse."

"Have you not been nervous all alone?"

"No. I'm used to it. Would you care for me to stay with you?"

"Yes, I should like you to. I don't understand much about it. I think it would be best for us both to stay—I—I——"

She did not finish, but moved over to the bedside.

Patches' half-closed eyes opened for the second, and he smiled—that smile that almost breaks the heart of the hungering watcher—and he moved his arm feebly along the folded sheet for her to take his hand. She took the hand and kissed it, then held it in her own, and her heart seemed bound in by a strong band of iron that prevented her moving or crying at all.

Thus for a long time they sat in silence, the nurse back in her accustomed seat, only the quick, troubled breathing, with its occasional pause and jerking, sounding through the little house.

Then the door downstairs opened, a step on the staircase, the nurse rose again, Marigold sat still, her back to the bedroom door, and with the

doctor's entry the tension seemed broken—perhaps because he spoke naturally enough, not in a whisper.

"You here still, Nurse? I thought you went off duty at nine o'clock."

"He is so much worse I thought I had better stay till the end."

"You will not be needed—or, if so, I'll send on for you. Good-morning!"

She took up her belongings, and quietly retired.

Patches still lay with his eyes closed, Marigold sitting by him.

The doctor knelt down by the bedside, and she half-turned her head to look at him—jealously, yet with admiration.

For what a contrast there was in these two figures before her! One, broad-shouldered, tall, the very embodiment of life and strength and intellect; the other, tiny and feeble, past thought, past all exertion—only a few little sparks of love left in his tiny frame.

The doctor took his other hand and bent over him carefully, so as not to exclude what air there was in the room.

"Timothy," he said very clearly, and a little louder than he generally spoke, "I've come for you—to take you. Won't you give me both your hands?"

Again the feeble smile and the half-opening of his eyes, and then he raised his hand with Marigold's, and drew it across.

Her heart beat with a certain triumphant pleasure, for his fingers had tightened over hers, almost miraculously, considering his weak state.

And the doctor took the two clasped hands, and he smiled, and very gently, very firmly, unclasped them from each other. It was the first time that her hand had come in contact with his, and in the thrill, as he took her hand in both of his, Marigold forgot the harsh presence of Death, and scarcely understood what he was doing, till her hand fell almost heavily upon the bed, and the little hand she coveted was lost within another's.

The chamber of death is rightly judged the place for one emotion only. A hundred surged through her, pricked into life by the touch of the strong, gentle hand, and the subsequent heartlessness. Yet she sat still, her big eyes fixed on the dying face, her cheeks white as the pillow that encircled it.

"You may go," said the doctor to her firmly, yet in a lower voice again. "You will not be needed. When I leave I will knock for you."

But Marigold's face had set hard and white.

"I won't go," she said. "I promised him once I'd stay till the end, and I will stay."

"You are a nuisance," he answered, evenly as before—no trace of passion in his voice.

"So are you," and all the world of subdued passion was in hers, and with big, gleaming eyes she looked across at him.

Then, for the first time since she had known him, a change came into the doctor's eyes as he knelt there looking at her. It was that dangerous light that brought no fear to Marigold, only a throbbing pleasure, seeing that she loved him.

And then the room went very, very still, and they both of them looked back at Timothy.

Yet there was more than the presence of Death in the room now—the presence of Love.

Marigold felt it hovering round the little child, sinking so peacefully—felt it round herself, the room full of it, and Death being vanquished. She forgot she did not hold the other hand, content to clasp her own trembling fingers each within each, and wait.

Very slowly and gradually, without hurry or haste of any kind, his breathing weakened. And then at last a little smile lit up the wan face, and he turned, with the last faint yearning of a child's love, towards the Master.

"I'm sleepy!" From his look and attitude it was as if he asked to be taken once more in the strong arms that had so often cradled him. And

very tenderly, for the last time on Lucifram, the Master drew him to him—the little head against his breast, sheltered from death and every other evil.

And so the dreamy shadows of silence crept over the fragile body—a smile of childish peace and contentment on the tender mouth. Some time passed so—Marigold watching; her whole soul in her eyes, having no thought for anything but them.

What was she expecting? She scarcely knew, but her clasped hands rested on the bed, as she leant forward, eagerly waiting. The dark head was bent over the child's, so that she could only see one face.

Then suddenly the little face fell back slightly from the doctor's shoulder, and, with a feeling of surprise and shock and utter pain, she realised that he was dead.

But very gently the doctor laid him back upon the bed, drawing the sheet; and then he rose to his feet, Marigold watching him.

Every emotion of love and tenderness and triumph was on his face—yet not for her, he had forgotten her—it was for Timothy.

And suddenly it was all more than she could bear, and from understanding nothing a quickened instinct taught her everything.

"I want him! I want him! He is my little baby! Take me too!"

Her own voice sounded scarcely more than that of a child, though all the abandonment of long pent-up nature rang in it—yet so pure and sweet.

And now again, for the second time that morning, the Master became aware of her presence there. Again, her eyes riveted on his, she saw the stronger light of passion rising up in them, and almost as Timothy had done, she smiled.

Then, as if she had been no heavier than a little child, he lifted her from her kneeling-place upon the bed, and all the happiness in Marigold's nature burst out in a sweet and merry, yet half-trembling laugh—for she did not care in this moment of abandonment whether he crushed every bone in her body, or smothered her with kisses, or anything, so long as he held her close up to him in this first paroxysm of love.

How long passed thus she never knew, till suddenly she felt the strong arms slacken as by some electric chilling shock.

She knew instinctively (though how she knew—perhaps there had been some rays of triumph mixed with Marigold's laugh) that his head had turned in the direction of the picture, but even she was not prepared for the reaction.

For the scorn and anger in his eyes were terrible, as for the moment he held her roughly at arm's-length, looking at her—scorn and anger and hatred, that sent all Marigold's blood chilled to her heart.

And then, with a savage sound of fury, he caught hold of her white throat (the throat he had so lately kissed) with his strong fingers, and flung her from him, dashing against the wall and ground —no more.

For now Silence reigned—Silence and Death—over two lifeless forms—one on the bed, face upwards; one in a huddled heap, face down, upon the floor.

CHAPTER XIX

A little while later, Alice, coming upstairs, found her mistress lying unconscious, and Timothy quite dead upon the bed. It was a shock to her, but Alice left to herself was somewhat phlegmatic, and, having lived with Marigold over five years, had got into the admirable habit of never being too surprised.

Timothy was dead, laid out peacefully upon the bed, just as when the Master put him there. For him nothing further could be done. With strange misgivings she turned to her mistress, kneeling down and turning her round towards the light.

A tiny stream of blood was running from a wound upon her throat—her face was white as death, and she unconscious. Alice brought water, smelling-salts, rubbed and chafed her hands, till gradually a little colour came to her cheeks, and the eyelids quivered. And suddenly she sat up with wild, open eyes, and her head turned in the direction of the picture. It had

gone. Alice, looking too in the same direction, perceived its absence, and to her mind came the one thought "thieves"—thus accounting for the disorder in the little room. For, miraculously, she had never seen the doctor pass that morning, coming or going away; and if she had seen, she would never have connected him with this sight before her—she believed so in his humanity and kindliness.

But Marigold shivered, and then looked towards the bed, and Alice thought she would have fainted again. But instead, she staggered to her feet and put her hand in Alice's arm, leaning heavily against her.

"Take me away from here," she whispered huskily; "take me away."

So Alice led her down the stairs and into their own tidy kitchen with the bright fire burning, and set her down beside it, and put the kettle on.

"I'll make you some tea, and then you'll feel better," she said soothingly. "Nothing like something hot when you're chill and faint."

"You must go back and look to—to—to him, Alice. I am quite right now. Go and get somebody to look to him, and then come back again."

So Alice, being commanded, went as she was told, and left Marigold alone.

And, when the door was shut, Marigold got up, still trembling, and crept towards the looking-glass. Her neck was bandaged with a handkerchief, and with trembling fingers she untied the clumsy knot, and there—yes, there—smarting and burning, was the torn wound, discolouring the shapely neck.

"What long finger-nails!" she said, and went back to her chair unevenly, and sat down in it. And then she laid her head against the back, and laughed—laughed and held her sides with laughing, unable to stop. And it was perhaps as well Alice was not there—or anybody, for it was worse than the most heartrending sobs.

When Alice returned, nearly an hour later, she found her mistress exhausted, yet feverish and restless, with flushed cheeks and burning eyes.

"Alice," she said petulantly, "how soon you're back. I don't want you yet, I want to be all alone for a time. Go and tell Mrs Wiggs that her son is dead."

"We don't know where she's working."

"Number 7 Crescent Park. She must certainly be told at once."

And Alice went out silently—apparently to go; but said she to herself when on the pavement:

"I'll go for Mrs Wiggs, but I'll go for Dr Quack

as well. I won't take the responsibility of her any longer. She's nothing but a skeleton, and that colour's worse than none."

So saying, she hurried off in the direction of Marble House, sure of a sympathetic welcome.

CHAPTER XX

BUT as Alice went up the many steps towards the gloomy entrance, she felt unaccountably somewhat less assured. There was no mistaking the house, because a policeman had directed her to the very steps; and with some surprise she noticed there was no plate explaining the doctor's whereabouts.

"Let's see," said Alice to herself. "A doctor writes 'doctor' before his name. And what are those other men—'surgeons'? They've less about them, I believe, because they're plain Mister. Perhaps he's a surgeon, and so doesn't trouble about putting it outside. Private means, maybe."

With the assurance, therefore, of ignorance, she advanced and rang the bell.

The door was opened swiftly, noiselessly, and inside stood one—not Everard, but one trained to a silent perfection, even as he.

"Can I see the doctor?"

It was well or ill for Alice that at this moment

she remembered the card—Timothy's card that Marigold had given her when she should have come to Marble House before, on Timothy's pathetic little message. It was still in her pocket, neatly wrapped in white paper just as then, and, with the instinct that she wasn't going to get in, and with the firm determination that she would do so, she produced it.

It had the decided effect, when he had looked at it back and front, of admitting her into the large hall with which you are already well acquainted. And he went off to the west wing, leaving her sitting on an uncomfortably high chair, and everything around quite dark and gloomy.

"Poor man!" said she, with that ignorant pity we so often feel for our neighbours. "No wife, therefore no taste! Now, who in their right senses would furnish a house like this? Plenty of money—piles, I should say, from the look of things—but nothing homely. Rather have the cottage than this! Now, if only the Princess would take a fancy to him—make love to *him* instead of to his holiness—all this would be kicked out of the door in a month's time, or—or made to look different. A very good idea! I'll work upon it. He's taken an interest in her ever since the first—I know, because I've seen him looking at her—but she was so taken up with

Patches she never saw; and, besides, a sensible man never did interest her—never any one, unless she could be mimicking about like them."

Here the doorkeeper re-entered the hall.

"The Master is busy. He cannot see you."

The tone was as brusque and decided as possible, but Alice, being in earnest, paid no heed to it.

"I *must* see him. It's very important. Something very serious has happened."

"It is no use, I'm afraid. He cannot see you."

"But he must—I really must see him. It is about something that happened this morning, and he knows nothing about it at all."

"I should advise you to go."

"I won't go," she said stubbornly.

"If you won't go," said he politely, "the only thing I can do is to go back and get orders to put you out forcibly."

"All right, go!" said Alice, the spirit of the lower orders beginning to assert itself, and a sharp suspicion rising in her about the morning's thief.

For one minute he stood waiting her decision, but it did not alter, and he went away.

And Alice, suspicion being roused in her, found it very quickly followed by dislike. Why should an honest man be too busy to see an honest woman? Her mind could not perceive such limitations to the path of honesty;

Then again the door to the west wing opened, and out came Mr Barringcourt, followed by the servant.

"What is it?"

The shadowy eyes were bent on her—steel shining through the shadow.

"Timothy's dead—and my—my niece has collapsed altogether. She's—dangerously ill."

"Hysterical, you mean. Leave her alone—she'll be all right in the morning."

"Look here, sir, I know my niece. She isn't hysterical, though she may be flighty. And she's got a nasty wound on her neck—nails, sir—human nails, I call them."

"You are very melodramatic, you beggar-folk!" he said, turning to leave her.

"We're not beggar-folk. I'll tell you what, she's a better born woman than you are a man—now!"

"Very possibly—very possibly. Is this all you've come to tell me?"

"No; I came, honestly believing you an honest doctor, to ask you to come and see her."

"I don't understand women's ailments—never studied them. A douche of cold water is all I can think of to recommend."

"You big brute!" said Alice, and such a healthily untrained voice had never, never been heard in Marble House before.

"I told your niece, or your daughter, or whatever she is," he said, suddenly turning again to her and bending his dark eyes to hers; "I told her she was not to nurse Timothy. She persisted in the teeth of everything — first snubs, then, I may say, insults. She has nursed him — and incidentally she fell in love with me. I tell you all the phases of her disease, so that in nursing her you may understand the symptoms. She lost him, he was bound to die from the beginning. I told her so. And now she has lost me, I suppose, and sent you to bring me back. But I am not coming, Aunt Alice. She will die of consumption —slowly—very slowly. You'll have plenty of time to get used to it, so don't look so pale. And she has no one but herself to thank for it. It used to irritate me to see her in the room."

"You're a liar! You loved her more than she loved you."

"Oh! has she told you of—of this morning?"

"No, but I guessed. You're a thief, too."

Alice was thinking of the picture, for she had not heard of its history.

"I'm everything that's bad. You can tell your niece so—it may cure her of her infatuation."

"I'll tell her nothing. She isn't the one to break her heart over any man, though it pleases you to think so. But just you wait, sir, and one of these

nice days you'll jump finely. Just you wait, and even a douche of cold water won't cure *you*."

And so Alice, strung to the fine pitch of irony, turned her back and trudged away through the echoing hall, and the door closed behind her.

Then from there, pulling herself together, for the interview, short as it was, had terribly upset her, she went on to Crescent Park. Mrs Wiggs received the news as most of her class, and was sent home in a cab loudly bemoaning.

And Marigold heard her get out of the conveyance and sob loudly as she entered the house, where a neighbour was now awaiting. And Marigold shivered.

But Alice walked home in the dusk, and crossing the large deserted space before the Temple, she met St Armand. He knew her, though only having seen her once; and not only that, he must have known her name.

"Good-evening, Alice. Is anything wrong at your place?"

Oh! balm on wounds, to be spoken to with such sympathetic interest by one gentleman when so rudely snubbed by another.

"Wrong?" she cried, breaking down despite her efforts. "Mistress is ill. The little boy she was nursing died this morning, and she's quite broken down."

"Ah! and the little boy had a doctor, I believe —a quack doctor?"

"Yes, indeed; a hateful man — a hypocrite who took everybody in."

"What's the matter with your mistress?"

"Why, he says she's got consumption. But I can't bear to think of it—indeed I can't."

"He knows nothing. He makes as many mistakes as a fashionable doctor."

"How do you know she hasn't?" said Alice, longing to be assured.

"Well, I'm not quite sure. But if I saw her I could easily tell."

"Are you a doctor too, then?"

"No; but I know as much about it as he does —perhaps more. He hasn't the sympathy with women that I have. He hasn't got a wife, you see."

Alice, remembering the Master's words, felt what an admirable thing a wife must be.

"Come and see her, will you?" she asked bluntly.

"When did the little boy die?"

"This morning."

"Oh! bless me, the symptoms haven't had time to develop yet. When did she last see the doctor?"

"This morning, too."

"Ah! he has probably an excellent reason

for thinking she has consumption then. It will enable him to still come to see her."

"Heaven forbid!" said Alice. "He spoke to-night as no godly gentleman ever would have done, and he'll never cross our threshold again. But wait!" she went on triumphantly; "wait! When he finds out who he's been insulting and flinging impudence at, he may alter his tone. The hignoramus!"

"Can it really be true he took your mistress for nothing better than a beggar girl?"

"Of course. And he was too proud to fall in love with her. Too proud! He! with an old hull of a house, furnished with nothing else but odds and ends of furniture meant for a musty museum. If he'd known she was a Princess, he'd have jumped at her—though, no doubt, when it came to the test, she'd have been too proud to marry him. Hignoramus!"

"He or she?"

"Oh, he! calling her my 'niece' or my 'daughter.'" (Alice minced the words as it is only fair to Mr Barringcourt to say he never did do.) "But that is the worst of being trained like me in the best houses. You get out of the way of giving cheek when it's needed."

"Any one could see you have been most admirably trained."

"My word! the old housekeeper at Ellel Palace was a terror to the worst of us."

"Oh! ah! the Princess Marigold has very well disguised herself."

"Holy Serpent! what have I told you?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all, my good woman. And, if you have, I am not likely to repeat it. Now I must go. But see—here's my address. If your mistress is no better to-morrow, send for me, and I'll provide the very best physicians."

CHAPTER XXI

BUT, when she was gone, St Armand stood under a gas lamp, and leant against the post, and laughed, held his sides with laughing, just as Marigold had done—only from different reasons. Then, when he had laughed, he went off to the Priest's Palace and his own private apartments, because he and his holiness were not really on the best of terms just then, because the High Priest persisted in sacrificing his inclinations to respectability and habit, and St Armand would have kicked the last two to Jericho—that is, from one planet on to another, you perceive. True, the morning after meeting Marigold, and the bitter jealousy occasioned in Alphonso by St Armand's conversation of that night, he had gone again with his strange lingering guest into the Temple grounds. But no vision in rags appeared upon the scene. Piqued, as a child might be, after an hour's wait he insisted on going home. And not all St Armand's persuasion could get him to repeat his visit to the cottage.

It is likewise true the lithe octogenarian had frequently passed through Friar's Court to try his blandishments upon the lady. But she, as has been said, was passing through those fires invisible to the mortal eye, which he, by long experience, had learnt not to burn his hands upon.

"Good fit, this," said he whimsically to himself; "I wonder when it will pass away? One of these days she'll feel too good, then the reaction will set in. Meanwhile I must lie cooped up in that wretched hen-roost of a monastery—*waiting*. Of all things I detest, it's waiting. There's one thing, though. When I have properly subdued them, I make them wait—to the wretched state of being forgotten."

When Alice left him she hurried home, conscious of being much later than she had any excuse for being. And when she got there, she found that Marigold had lit the lamp, laid the cloth, and set the tea-cups, all to her unutterable surprise.

"Why," said she in amazement, "I thought you were on the brink of high fever?"

Marigold smiled.

"Oh no! I'm not one of those women with a convenient constitution that breaks down just when things get unendurable."

"Are things unendurable to you, Princess?"

"They are just about. If I were a real beggar girl, I think I should take poison."

"Heaven forbid!"

"As it is, I'm going back to my own house to-morrow."

"To Fairy Sky?"

"Oh no! Here. You can send them word to-night. There are one or two more interesting people this side of Lucifram than there were a month or two ago. I shall stay here a little longer."

"I'll be glad to be back again, Princess."

"So shall I. I consider the life of the poor unendurable. Or perhaps it is you're flattered so idiotically when you're rich that you can't stand the other thing after. I know quite well, if all these people had known who I was in reality, they would have treated me quite differently. I always thought women were stupid enough, but *men*, oh! defend me from them. They're ten times worse."

"Yes. I always think the best men die young like Timothy, Princess."

"Timothy?" and there was a strange recklessness and rage in her voice and eyes. "Don't mention him to me, Alice—never again. When —when he was dying he turned away from me—on his side—away to the doctor. He had

forgotten me. I wanted him to turn my way."

"I'd be more inclined to blame the doctor than him."

A queer vivid light flashed into Marigold's wonderful eyes.

"I don't blame the doctor. He is an ignorant quack, who wants teaching manners."

And then she laughed with a little panting breath.

"Did you see those ugly marks on my neck?—that's the doctor. Did you see me lying in a heap upon yonder floor?—that's the doctor. Did you see that picture gone?—that's the doctor. Did you see Timothy lying dead?—that's the doctor too. He wouldn't let him live—wouldn't even prolong his life by sending him away—when once I asked him to."

"Ah! he's a bad lot," said Alice mournfully; "a bad, bad lot. How did he make those ugly marks upon your neck?"

"Finger-nails. He shook me like a rat, just because I wanted Timothy."

She was standing there, her fingers clasped, more like a child than a woman—exquisitely beautiful in this recklessness—something that made Alice tremble, because she knew that at the back of it there was nothing but smarting, unendurable pain.

But she knew it would be dangerous to offer sympathy, so, like the sensible woman she was, she began stirring round, making the tea. "I met Mr St Armand to-night as I came across the square."

"Oh! he isn't *Mr* St Armand. He is Saint Armand. That's his title—just in the same way that—— Well, go on, Alice. What did he say to you?"

"Nothing! He asked me how you were, Princess; and I said the little boy you were nursing was dead, and you felt it."

"How ridiculous! I shall go out to-morrow with the hope of meeting him to contradict it. Now, I like St Armand—he is the only man who has treated me the same, princess or beggar maid. If he was rude to me, it was the rudeness of equality; and his politeness had no sticky condescension in it. I wonder how the High Priest is getting on? I've learnt a tremendous lot this last two months, Alice. The only thing I need now to become a fully-fledged woman is practical experience—experience and inches."

"Will you be ordering a wreath for Timothy?" asked Alice later, as she ate the tea that Marigold could scarcely touch.

"No."

And then, in a different tone, after some minutes had elapsed:

" Alice, I'm very ill—in mind and spirit—not in body—and I can't think properly at all. I used to love Timothy—I loved him more this morning than ever I had done, and now, and now I can't do. It is the thought of that — that last time. He could lie there without a tear—without a word, and see me trampled on and hurt. I know it's reasonless. You'll say that he was dead. It's the strange power of the doctor's words, I think. For, ever in those last few days he would repeat them — almost hypnotically: ' I'll come for you and take you away, Timothy '—' I'll come for you and take you away.' And he did come, and —I—I was left behind. But that's not the worst. I can't explain to you the worst—it was so—so unexpected. And I daren't sleep in that bedroom next to his to-night. I dare not—for I have always prayed for him at night—night and morning—and to-night I cannot. He has gone away, and he doesn't want my prayers. And I can't think at all, I can only feel. So I'll come and sleep with you. You won't mind for one night ? I'll be better to-morrow. For lately I haven't slept well at all of nights. I have felt so ill and weak. And every night just after midnight I awake with such a terrible feeling of fear—as if something were drawing all the life out of me, and leaving nothing but a paralysed skeleton behind.

And, and—I think I'm like Timothy. If you will only put your arm around me whilst we sleep, I think I shall feel safer."

And then suddenly she buried her face in her hands.

"Oh, Alice! Alice!" she cried; "if only he would have loved me, how I would have loved him!"

And then as suddenly she got up, a certain stiffness in her movements, as if she suffered from some cramping pain.

"I'll wash the tea things. I want something to do. You write the letter and get a boy to take it to the post. I don't want you to go out again. Thank Heaven we go to-morrow! This little cottage stifles me. It has been a nightmare, and I thought it was to be a novel holiday."

And that night, when everything was silent, St Armand took his usual midnight stroll, calling upon his neighbours. And when he came to that sad room where Marigold and Alice slept, he stared with much surprise and some amusement.

"Here's a sight to gladden the heart of the most rabid anarchist," said he. "Who would have thought that Royalty could so far forget itself? But illness makes strange creatures of us, and the little girl *is* ill. Very different from my first visit here. I must see what I can do.

Even the devil is not so black as he is painted—unless he gets the opportunity!"

Then, from curiosity only, he passed into Timothy's silent room—like a shadow lost on the wall.

"Not the stereotyped death-smile at all, Timothy," said he. "They rave so here on Lucifram about the smile of death, which is at best as hollow and vacuous as that of the best painted society dame. But you've managed differently, somehow or other — thanks to the quack doctor, I suppose. Now, I wonder how those two parted this morning, for I presume they parted here—there's so much electricity about. Misunderstanding, probably vowing they hated one another—for this isn't all the Positive current of love." And for the second time that day he held his sides with laughing, and instead of leaning on a lamp-post, he sat upon the bed. And the thin, wasted figure of little Patches lay quite still, content and peace and ineffable sweetness on his tiny baby face, for he had grown so very small of late.

And at last St Armand rose, and before going, stooped over him again. And he patted the cold cheek almost kindly.

"Well, well, my little boy, you're out of it. If I could have done you an ill turn, I would have done—but, unavoidably, I couldn't."

CHAPTER XXII

So the next day Marigold and Alice returned to the Palace in the suburbs, which had been rented from a Duke whose pockets were always empty. And it was quite a treat again to be in the long gardens and the big airy rooms, away from poverty and the extreme closeness of neighbours. So, at least, Alice found—she who was less susceptible to surroundings than her mistress, yet at present evidently more so. For, though Marigold went back to her usual dress and her usual occupations, and received calls from certain stately ladies who had heard of her return from abroad, and returned them, it was all done without heart or life, or, rather, such a pathetic imitation that Alice could not bear to see.

For now no more the gay voice rang through the corridors, nor the merry laugh; and the stoutest, stiffest dowager might come and go without one smile, one wry face or mimic action as the door closed. Marigold, who did it with no thought of offence, nor forgetfulness of her own short-

comings, but because it came so natural, and one must laugh at these dear things just as one laughed at oneself. And now, instead of the bright colours that had so greatly suited her, she dressed in nothing but black; and one day, when Alice remonstrated, having heard some remarks from the servants on her altered looks, she turned to a window, and for a minute the absent colour rose in her cheeks.

"You forget; Timothy is dead," she said, and the subject never rose again.

Yet to Alice, in these simple silk frocks, she looked more lovely than ever before; and then again, the other difference, the close band of velvet round her neck, hiding the red scar that still spoilt, and perhaps would always spoil, the lovely neck.

And many a time Alice would find her sitting alone in the big gardens with their bright-coloured flowers and the butterflies playing round, and to her the Princess looked nothing but that fairest, sensitive plant, the heavenly lily, transformed from a golden butterfly into something lovelier still. Then Alice, to hide her feelings, would scold from the distance, where she was not heard, and had no wish to be.

"Moping," said she, in the homely language of those who are not taught to pick their words

except in company. "Moping, and it's not all for Timothy. And it's wearing her into her grave. Consumption! That's what he said to salve his conscience. Telling me the symptoms so that I might know them when they rose. And it's as well, perhaps, because I'd never have guessed myself—I thought it was all the other way about. But what can I do—what can I do?"

And one day a brilliant idea struck her—send for St Armand. He who, in their return to the old life, had quite slipped her memory. Was he not a gentleman of good birth?—a friend of the great High Priest? And had he not promised her the best physicians?—though her mistress absolutely refused to have a doctor near the place.

So she wrote a plain letter to the address that he had given her—the High Priest's Palace—and asked for his advice.

And the next afternoon Marigold walked out alone as usual in the flower-gardens, taking a book and some trivial needlework, and sat as usual, thinking and grieving, and scarcely understanding what she felt. And looking up, she beheld St Armand approaching her, with the easy confidence that characterised him.

"Marigold! This is better than a game of hide-and-seek—now that I've found you."

His manner was so kind, his voice so cheerful,

that she smiled, though the colour had risen all over her neck and face, for he was one of the links in her past life—had he not been intimately acquainted with the doctor ?

" How did you find me ? "

He sat down beside her. " A restless activity that leads me to discover everything. You have treated us somewhat shabbily."

" Whom ? "

" Myself, who wished to be your friend ; and the High Priest, who wished to be your lover."

Marigold took up the handkerchief she was embroidering.

" Believe me, I have grown too old for that last. I am no longer so thoughtless as I used to be."

" How old *are* you, Marigold ? "

" I don't know. They never kept count, and it was impossible, under the circumstances, that I should do."

And the first tantalising smile crept on to her face as she looked across at him, though with a difference from the olden times.

" You're not too old for friendship, though. I will speak candidly—you're looking very ill."

She drew herself up a little stiffly.

" It is the climate."

" The climate is delightful. You nursed Timothy Wiggs too untiringly."

"Don't call him Timothy Wiggs. We never—I never used his last name."

"I think, if you could bring yourself to call him Timothy Wiggs six consecutive times without stopping, you would be quite cured of your infatuation."

"Sir!" said she, rising to her feet.

"Saint, you mean. Sit down, Princess. It is only fools and hypocrites who can't bear plain speaking. Sit down."

He spoke so authoritatively, that somehow she obeyed him.

"You imagined a great deal about Timothy Wiggs, you know."

"Oh, please don't. He was the sweetest little boy I ever met."

"I don't doubt. They're all sweet when they're too ill to make themselves obnoxious in any other department. Shall I tell you why you got to imagining great things of the little Wigg boy?"

"No."

"Yes. Barringcourt came along with his good looks and better figure. He talked a lot of nonsense to Timothy, and incidentally to you—he's good at it. And the nonsense was so sweet, you fell in love with it. Believe me, it's all nonsense from beginning to end."

"It isn't," and unconsciously she put her hand up to her throat.

"Oh no. *That* isn't. But the rest is. He has a temper that would lock most men up in a lunatic asylum."

No answer.

"Not only that, but he is absolutely made without a heart."

The white hands trembled over the embroidery.

"Not only that, but he has a habit of despising those who show theirs too freely—as perhaps, being young, you may have done."

The handkerchief had fallen—her hands were clenched.

"I never did! I never did! I stifled every feeling, I never showed a thing. And I won all along the way till—till just the end. And then I was weak and ill, and I couldn't help it—and even then I don't know what I did."

"No; I expect it's one of those cases in which men blame women, and women blame men, instead of going equal shares. But is it true you're going to sit here moping, making him believe that with you it was all a serious affair—whilst with him it was nothing but a passing folly?"

Marigold looked up at him.

"What do you advise?"

"Get back some of your old life. Not all of it.

Men are heavy—even the best of them. They don't understand."

"I will never speak or look at him again."

"Oh yes, you will. You imagine you've done something terrible, and, in reality, you've done nothing at all. Look like that long enough, and people will begin to believe dreadful things of you. Marigold, you are now quits with Mr Barringcourt. He has broken your heart—smashed it completely, when he flung you there upon the ground. And with no heart left—that wretched stumbling-block in the path of all successes—you are free and safe. Here is the High Priest longing to see you once again—but too big a coward—too eaten up with habit—to step out of his monastic shell. If you wish to hurt Barringcourt, to humble him as he has humbled you——"

"I don't think I do," said Marigold sweetly and earnestly, shaking her lily head, as if these baser passions were rather big enigmas to her.

St Armand stopped. Then he looked across at her and smiled—the child-like voice having arrested his thoughts as well as words. And suddenly he moved across the seat towards her, and took her hands in his.

"Well then, at any rate you're no woman if you wouldn't care for him to fall in love with you

—or learn, at least, that you were made for admiration, not for contempt. You must rouse out of this lifelessness. It is not becoming to your station."

"But—but," said she, sadly and yet shyly, "it would be so easy to admire a Princess—even to love her. And I feel so uncertain of myself. My neck—it was so very beautiful, and now I'm forced to wear this bandage round. For what is it but a bandage, even with pearls? And lately I've felt more forgiving—this last few days; but now, whilst you are speaking to me, the scars seem to have gone red-hot. Oh! he had no business to hurt me so—no business at all!"

"That's what I keep telling you. Rouse up! and enjoy life—heartless or broken-hearted."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE next day being Sunday, Marigold went to the Temple for the morning service. It was not a long drive, and she sat in the big carriage, very stiff and straight, beside the old stone-deaf governess, who generally accompanied her to these affairs—strictly, however, when she was invited.

They had just risen from their knees when Marigold perceived Mr Barringcourt and St Armand pass them to a seat just beyond on the other side of the aisle. Again she felt that burning feeling on the scars on her neck, and a hundred quick emotions and memories throbbed in her heart and brain. It was not easy to sit there straight and calm, but Marigold managed it, and all through the service listened attentively, but with lack of interest, to what was going on. But now and again her strange, expressive eyes would wander across to the two figures opposite — so different, yet in some unaccountable way so much alike.

The High Priest preached himself — a very

learned and eloquent address, all about nothing, yet marvellously well delivered, though in a pompous way.

Marigold studied him. Where had all the old infatuation vanished? All that exuberance of spirits that made her see something exceptional in everything he did and said?

"I can't," she said to herself. "It is too much fag—going acting through life."

And then her eyes stole across again to the dark figure opposite—and the feeling of fag vanished.

So, when the service was over, it was Marigold who, having prayed no prayer at all, rose to her feet with a quiet face and beating heart. She took her long gold-handled umbrella, and gathered up her silken trailing skirts with a quiet grace that was the admiration of many watching—for on Lucifram half the people went to Church to see the other half, and the other half mostly to see each other.

And stepping down from the pew, her eyes came straight to the eyes of Mr Barringcourt. It was the first time he knew her to be in the Church, and, for the first instant, though he looked at her with interest, he did not recognise her. And even then his expression was more that of incredulous surprise than recognition.

But Marigold was more prepared; and though every joint in her body felt loose and powerless, she walked on down the aisle without showing any signs of it at all. But on the steps, before entering her carriage, she was accosted by St Armand.

"Good-morning, Princess. What delightful weather we are having! It is almost a pity there are such things as sermons, with the sun shining like this."

"Oh! I liked the sermon very well. His holiness has such a wonderful delivery; it is a pleasure to listen to him."

Thus she spoke to the little man in the old sweet voice grown sweeter, but her thoughts were all with the taller one who stood waiting, standing to one side.

"You do not know Mr Barringcourt," said he, keeping all the maliciousness out of his voice, and speaking only with politeness. "The Princess Marigold of—of—Ellel."

A strange, deep colour, that left him unusually pale, flushed into Mr Barringcourt's face, and Marigold, who had always found him so easily self-controlled and self-assured, felt a certain pleasure in it. Yet she gave no signs of it, but inclined her head very coldly, and just as coldly he returned her salutation, and in the silence that

followed she entered the carriage. It was St Armand who closed the door, and to him her last glance was directed, and she smiled as they rolled away.

And then Mr Barringcourt turned to him—his hands deep in his pockets.

"Is that—is that the beggar girl?"

"No—it's the Princess."

"Is it the beggar girl, St Armand?"

"You know as much about that as I. Looks very like her, I should say."

"And have you known this all along?"

"Known what?"

"Who she is."

"No, but I've *guessed* at it. I possess a marvellous intuition, you know. But you yourself, surely you have guessed at it too?"

"No. By the Holy Serpent, no!"

"Did you seriously take her for a beggar girl?"

"I took her for what she said she was—what she acted up to."

"Who would have given you credit for such stupidity? To believe a woman so implicitly! But, after all, with your reputation, princess or beggar maid, it is all the same to you."

"You called her the Princess of Ellel," he answered harshly. "There is no Princess of Ellel—Ellel in Fairy Sky belongs to me."

"Well, that's what she calls herself. I'm sure I don't know. If you object, bring a law-suit. It is stamped on her belongings—'Marigold—Princess of Ellel.' That would be evidence sufficient for any judge."

"And you have known this and never told me?"

"I simply got to know yesterday. I was wandering through the Duke of Mendona's grounds, valuing his effects from idle curiosity. Suddenly I came across our little beggar girl, all dressed up in silks, pearls round her neck, high up under the chin—curious fashion that, when a woman has a lovely neck"—and he looked out of the corners of his eyes at the haggard face of his companion—"so naturally I stopped to speak, and she explained the episode of Friar's Court was nothing but a girlish prank. She didn't call it a prank—her words were all picked from the choicest dictionary."

"I don't believe it."

"Do you accuse her of using slang? No; please don't look so devilishly angry, Barringcourt. I really don't want to wear pearls round my neck, much as they might enhance my natural complexion. Moreover, my neck is rather tough and scraggy—the last thing on Lucifram for you to try your strength upon."

He saw by the rigid face that every idle word had hit.

"Was—was she badly hurt?"

"Well, women are very inconsistent. You wring their neck one day, and they don't feel it; the next you touch them with your little finger, and they faint right off."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, she fainted, didn't she? That shows the little finger process."

"Oh! I was under the impression I wrung her neck."

But he wasn't laughing, neither did he mean to imply that Marigold had not felt what he had done. St Armand alone perceived it, and he smiled tolerantly enough.

"By the way," he said suddenly, "you must have known her. Hasn't she lived at your Palace in Fairy Sky all these years, and isn't that exactly the place where you have been?"

"You know I have not been there."

"Ah! I remember. Alphonso said your letter dropped from Heaven, but it was beastly sharply-worded to have come from such a place. You'll give them a bad reputation up there. Now, when they wanted to take your one house, you should have offered them also the other. They'd have

swallowed both without needing pepsin tablets, I can tell you."

"I'm going."

"So am I. Remember you've asked me to lunch, and too much Sunday doesn't suit me. Alphonso's like a third-rate ship biscuit. It's nothing but ME—my office and my Church! I wonder the Serpent doesn't swallow him. Too hard and dry, perhaps—not soft enough about the neck."

So they went back to Marble House together —these two so friendly on all points but one. And all that afternoon the Master gave to his companion—observing the strict rules of an etiquette that made them both for the time being the most charming companions of all.

And Marigold went back to the Palace, and Alice sat with her reading all the afternoon. And a very proud little curve had settled on Marigold's lips, for she kept saying to herself:

"How could I ever love him?—a man to whom one's position in the world makes such a difference. When I was poor he was always self-assured and self-composed, and even when he might have hurt me badly, he never cared or sent once to enquire. And as soon as I am rich—he hears my name—a Princess—that quick confusion, even a startled, anxious look at the strings round my neck. Oh!

it is too despicable—more than I can stand. I think I could forgive him everything but that."

So do we all at times misjudge our neighbours.

And that night the High Priest said to St Armand, with excitement in his manner:

"There has been twice at Church to-day a lady dressed in black, bearing a wonderful, though more refined resemblance to the beggar girl—to Marigold. I think I've seen her there before. I noticed she observed me pointedly. That is the style of woman I admire. The beggar girl was pretty, but too coarse in her manner—too free in her speech for a cultivated mind. These poor! when they open their mouths, how they disappoint one!"

So did he speak—himself believing what he said. And thus St Armand patiently—the High Priest never seeing the contemptuous smile.

"The beggar girl, I grant, was empty-headed, coarse, and uncultivated in her speech—but she was pretty. This lady whom you speak of is the Princess of Ellel—Marigold too. But more than different when you come to speak to her."

Thus was the High Priest blinded—believing as his prejudices swayed and St Armand taught him.

CHAPTER XXIV

NEXT afternoon, as Marigold was sitting near a window, idle as usual, the great High Priest was ushered in.

He came without any qualms of conscience, any loss of worldly dignity, without having to stoop his head to get within the door, and with no sense of being too big for the room where he now found himself.

Marigold, from her seat in the far window, saw him coming, and rose to greet him. Her heart beat a little faster, yet not with love, or that more common form, infatuation, but with a little sense of power and some unshown amusement.

But he, after all these weeks and their humiliations, forsaken by a beggar girl and laughed at by St Armand, felt his thin pulses quicken—for the face and figure before him were very beautiful, very dignified—an ideal wife for one in Holy Orders—had he not been too high.

"The Princess of Ellel, I believe?"

She smiled very sweetly, and drew a chair

for him beside her own, near to the open window.

"It is not often I have such visitors," she said. "It is ages and ages since I saw a clergyman except in Church."

"I think you are a stranger to these parts. I noticed you in the Temple for the first time yesterday."

"Yes; I live in Fairy Sky, and am renting this house from the Duke of Medona just for a little time. This is a pretty country."

"But nothing to your own. The only dark blot on the fair beauty of your country is its religion."

"I don't know much about it."

"You are a follower of the Serpent, I believe?"

She shook her head.

"I was brought up to worship nothing — at least, to worship something that I couldn't see. But that is very unsatisfactory, you know. Now —now, with you, there really is something behind that wondrous curtain, is there not?"

How should he perceive the smile within those wondrous eyes, so shadowy, so bright, so tender, and so serious?

"Believe me, the only true God."

"Is there any chance of ever really seeing Him?"

"For men, yes; for women, not—not at present."

"I don't see why it should not be—do you?"

Marigold's voice was very soft and persuasive, her eyes more so.

"It is a canon of the Church," he answered rigidly. Then, seeing her face, he added more unsteadily: "Laws are laws, Princess, much as at times we feel they might be broken."

A sigh he heard, and which, despite his narrow education, he also understood, escaped the coral lips and was her only answer.

Again that dangerous stillness settled on the room, as once before in the Cathedral precincts.

He looked across at her, too weak to look away. Marigold smiled. Why not? for he was there to play with, and ease the horrid aching of her heart.

"It seems to me," said he, "that I have met you previously. I feel as if I'd known you quite a lifetime."

"I too. I felt it in the Temple yesterday, and now again to-day."

"And you, being young, should have the better memory."

But Marigold's lips had almost pouted, and she shook her head.

"I should like *you* to remember where it was you first saw *me*."

"I cannot think. Only some weeks ago, I met a girl who struck me as being rather like you."

"But not very?"

"No, indeed. Her prettiness was her nearest qualification. But her hair was very tousled, and her general appearance most untidy."

"And I am the essence of neatness," and Marigold laughed.

"An absolute necessity to distinguished beauty."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it. Are you interested at all in charitable work, Princess?"

"Well, occasionally. But in Fairy Sky there were so many beggars you didn't know where to begin and where to stop. They seem to be better organised here. Now, your charity dinners——"

"You have heard of them?"

"Oh yes. Every one has praised them to me. Should I give you a subscription? I should simply love to."

"I—they are quite a private charity?"

"I should like to take part in a private charity. When you give to public ones, it all goes in big salaries to the wrong people."

"But I could never think of asking any one to subscribe to the dinners."

"But I am such a stranger. And your charity appeals to me. Yet I would not for the world set up in opposition."

And they both laughed. Yet it pleased the

High Priest that she should wish to join him in something—and at her own request.

"Then we have shelter homes for women——"

But here Marigold got up and stopped him by going across and laying her hand upon his chair.

"I don't want to hear any more," she said. "Charities only interest me in the morning. Do you not find it very lonely in your big Palace—all alone?"

Her voice acted on him like a spell, as it always had done.

"At times, yes, it is very lonely."

"So it is here."

"But you are young. You can have the companionship that pleases you."

"Indeed, no. I was brought up with a very exalted idea of my own position—very quiet and exclusive. And it is hard to break through a life-training. Only now and then I feel as if I really want to run away."

"A natural feeling in youth."

"Then you are young, because sometimes you want to run away too."

He sat, at a loss for words, because, after all, it needs practice to talk to a woman lightly and retain one's common-sense. Especially when you've gone a whole lifetime asking to be delivered from them in order to satisfy a capital ambition.

"I feel very sorry for you," she continued, half-laughing. "I should like you to feel sorry for me."

Again he had no words, but Marigold knew that she was not distasteful to him.

"I should love to see through the Temple," she continued. "I feel happy there — far more at home than here."

"I will take you myself, whenever you care to go," he answered, getting up eagerly. "Fix a day. To-morrow or any day I am quite at your service."

And Marigold looked up at him and blushed, just sufficient for beauty and nothing more.

"I should like to go now—this afternoon."

And the imperious tone, the imperious action, coming, as it did, like an unexpected lightning flash after sweetness and gentleness and childish loveliness, completed from that moment his moral downfall.

Never having been a lover, he became a slave, and, like most men who in theory admire the gentle, placid woman, it was in practice the domineering woman who had conquered him. A domineering woman, with a voice like music, and the manner of an empress, and the waywardness of a child.

So she drove back with him in the big, lumbersome High Priest's carriage; and her face and

station and the simple mourning robe were sufficient guarantee of decorum, even had his character not been.

The Temple was silent and grand as ever, and it impressed Marigold as it had never failed to do, for it brought back some heavy remembrance to her that she mistook for admiration of its exquisite beauty.

And he explained everything, whilst she listened most attentively; and the dim religious light suited her deep eyes and delicate ethereal face, as it suited all those saints and martyrs who carried golden sunbeams round their heads and were a credit to the great masters who had painted them.

"These panels are Crockerby's work," said he, stopping before six full-length paintings of the greatest female saints. "You have heard of him?"

"Oh yes, there are some of his pictures in the house where I am staying."

"This last one, the sixth, is considered one of his best works — some say the best. But, believe me, we almost had a quarrel over it."

"Why?" Marigold had gone up close to it, her cheeks flushed, her eyes alight.

"Because it is the exact face and figure of a woman who was a mischief-maker — one who caused much ill-feeling at the time of the late

High Priest's death, and one who escaped the punishment that was justly hers."

"How?"

"By running away with a Mr Barringcourt. You may have heard of him."

"Yes; what was her name?"

"Rosalie Paileaf."

The shadows of the Temple hid Marigold's face, its heaviness dulled the quick beating of her heart, for this was an exact copy of the face in Timothy's bedroom.

"You did not like her?"

"I had every cause to dislike her. And he, knowing it might have shown himself a—a truer gentleman. Even now I never stand before it without irritation."

"Why—why not send it to this Mr Barringcourt if—if he was so infatuated?"

"It would not be a bad idea. It has been consecrated; but still—his house is built after the cathedral style. I'll think about it."

And, as he passed along, Marigold followed him.

"I don't think she has exactly the eyes for a Church—do you?" she asked at length.

"Who?"

"Rosalie—Rosalie, I forget her name."

"No, she should have been imprisoned for a lifetime, had the law been justified."

"Ah!" said Marigold softly, "then she would have looked more of a saint and less of a goddess. It is all very well to smile so when you've never felt any pain, and you love who loves you. I don't like her a bit. She never suffered at all, and I am suffering every day."

But aloud she said:

"Has he not flattered her?"

"No, except the eyes. They were at times tragic and rather startling. Where he got that trumped-up expression from I can't tell. I asked him to alter them and stick to the truth, but he wouldn't—said he'd as soon cut off his head. Like an artist, everything ideal, nothing natural."

"But in the Church it is allowable."

"Well, yes, but the right kind of ideal."

And after this he found Marigold very quiet. But he did not object to it, for she went with him quite untiringly, and he felt the sympathy of her companionship, and liked her in this silent mood; for every one that came upon her suited her exactly as the one before.

And at last they left the Temple, and going down the steps met Mr Barringcourt coming up them. For the Temple was one of his especial interests. He spent much wealth and thought upon it.

And Marigold felt all the passion of pride lash

up in her, the scars on her neck red-hot, the wounds in her heart new opened — those raw wounds that would not, would not close and heal. For all that day she had expected a humble letter of apology, and none had come. And if it had come, the old French proverb stealing to her mind would have surely made her tear it in a thousand pieces. But of this she never thought. If only he would have said that he was sorry (and set them both in a most ridiculous position). But neither of this did she think. She thought of nothing tangibly. Why should she ?—feeling so much. So now she bowed very coldly, and the High Priest saluted him as stiffly, for, since St Armand's few gliding, simple words, suspicion and dislike had filled his heart. And somehow in the glance the Master gave to Marigold he detected something the jealous lover, though a slave, might take amiss. He remembered what St Armand had said about the beggar girl and this same man, and therefore would have passed him. But Marigold, womanlike, having one man there for a protection, felt fully capable of fighting with the other.

" Mr Barringcourt," said she, standing two steps above him, and remembering St Armand's words to good effect quite suddenly, that she had no heart. " Mr Barringcourt, we have been talking about you."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; you have only to tell the High Priest when your birthday is, and you will receive the loveliest present."

He did not answer, and Marigold was pleased, because he was looking at her in a troubled, puzzled way that was a great advance upon the weeks of constant coldness and dislike. So she continued:

"In the Temple there is the portrait of a lady, quite a masterpiece of art. But, by mistake, they've put her with the saints, and she was nothing but a sinner. And so I've advised the High Priest to send her on to you."

And she laughed in his face—carelessly, lightly, almost contemptuously—and went on down the steps, the High Priest escorting her.

"There now!" said she, "you have been so kind to me all afternoon that you must still be kinder. I cannot walk home; you must drive me to the Palace gates—no further. I've enjoyed this afternoon so much, I'll come again."

And Marigold's heart being broken, her voice was full of gaiety, her laughter sparkling.

And the High Priest drove her to the gates, and wanted badly to walk across the park with her; but she would not let him, only she smiled

at him as they parted, and the footman and coachman prevented him doing anything rash.

And Mr Barringcourt, left alone, stood till the carriage had left the Temple place, and then very slowly passed on into the Temple.

And his steps turned to the Crockerby panels, the sixth and greatest masterpiece.

He stood before it, his face a strange mixture of pain and doubt and tenderness.

"I don't know. No one but myself would see the least resemblance, and yet I have always seen it from the first, even in that mad trick of acting as a beggar girl. Seen and yet not believed, the obvious being always the hardest thing to find. Rags! when I looked for such untold perfection," and suddenly he laughed, and the Temple rafters echoed it, not at all hollowly.

"Well may St Armand laugh; I'd laugh myself if I were one whit less in love with her. Fool that I was! And that last time—oh Heaven! that I should so far forget myself! And blaming him! thinking her one of his tools—a puppet with a devilish resemblance, worked up by his skill to look like Rosalie! Truly he may be flattered. His jokes have been so many, so excellent, with such keen point; but this would certainly have capped them all and passed the bounds of courtesy.

But anyway the High Priest's safe, and with the beggar girl I hardly thought he was."

And then something seemed to strike him, and a shadow and a pallor crossed his face.

"Safe! Who ever yet was safe on Lucifram—God or man—till the net was passed?"

And the High Priest, driving home alone, thought on the Master.

"Decided signs of age," said he. "Twenty years ago, he'd have settled any woman—even Marigold. Decided signs of age."

And Marigold, walking home alone through the park, wrung her two hands silently together.

"I don't want the High Priest; I want—I want *him*—Rosalie is dead. He should forget her. Oh! I wish I'd never spoken to him so about her, if—if she is dead. What a hardened, heartless wretch he must have thought me!"

And suddenly she put her hands before her face, that had grown suddenly scarlet.

"He'll think me a bad, bad woman in every way, and I'm not—I'm not—I'm good. But I can't help the things I've done and said—I can't really. I—I wish I were dead. Indeed! indeed! I do. I wasn't made to stand alone. I was made to take hold of some one. I—I wouldn't even mind being the third person—

the strawberry—no, the gooseberry—if I might be allowed to speak to him like other people now and again."

So did Marigold argue, being the last person in the world to be content that way.

CHAPTER XXV

EARLY next morning the Princess went out to gather roses for a table decoration, and Mr Barringcourt paid an unusually early and very unexpected call. He saw her stretch up eagerly to snip a glorious damask queen, and then, before she cut it, suddenly turn to see him standing there. And her cheeks went the colour of the uncut rose, and the scissors and basket slipped out of her hand, and the gathered flowers all lay in confusion at her feet.

And both of them stood looking at each other without a word, and the deep colour died away from Marigold's face.

It must be admitted that Alice was watching in the distance, watching with a triumphant heart, for it was at her telling that he had been admitted to the rose-garden—Alice, who had an old score to pay off.

"I have come to apologise."

Marigold clasped her hands in front—always a dangerous attitude with her—and looked at

him with a little cold surprise, bent on not answering.

He bit his lip, as well he might; yet made another clean breast of it.

"I didn't know who you were."

Scorn arose and flashed out of the beautiful eyes.

"That accounts for everything, then. Your conduct under those circumstances was quite excusable."

"You do not understand me."

"I—I understand you perfectly. Perhaps I —I ought to apologise too. I—I forgot myself for—for a little while. I—I took you for some one else. I—I——"

Everything had died away from Marigold now that she had begun to speak—everything, except the pretty, unconscious attitude, and those wonderful eyes, half-truthful, half-frightened, with no acting at all.

"Then," said he gently, "let us forget it."

But she shook her head.

"I can't." And her hand went up to the ribbon at her throat unconsciously.

"I—I hurt you."

"Oh no; but if you were a gentleman you would keep away. I—I was very silly, but I was ill."

"Yes. You had been so very kind to Timothy."

Marigold's eyes fell to the ground, and she clenched her hands tightly as each fell suddenly to her side, for, at the mention of the little cripple child and the accompanying tenderness of tone, the old dangerous feeling began to rise in her, almost suffocating her. It was one of the few times when she ceased to look beautiful, for the wave of feelings, and the great will-power needed to at all subdue or rather hide them, gave to every feature a strange, hard, full look not its own.

"Yes, I was kind, and you were kinder. We'll let that pass, and other things. You must go."

Her voice, too, was thick and unnatural.

"Then you must forgive me."

"No, no, I never can. There are a hundred things for which I never can forgive you."

"My only fault all through was that I misunderstood you."

"Rather that you hated me."

"I misunderstood you. You said you were a beggar girl, and I believed you."

"How contemptible you are! Holy Serpent! what are men coming to, to see no shame in their own cowardice and lack of chivalry?"

"Marigold, I——"

"You will perhaps remember my title; this familiarity is the last insult. If you will not go,

I shall send for the—the footman to show you the—the gate."

She expected some retort, but did not get it, for he stood there, his head bent towards the ground.

"If you will not forgive me, I must cease to ask for your forgiveness. But you cannot prevent my feeling shame and sorrow for what I did so unaccountably, so unexpectedly. You say you were tired with nursing Timothy; perhaps I was tired too."

"You weren't," she panted; "you got him away from me, and—and then you were happy. You—you were jealous of me all the time."

"Yes, for another woman's sake. At least, I thought so. He is quite safe with me. You were not strong enough. What would you have done with him?"

"Why do you always torture me? Is it a pleasure to you to see me all—all unstrung? Go away, or—or I must."

She turned and walked unsteadily, if quickly, to the open windows. Yet he had made no attempt to follow her, for her voice was nothing but hard pride and shame, at being thus found too weak to fight against her own emotions.

Inside the room she sank into a chair, trembling and shivering.

And then at last a sudden change came in her face, bringing the old beauty.

"I'll run after him, and say I've—I've changed my mind—that I've forgiven him, if he's forgiven me."

And quickly she ran out across the smooth lawn, through the gates, and into the broad park. But he was nowhere, neither near nor far, and Marigold's face was white with disappointment, and grey with the long strain. So she went back to the rose-garden, and flung herself down upon the grass amongst the bowers of roses, and cried just as when a child, in the big grand gardens far away in Fairy Sky, when night descended and the stars came out, and she remembered she was quite alone, with no companion, nothing but the beauty of the world—an orphan, with a child's heart aching for love.

And now the same, only the child's heart was changed into a woman's. Yet there was so little dross in it that it was far too soft for daily use, though the crust of tiny diamonds might at times make it look hard.

"He'll never come back now," she said, "because I was so horrid to him. I couldn't help it. I thought it so contemptible to come with that excuse. But oh! I don't know, and I don't care. I can't tell whether

he is contemptible or not. I only know I love him."

And when she went upstairs to change the simple morning-robe for one a little more elaborate, she sat before the glass alone, and removed the velvet at her neck.

"I am glad these marks are on my neck. I hope they never disappear," she said. "It is our little secret away from the world. They used to burn with anger—at least, I thought it anger, but I don't know, I don't understand a thing. I wish the marks had been on my hands or arms, or somewhere that I might have kissed them."

And she kissed the velvet that encircled them instead.

And suddenly her eyes filled with tears.

"And Timothy—he said that Timothy was safe. Patches! dear little Patches! It was you who taught me how to be good — how to try. And now you've gone, everything is black again. Who cares really whether I'm good or not?"

And then life went on evenly again, though Marigold passed over the rough stones bare-foot. And every day her loveliness became more ethereal and spiritual, and no one but Alice noticed the gradual wasting away; yet she dare not presume across the silent barrier that had sprung up

between her mistress and herself—nay, between her mistress and every one around her.

For Marigold now went out far more than she had ever done—sickness and charities and social duties each claiming her attention.

And now she laughed just as in the olden times, but with the world of difference to the faithful servant's ears; for sometimes in the night she would hear the stifled cry of pain, the restless motion, the weary sigh.

And one night in the darkness she crept up to her mistress's bed.

"Princess," she cried, "say you're ill, and let us have a doctor."

"Alice! what nonsense! go back to bed at once, or we'll be having the doctor to you."

"You're growing thinner every day, Princess."

"Then it suits me," and she laughed. "For to-night I had more compliments paid me than even is usual with a Princess."

And Alice went away, the hard, brilliant tone covering the childish sweetness in her voice, that rang out so pathetically, because you were not meant to hear it.

And each day the High Priest's infatuation grew, and who could blame him? Yet, since the interview with Mr Barringcourt, Marigold had held slightly back, now smiling, now laughing and

merry, now very silent, wistful, and retiring, and he knew not in which mood he loved her best.

Yet they met little as yet except in public, and it was well.

And in public also she had met Mr Barringcourt, and almost like a child might, tired at last of straining and pretending coldness or indifference, she met him simply with a sweet gravity, and sometimes a little heightened colour; and he in his turn (but that is best left to Marigold, because she loved him, though it was rarely if they ever spoke, and that only in the stress of circumstances).

Yet Marigold would pray every night:

"Holy Serpent! dearest guide and counsellor, preserve the man I love, and bring him to Heaven. And I—I am nothing but a child, I should like to come to Heaven too."

And the Serpent was very kind to Marigold, because she prayed the right way and not too long, and perhaps because she was a convert, and perhaps because she didn't enquire too minutely into his three tails, but took him quite for granted. And perhaps again because she prayed for the right man, and prayed for him nicely, for the Serpent owed a great deal to Mr Barringcourt, the Master, and his Father's house; for he, the Serpent, had been built up by them, endued with

power and fascination quite outside his own sphere to compel.

And so a few weeks sped by, and then, when the High Priest was indisposed—a sudden heart-attack, the doctors said—Marigold called to see him and stayed the afternoon, St Armand being there too ; and, as you know, she made an ideal nurse. And when she was gone, the patient became gloomy and irritable, and then St Armand smiled, looked at his watch, and went out for a stroll.

CHAPTER XXVI

It was that hour of dusk that was his favourite —not night, not day, but glimmering shadows suited to Lucifram.

With shadowy strides, the shadowy cloak encircling him, he passed the cattle grazing lazily within the parks that stretched round Marigold's dwelling-place, and thence through the rose-garden, the velvet lawn, towards the open windows. He had chosen his hour wisely and well, for, thinking of lovesick maidens and their curious lack of all originality, he remembered the twilight was their special hour—twilight and silence, the open window with the sad night breezes, the solitary figure, the total oblivion of time.

Thus also he found Marigold, sitting alone upon a couch drawn near to a window, leaning against the cushions.

Her simple satin dress, pure white in the shadows, draped the fragile figure gracefully; but, as he crept shadow-like through the open window, he paused to look at her.

All the animation that deceived the world with its strange brilliancy had vanished, and he saw only the face of a tired woman, with pure face-lines, and an expression never meant for Lucifram — a haunting sweetness struggling triumphant through the sadness.

"Ah, Marigold," said he, "you're very pretty, though it takes an old married man like myself to notice it evidently. Considering you've got such a little time left upon Lucifram, it seems too bad you should spend it idling."

And so he approached her from behind, laying his hand with the blood-red ring upon it, on the couch back.

"Marigold."

She started and looked up.

"St Armand! What an unusual hour for a call! I—I thought I left you looking after the High Priest."

"You did. But, like all people who have nothing tangibly the matter with them, he is bad to do for sometimes."

"What is the matter with him? I thought him looking unusually well."

He came and sat down beside her, on the other side of the couch.

"Yes, you were his medicine. As soon as you

came, he was better. Before, he was worse; and since, he has been much worse."

"Then I was a very poor medicine."

"No, you are dangerous. To accomplish a lasting cure, you must stay with him for ever."

She laughed.

"Well, I couldn't do that."

"But you might arrange a kind of continuity."

"What do you mean?"

"You could come oftener, and with a certain promise to return."

"I don't think I am good for him," and she shook her head thoughtfully.

"You are squeamish, Marigold. Your greatest charm at one time was that you were not."

"And now my greatest charm has gone." And she sighed and laughed in a breath.

"No. But you are labouring under a false impression. You are growing highly moral, therefore highly dull."

"I don't think I have the strength I used to have. I tire of things quickly. I am tired of the High Priest. It is all such empty twaddle to me."

"But not to him."

A silence.

"Marigold! I am disappointed in you. You were meant to be a wonderful woman, and you

have allowed yourself to be mastered and subdued by a man who doesn't care that much for you."

"Ah!" she said, half-rising, "I—I will not let you speak so to me. I shall go."

"I speak as it pleases me," he said in the heavy tone of authority that few ever withstood when he used it. "Your infatuation for Mr Barringcourt is senseless as it is useless. Half the town talks of it. You are a little fool."

"Don't!" she whispered, cowering down against the pillows, her hand stretched out as if to send him away; "I—I have so much pain lately everywhere—spirit and mind and body—I can't stand any more."

"You want to be a bit harder, Marigold—to have a bit more pride. There was never a man yet who loved a woman who deliberately let him see she was in love with him, even through snubs."

"I scarcely ever see him, and I rarely speak to him. If the town talks, it is because——"

"You blush every time you meet him, and then like as not go deathly pale; flattering to him, no doubt, but not calculated to inspire much—much affection."

"I don't want him to love me. He loves some one else."

"Then you love some one else too?"

"I can't find any one."

"The High Priest."

"You will make me hate him."

"Make you love him rather. Marigold, he simply worships you."

"He should worship the Serpent."

"The Serpent is an obsolete idol. Even women have seen through it since Barringcourt's lady-love peeped behind the scenes."

"I don't understand you."

"You understand me sufficiently well. The High Priest loves you as deeply as you love the Master of the Marble House. You have it in your power to be very kind to him, even though you may not marry him. His illness is all caused by you, Marigold—you have treated him badly—just as your illness is caused by some one else."

"I got mine through little Patches," she answered softly.

"And every one was very kind to Timothy when he was ill," said he.

"And I'm left all alone."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"You're a Princess born to the purple—born to hardness and to suffering. There is a man less proudly born, a mortal, weak and hungering—he, too, is all alone."

"I cannot help him."

"You were kind to Patches."

"Oh! but in a different way. I loved him."

"Love this man. It's very easily done—a little condescension, a little stooping, you will cure him."

"But I am dying."

"But surely you intend to live to the end?"

In the strange dusky shadow that was gradually encircling them, the room around quite dark, Marigold glanced across at him, her fine thin face clearly silhouetted against the shadowy curtain.

"You will not pity me; how, then, can I pity myself?"

"You were born to greatness; why should I pity the great? I pity him, but your weakness I despise as quite unworthy of you. You are taking life too seriously. It's nothing but a game, a plaything, at the best."

And suddenly he moved across to her, and in listening to the strong persuasive voice, low-pitched and softly, she forgot the little man had disappeared, the presence near to hers but half disguised.

The fascination of that powerful presence drew her magnetically—the strong arm round her, the shadows encircling them, giving her new life. Marigold sat up, her white dress gleaming, her golden hair shining, her wondrous eyes sparkling in—what was the light? Nothing on Lucifram.

And the old childish merriment and laughter came bubbling back to the parted lips, coral and pearl of exquisite beauty.

And recklessly, not understanding, she held out her one disengaged hand, and now both of hers were hidden in his — the strong shadowy hands holding the white ones.

"You can afford to be kind to him, Marigold."

No answer.

"Not only that, but there is always a certain stimulus in love-making. It will relieve the monotony of the few months left you here on Lucifram."

No answer.

"And Mr Barringcourt has got so accustomed to your devotion, given so silently, that he'll be quite jealous."

And suddenly Marigold drew herself out of his arms, and stood up laughing.

"Yes, I'll come, if you can guarantee that he won't be mopey, and grumpy, and talking of his ailments all the time. I'll come to-night. I'm tired of being good. I do get deadly tired of it every now and then; no one knows the struggle that it is. And, after all, I must amuse myself. Being love-sick is so monotonous."

CHAPTER XXVII

SHORTLY afterwards St Armand went back to the High Priest's Palace, and, with a certain quiet power he had of ordering things to his own liking without anybody being aware of it, he arranged that all personal attendants and others should be dismissed for the night. He gave them to understand that he himself would wait upon his holiness. And in this there was nothing unusual, for St Armand was an old man, well skilled as a physician, with a certain authority about him, and he was known to be high in favour with the priest.

St Armand said nothing about Marigold's approaching visit, for, like all immortals, he had great faith in the unexpected. Prepare a man—and, well, somehow or other he is prepared, and at times is troublesome.

So, with the ordinary medicine at eight o'clock he mixed a little of his own, for, said he :

" I promised Marigold he should neither mope nor grump, and this fool's quackeries will enlarge

his liver and raise up the ghost of conscience itself. But mine is just a *gentle* stimulus to feeling, sleep for an hour or so—our best medicine—then awake."

So the High Priest slept in his big arm-chair beside the fireplace, and St Armand, hearing his regular breathing, turned down all the lights, threw fuel on the fire, went downstairs by the private staircase leading from this private suite of rooms, and so out into the garden, unobserved, and away, leaving the door unlocked.

"For," said he, "I should be nothing but a damper and a gooseberry, for, give a man and a woman each other's society under certain mutual conditions, and the devil's presence is altogether unnecessary."

Yet he waited till he heard the sound of wheels, and presently saw a woman's figure gliding through the gardens toward the private door. Then, shadow-like, he vanished, laughing.

"I wonder what Barringcourt will say?" said he. "Quarrel again—lovers are always quarrelling, but nothing serious. Well, he ought to look after her, for no one else will, not even I—although, speaking modestly, I believe she's taken quite a fancy to me."

But, whilst he had walked, waiting in the private grounds for Marigold, Mr Barringcourt had entered

by the big front door—informed, as spirits are, that something was about to happen, not knowing what.

Like as St Armand might, he had passed unnoticed up the famous staircase, along the corridors, and to the private suite of rooms. He found them quite deserted, the High Priest quite alone and sleeping, the fire burning brightly, all other light subdued.

And he felt the holy pulse, and looked a little puzzled.

"Stronger than usual, and yet he's only a few more days to live. St Armand's medicine, I suppose. I'll wait a while, and make up his accounts whilst I am waiting. From ten o'clock till midnight," and he glanced at the timepiece. "It's getting on for ten."

Then he laid his hand upon the High Priest's brow and eyelids, and the peaceful sleep became a little heavier, the breathing longer drawn and more pronounced; and then he pulled out a notebook, and began making up a list.

"It will spare time when he is dead," said he.

And twice he got up from his chair beside the invalid and opened the heavy eyes. They stared out as meaningless and fixed as death, yet the Master had been trained to read the mental impression of long-past incidents that still remained.

So absorbed was he again in writing, that he never heard the clock strike, nor presently the softly opened door.

And there stood Marigold, perceived by no one. And all the mourning colours, clinging black and simple white, she wore since Patches' death had vanished. And instead, there stood a radiant vision, a shot effect of ruby and amber and emerald, changing and glowing even in the fire-light. A wealth of hair dressed to perfection, yet neat and close enough to show the shape of her dainty head, bosom and arms quite uncovered, white and shining too, more so in contrast to the glowing shades beneath, and here and there a gleaming jewel. But beside her face all the rest was insignificant.

The pallor and extreme thinness had vanished. She seemed more like the Marigold of olden times, yet with a difference, a ten-times' difference. She had learnt everything that goes to make a woman, and no ordinary woman, but one in the highest, broadest sense — one born to true and natural impulse, but just now a bit thrown out of the course, and having no restraining force in the world's opinion, Death being so near at hand.

To her the room was so dimly lit, that, looking in, she mistook the figure sitting by the sleeper

for St Armand, for she had learnt the deception of the white head and shrunken form.

"You here!" she said, coming in and closing the door behind her; "you said you were going to leave me all alone."

Then he sprang to his feet with a start, and she stood still scarcely six paces off in the flickering fire-light, her hand upon a chair, each looking at the other, almost horror-stricken—scarcely comprehending what it was that brought the other there.

"Yes, I am here," he said at last, deliberately, closing the book as slowly, and putting it away. "I am here. I've come to stay."

"Well now, that is very strange, because I've come for exactly the same thing."

Marigold looked dangerous—dangerous in temper as well as in beauty, though her voice was subdued. She had set her mind on this night's escapade, still felt every pulse thrilling with the touch of St Armand's hands upon her wrists, and in dressing she had laughed at and hated the Master, feeling that he, and he only, had driven her to this—hated him for making her hate herself through failing to win the love she coveted.

"Then," said he, just as slowly, his eyes full on her, "we will both stay."

"Oh no, I will awaken the High Priest, and

he shall settle for us. I think—I really think you will have to go." And she took another step forward, laughing.

He shook his head.

"He is too fast asleep. I've drugged him for a few hours to come. I did not know that you were coming."

She heard the heavy breathing, and her face set like marble, and a terrible anger flashed into her eyes; and then as suddenly she laughed.

"Ah, well!" she said, "I will stay till he awakes." And she took one of the unconscious hands, fondled it in her own, and kissed it. And, as she did so, she looked up sideways at the Master, her vivid eyes gleaming.

"How long will he sleep?" she asked.

"Till midnight."

"Oh, that's not long, only a little over an hour. I have lived long enough to learn a little patience."

And still she held the thin intellectual hand, and yet she knew the gleaming eyes above were watching it and her, and that the silence had something terrible about it.

"You will tire of standing. You had better take a chair."

"I can look after myself, thank you. I am perfectly acquainted with the room."

Again silence settled, and at last, with a gesture

of impatience, she began walking about the room —the soft swishing silk, and the delicate scent of violets that Timothy had loved so much, having their own fascination to make up the total sum.

Mr Barringcourt leant his elbows on the mantelpiece, and looked into the fire.

She had turned on one light, and still continued pacing back and forwards; and the clock struck the hour before midnight.

"I think," he said at last, quietly and steadily, "it would be much better if you composed yourself a little There is no need to move about so incessantly."

"Don't!" she cried, stopping abruptly. "Don't stand there and preach to me. You are ten times worse than I am — only you— you have made up your mind not to show it."

"Do you seriously intend to stay here till he awakes?" He had turned round to her again.

"Yes. I'll stay, if only for the pleasure—of seeing you—s-sent away."

"And then what?"

"Oh! then I will stay for the pleasure of staying."

And her head was very high, and she looked at him unflinchingly.

"Pleasure?" said he, and he raised his eyebrows.

And Marigold laughed quite naturally, and raised her eyebrows too.

"That is why I came," she said. "The High Priest is very fond of me, and I have grown fond of him. Perhaps you wish to take *him* away from me too — like you did Timothy Wiggs."

The Master looked across at her, more narrowly than before.

"You are not yourself to-night."

"I'm afraid I cannot say the same of you. You are as irritatingly superior as ever you were."

And she clasped her hands in the old attitude, and he turned abruptly back to the fireplace; and she mistook the action for dislike, and she laughed again—a low, dangerous laugh.

And once more, this time with a face more set and white than ever, he turned again to her.

"Marigold——"

"You shall not call me Marigold. To you I am the Princess of Ellel."

A queer, stiff smile came to his lips for an instant, then disappeared again, as he bowed his head in acknowledgment of what she said.

"Princess, have you thought seriously about to-night?"

"That is my own affair entirely. It has nothing to do with you. I have thought over

it perfectly seriously." Her tone was anything but serious.

"And have you weighed to-morrow morning?"

"Why to-morrow morning?" she asked carelessly, her eyes travelling to the High Priest.

"Because then the excitement of to-night will quite have died away. There will be nothing but a memory left in the place of—of all this that you anticipate."

She shrugged her shoulders, and began drumming with her fingers upon the table-cloth.

"To-morrow mornings come to every one."

"But some are pleasant, and some are very black."

For the moment she looked at him seriously, and opened her lips as if to ask a question. Then remembering, and feeling the burning scars upon her neck—the only blemish to her beauty—she began pacing about again, making no answer.

"Have you thought about it?" he asked again at length.

"Oh! your voice will drive me mad—it's worse than a corncrake" (and yet it was the voice that Marigold had always dreamt about). "Yes, I have certainly thought about it. I don't mind to-morrow morning in the least."

"He is not your equal."

"Oh yes. He is the highest dignitary in the Church, and comes of a good family."

Another pause. Then suddenly he took a step nearer to her, and her heart gave a curious flutter of alarm, but her face showed nothing, and the feeling was but momentary.

"Marigold—Princess—whatever you are, listen to me."

"No, I won't," she said; and put her fingers up to her ears, with all the waywardness a child might show.

And suddenly both the delicate wrists were caught in hands as gentle as they were strong. Yet Marigold cried out with a sudden pain, as if he hurt her, and her cheeks went deathly white. But he held her at arm's length, and his face was stern and set, and every feeling repressed as in a vice of iron.

"You have no regard for yourself," said he. "So now I ask you to think of other people. I am going to make a very unusual, perhaps to you ridiculous, request. I am going to ask you to give up this man for the sake of another woman."

"Ah! has he, too, some one else who loves him?"

"No. I ask it for the sake of the woman I love."

The green eyes flashed, and she tried to shake the hands off her wrists.

"Ah! that woman — that Rosalie — Rosalie, what is her name?—I hate her. How could any man love such an insipid doll as she?" And her breath came in angry pants.

But the shadowy eyes, with their strength and beauty, looked full into hers. "Whatever she is, I love her. That is enough for me. The High Priest harmed and wronged her, but it was done ignorantly, in justifiable bigotry—and—and some dislike. It is forgiven him—mostly forgiven, any way. But her life has been curiously connected with his, and even yet she may be obliged to suffer through him. I love her very much, this woman whom you hate. If you make him sin, as to-night you must do if you persist in staying here, it is she who must suffer for it—she and I. I had hoped to see her very soon—in a few days—to make her my wife. This act of yours will separate us many years again — a lifetime, reckoned on Lucifram."

"And—and I can separate you—by staying here to-night?"

The terribly strained expression on his face had only one meaning for Marigold—that of love for another woman.

"Yes. You can separate us. Perhaps for ever. I cannot tell."

She burst out laughing.

"Then of course I will. What fool do you take me for?" And she wrung her hands free of his, and laughed again in scorn and mockery.

When he spoke again, his voice was almost inarticulate.

"You remember Timothy?"

"What?"

"Timothy. You remember him?"

"Oh yes. The little Wigg boy."

"This act of yours may also be his death."

"He is dead."

"His spiritual death."

"Ah, then!"—and she held her hands out eagerly like a child—"give him to me. I'll take care of him. If you can't, I will."

"Be careful," he said harshly. "Be careful. You'll try me too far. I have stood too much already. What is your decision?"

"About Rosalie?"

"Yes."

"I—I hate her."

"And you will let this ugly passion get the better of you, along with others?"

"You—you have ugly passions as well as I. Remember how you shook me—and—and all because of her." And her hand went up to the pearls at her throat, consciously this time.

"I have asked your forgiveness."

Then suddenly Marigold stiffened, and she asked sharply:

"Is—is Timothy to be her child?"

"Yes."

"Then I—I—will he die otherwise?"

He simply nodded.

Then a long silence.

And at last Marigold's face softened, and almost immediately every feature was twisted with pain and anguish.

She put one hand up to her throat, as if stifling, and the other on to her open lips, white and drawn with pain, and, with her great eyes fixed on his, after one glance at the High Priest, she crept from the room. And, when she passed the Master, she crept far from him, near to the wall; yet all the time her eyes were fixed on his, and she looked like a wizened little woman, very plain and very old, and the wondrous dress seemed nothing but a wretched mockery.

And closing the door behind her, she crept down the stairs, one by one, heavily, wearily, on into the open garden. And here the moon was shining brightly—but what was that to her? She crawled along through grounds and park, till she came to the Temple close—then towards a side door used only by those in authority, and thus into the Temple.

And first she dragged herself towards the famous panels; and there the laughing, tender eyes looked down on her—the moon shining full upon the lovely face.

"His mother. And I—I'm dying—because I wasn't used to nursing sick people—and I caught his disease—that's all."

And then she wandered out again to the central aisles, and for some time she stood there uncertainly. And then at last she whispered, the hollow echoes carrying the sound uncannily:

"I'll go to the Serpent. It won't matter, and I must go to something—something strong. I'm dying."

And she climbed up the many steps and crept within the heavy curtains.

And there the last pulse of feeling, given so strongly to her by St Armand earlier in the evening, suddenly snapped—for the strange fight had ended. And the fight being ended, and the wretched after-weakness gone, the child-like sweetness and beauty returned to her features; and stealing close to the golden table, she sank forward wearily upon the topmost step.

"Little—little Patches." A tear glided down her cheek, her lips parted in the same tender smile that once before had parted his, and the whole great building was silent—silent and lifeless too.

CHAPTER XXVIII

It was thus that two hours later the Master found her, the moonbeams streaming down upon the golden Serpent, and thus directly down upon the golden hair. And kneeling down upon the steps beside her, he raised her head on his knee. And then, taking her in both his arms, the soft white bosom, cold and stiff, pressed to his, and his warm lips upon her frozen ones, he held her so a long time, till he felt the feeble pulse in the new heart, and saw the tiny flutter of her eyelids.

That was all. With a sigh of relief he rose to his feet, still holding her, and carried her away with him, through the private door, to where the chariot and horses he used by night were waiting.

The moon was setting, the streets deserted still, and quite unnoticed they came to Marble House. And then, leaving the horses in the charge of one of his attendants, the Master himself carried her upstairs to that same bedroom that Rosalie once had occupied for a week of tears. And here he left her with a woman as

silent and as dignified as Mariana, though not the same.

And all that day till evening Marigold slept, and the long sleep of health—heaven-sent, not Nature's commoner medicine—was bringing back the roses to her cheeks, as she nestled in among the silken pillows, contented, and unconscious of everything around.

And, whilst she slept, the Master wrote a note to Alice, and sent it off at daybreak.

"Your mistress is here, and will require your services at once."

And when Alice saw the signature and the address, she threw up her hands in consternation; but, being trained to obedience, returned in the carriage that was sent for her.

This time there was no demur made at the door. She was conducted to Mr Barringcourt's study almost immediately.

"Where's my young lady?—where's my mistress?" she asked him bitterly, suspiciously, before the door had closed.

"Upstairs, in bed. She is recovering from a long illness."

"I'll take her home. Sick people are always best at home. Let me go to her."

"At present she is fast asleep. I sent for you, because you are not strange to her."

"I'd like to know," said Alice sturdily, "what she's doing here. It's through no wish of her own—of that I am certain. She always called you a heartless quack—a hignorant one, I mean. And—and I haven't forgotten the last time I came. You used some queer language then, sir—quite unbecoming a gentleman."

"So did you, Alice. You called me a big brute. I've done you the honour of remembering it."

"And you called us beggar folk. My mistress! whom, I told you, was better born than you are."

"I remember that too. But I think we are perhaps about equal. Ellel in Fairy Sky belongs to me. Most of the servants there know me well. I think you are a more recent addition. You came with a very good character, I believe. I remember seeing the testimonials."

Alice's eyes were wide open in amazement.

"Then—what—what about the Princess?"

He smiled.

"Nothing. At least, too long a story for repetition. I'm surprised that you should let her act as a beggar girl, and thus cause all the mischief that has followed from it."

"Nay—I—I—I can't turn her," Alice stammered apologetically. "I tried all I could—but what could I do? I followed on behind as well

as I could; but lately, since we went back to the old life, I've seen very little of her. I—I wondered what all that fine dressing was for last night, when all along she's been in mourning. And when she said she wouldn't be back till into the morning, I felt that uneasy I wanted to go after her, only I couldn't. But I've never spied on her, and she knows it. When I've followed her, I've followed her outright. She didn't tell me she was coming to you—and I—I thought she was going somewhere else. But she perhaps wouldn't bother to tell me she was coming here, because, although she called you ignorant, sir, I believe she had great faith in you. And I've always spoken ill of you since my last visit here. I—I thought it might help to harden her."

"Well, now you can come upstairs. I'll take you. You'll have nothing to do but watch till evening; but I want you to be there when she awakes. It will be somewhere about six. Then you will see she eats the meal that is prepared for her, and afterwards I should like to see her in this room. If you tell one of the attendants when the Princess is ready, she will conduct her here."

Then he led her upstairs, and when she saw her mistress sleeping peacefully, with such an utter change from the last months, she burst into

tears and took the Master's hand and wrung it in her own.

"I knew it! I knew it!" she cried, veering round to her first opinion of him. "I knew it from the first, you were a clever man. I swore by you, till you turned on us so suddenly after Timothy died. But then we were all upset then."

And the Master looked at her with tolerant good-nature; for, when the mask was laid aside, he had sympathy and kindness too.

And so Alice waited alone in the room, and commented to herself upon the curious furniture, and dwelt upon the Master's conversation, and put two and two together, yet could make very little out of it, except the one thing positive—her mistress's returning health.

And soon after six, Marigold moved—the first time in all that day; and then she slept a little longer, and then moved again, and finally awoke.

And it was Alice's broad, good-natured face that first met her eye. And she sat up in bed, laughing and stretching her arms.

"What's the time?"

"Six o'clock, Princess."

"How early! I think I'll get up, though. I feel so ready to."

Alice smiled.

"It's six o'clock in the evening, Princess."

"Never!"

"Indeed yes. You must take this food before rising, though." And she brought in a tray from the outer room, that had just been left there.

"Thank you. I feel quite hungry. Where—where are we? I know this room quite well. Where—where are we, Alice?"

"We're in Dr Quack's house."

"Never! Oh! I say—it's enough to take all my appetite away."

"Indeed no, Princess. It is his prescription that is making you so well."

Marigold laughed—a charming mixture of fright, wonder, and self-confidence.

"Ah, well!" said she, "I believe he owes me something. I believe somewhere or somehow I've done him a good turn, and I certainly do feel well. I feel so intensely happy, Alice—not too happy, but really happy. Now, this is champagne, Alice—the real thing. Just taste—that side of the glass. Isn't it lovely?"

"Delicious!"

"I've eaten every scrap. And I could have eaten more, I'm sure. But just let me think a minute or two. I seem all in a mist."

And she rested her forehead on her hands, whilst Alice removed the tray and began to prepare for dressing.

"Alice," she called at last, with none of that restlessness that lately had characterised her speaking, "I'm afraid I shall have to go as soon as I'm dressed. I don't feel quite equal to meeting him."

"He said I was to tell you he wished to see you as soon as you found it convenient to-night."

"I don't think I care to see him. I—he knows what an inferior kind of woman I am. He knows better than any one. Indeed, he is the only one who does know."

"If you're inferior, I don't know what the other women are."

"Ah! but I have been terribly silly and wicked too. And it's no good pretending with him that I haven't been, because, somehow or other, he has always been there, just when I've been doing something or other I shouldn't do. Oh! and I've been so spiteful and jealous too, Alice. I really wonder how I can feel so well, when I've been so bad."

But she got up and dressed, and Alice brushed out the wavy golden hair with much greater pleasure than last night, and arranged the simple white dress with greater pleasure too.

And at last Marigold stood ready, and she looked at herself in the long mirror, and said with laughing excitement:

"You know, Alice, I don't feel a bit like myself to-night—I don't really. I shall go to see the—Mr Barringcourt, and—and if he looks superior, as he is nearly sure to do, I shall tell him I was very ill, and I wasn't responsible. Good-bye."

And Marigold went with the waiting-woman, and she felt happy and prettily confident, because, after all, as she had thought of it in dressing, she remembered that the Master had not been at all superior last night, that he had looked terribly worn and anxious, and had appealed to her in a way that had surprised her. And not only that, but she had conquered once and for all, after many weary months of struggle, that lower nature, fierce and passionate, which, if it dies at the right time, is the best guarantee of the higher life unhampered.

"He won't keep me long," she said, as she went down the staircase, a smile lighting up her eyes. "He will be getting ready to go away to the woman he loves."

And there was nothing pathetic in her smile or words—but happiness and laughter.

CHAPTER XXIX

HER conductor knocked at the study door, and the next minute Marigold entered. The old feeling returned of familiarity with her surroundings, and Mr Barringcourt, all anxiety banished from his face, seemed to bring back still more remembrances. And Marigold looked at him, a mixture of health and blushes in her cheeks.

"Good—good-morning," she said, and held out her hand.

"Good—yes. Good-morning. You have slept very soundly through the night."

"Yes; and it is very pleasant waking. That is—if—if you will forget all about my wickedness last night."

"I can remember no wickedness—nothing but good."

"Don't you really think then it was very wicked of me?" And she looked up at him seriously, evidently no judge of her own line of conduct.

"No." And he looked at her honestly and simply.

"It is very kind of you. Ah! there is Rosalie's (her intonation on the word was very sweet) portrait, the one that was in little Patches' room. You will be going to her, will you not?"

"Yes, very shortly."

"And I wish you every happiness. But there is one thing, Mr Barringcourt."

"What is it?"

"When you are married to Rosalie, you will never tell her about me. How I loved you and hated her, and all the things I did. She wouldn't understand, you know. Women haven't so much sympathy with one another. I don't know how it is, but it is so."

"I think she would have every sympathy with you."

"But you will not tell her?"

"Not if you wish it."

"What medicine did you give me, that has made me feel so well, so different?"

"A very simple one. A moral tonic, prescribed specially by Heaven for those who acknowledge their own weakness, and have conquered it."

"I am thinking of going back to Fairy Sky very shortly. And, with all due deference to you as a physician, I must go back to Mendona House to-night. I—I am beginning to study appearances, and I don't think it is quite the

thing for me to be here. But I should like a bottle of medicine, if you can spare it."

"Oh! you will find the one dose quite sufficient. But why should you not stay here? It is part hospital, part workhouse—and it will not be for long."

"What do you mean?"

"Come with me."

And he led her into the inner room with all its appliances—scientific and otherwise. And again the feeling of familiarity returned to Marigold.

And there upon the table was a crystal, and he took it and gave it into her hand, and set the room in darkness, with the door closed; and then he came and held her other hand, and, on the instant, a pale-blue mystic light lit up the magic ball.

She held it, gazing spellbound into it. And suddenly she saw a cottage bedroom, and a girl kneeling there—a pretty girl, with flaxen hair and a sad, thoughtful face. And again, the long vistas of the Temple—the heavy curtains drawn, revealing the same figure kneeling before the Serpent. And then again, the same girl in a garden surrounded by the loveliest brilliant flowers, with a look of eagerness and expectation on her face that Marigold somehow felt she understood. And then instantaneously a blight

had settled on the garden—the flowers shrivelled and dead; but this as nothing to the human face, white and paralysed of every feeling except despair and pain. And then a deep-red glow, a palace garden, terraced and ornamented, a chariot and horses, and two figures just for the instant—and one was the Master, and the other the girl, who came and went all through.

"Rosalie." The word slipped from Marigold's lips, and then again was silence.

And then the image of the Serpent melted within the pure white fires of Heaven. Pure and intense—the real curtain that divides man from God.

And it seemed as if the crystal seethed and burned within this holy light a long time; and though there came no forms or scenes with it, it was to Marigold the most glorious scene of all, for she had felt and understood that fire—so cruel, yet, to the strong, so kindly.

And then at last another garden, with long lawns and blossoming bowers. And this time a little girl, playing alone, the sun having dyed her hair a pretty golden. And then Marigold looked a little while, and at last she put the crystal down, and she said:

"It's me."

And when the ordinary light came back to the

room again, she looked around with a new interest and a heightened colour, and she rubbed her eyes.

"I don't understand a bit," she said.

"Neither did I," he answered, smiling. "At least, not when you played the beggar girl. That was rather an expensive whim of yours, Marigold. Had I met you as the Lady of Ellel, I should have been prepared for you, and all would have been smooth sailing from the first. But when you're looking for a Princess with a pair of lovely eyes, with an expression in them you have learnt to love and know through all the changes of eternity, and suddenly a beggar girl appears in rags, with just the same expression, you are allowed surely to feel—well, some annoyance."

And Marigold laughed and clapped her hands.

"Oh! you are dull and stupid," she cried gaily, shaking his arm and almost dancing with delight. "Don't you see, I—I couldn't have done anything better? I—I never knew what pain and suffering were till I became the beggar girl."

"You'd learnt it all before."

"Ah! was I—was I—am I—Rosalie?"

"Did you not remember the scenes?"

"Ye-es—ye-es. I don't understand it. I can only feel. But there *must* be a Rosalie, besides myself, because I was so horribly jealous of her. You know I was."

"I know. That proves how reasonless jealousy can be."

"And have you known this all along, and never told me?"

"How could I? If you had acted consistently to what you were, all through, there would never have been the slightest need for it."

"Still," said she thoughtfully, "I think there must have been some purpose to fulfil in acting as I did."

"Yes, one—Marigold. And thank Heaven the purpose is fulfilled—and to our side the victory!"

"What do you mean?"

"It refers to the High Priest."

She started, and the colour dyed her cheeks. "What of him?"

And seriously, too, he answered her:

"Last night was a serious time for you and for me, and for others. Had the High Priest fallen, and through you, he would have been one more big stumbling-block in the path from Lucifram to Heaven—and there are many. They wanted a soul to fill the hole in the broken net, to make it smaller. And he was chosen. But, since his election, for over quarter of a century he has shown a remarkable attention to duties. He has sacrificed in that direction almost more than a good man sacrifices to his God. No sin

against him—for narrowness and bigotry, if they be genuine, are rarely let to count. In fact, the one great blot on his life was that plot against the late High Priest, which Rosalie exploded, and thus saved him a life-long penalty, and received small thanks for it. And now you, Rosalie over again, but with the deeper light of Heaven around you, came to him once again. Had he fallen, he had gone to Hell, to fill an office most contemptible, with the additional pain of hard imprisonment; for he, judging his Master hardly for the same offence, unjustly, was falling into it himself—the common fate of sinners. And you and I again had long been parted—lost to each other—and, knowing little of futurity, I cannot say how long. For you could not have lived in the higher state, even though almost of it, with those untamed passions still alive in you."

"Ah! but it was St Armand. I had felt good for months—almost since little Patches went—and suddenly he came and put his arms around me, and I was ill and weak. What could I do?"

"What, indeed? But I should have blamed myself. I should have known you even in the beggar state, as Patches did."

"Yes, he did—didn't he? And you were so angry, and I thought you silly, because I thought he was getting too weak to think or see

properly — and, being a doctor, I thought you should have known. And there he has been the cleverest of all—of both of us. I'm so glad I'm Rosalie, because it's allowable to hate yourself. And I always used to hate myself when I was jealous of her. It *sounds* rather mixed, but it doesn't *feel* mixed at all. I'm glad you're Dr Quack instead of a scientist, because you've taught me so many nice things that they would shake their heads at. Do you think there are any scientists in Heaven ? "

" Oh yes. Hell too."

" And—and can they get any one to marry them ? "

" Yes. Without exception, they have very charming wives. I thought I'd told you a story of one."

" Oh no, you've never told me any stories—neither this time nor last. You only kissed me twice last time too. And once wasn't a kiss at all, but what I call a mark of condescension."

" And this time I haven't kissed you at all." And he turned and looked down at her.

" Oh yes," said Marigold rather shyly, and moving back a step or two, " you've kissed me many times."

And her hand went to the covering at her neck, and his eyes went there too.

"If you're a doctor, you should be able to make this all right," she said. And she removed the pearls, and held her face up, and he saw the red mark at the side of her neck. And then very gently he drew her to him, and stooped and kissed each place, and a deep rosy colour spread over her neck and face, and when it had gone there were no marks left—nothing but fairest beauty. And then impulsively, for his head still bent towards hers, she raised her arms and clasped them round his neck and kissed him.

And Marigold was very happy, because she knew she was secure in that strong love and those strong arms. And now there was no misunderstanding to dash the cup of happiness away, and leave nothing but bitter, humiliating dregs, and ugly scars of memory.

. . . . . .

That night she stayed with him for dinner—too happy to eat much, radiantly contented.

"I don't care very much for this house—do you?" she asked at length.

"No. It's a necessity, so I tolerate it."

"I think it would make me unhappy. It is so very gloomy, and the servants are so unapproachable. Alice says they're as proud as if they were 'the family.'"

He laughed.

"Poor Alice! You'll have to pension her off, Marigold. You're going where Alice cannot follow."

"When?"

"To-night."

"But I have settled nothing. Remember, I have an estate in Fairy Sky—I——"

"Oh! that estate is mine. That is why they sent you here. If I had looked better after that bit of property, I should have met you earlier, but I had no notion you were there."

"It used to be very lonely, I can tell you. But it was very lovely. Now this place——"

"Is a heathenish barracks. I agree with you. But it's right enough for business purposes."

"Do you think if I began to re-arrange the furniture I could improve upon it?"

He looked at her with a half-indulgent, amused look.

"Why, no. But if you only knew the number of ladies who have raved about it, it would surprise you. They have considered it an ideal home for their daughters. But I don't. Now, I must be going."

"Where?"

"To see the great High Priest."

"When he awoke last night, how was he?"

"Worse."

"Was he pleased to see you?"

"He did not see me. He was as blind as usual."

"Will he get better?"

"No. He is dying."

"And what are you going to do with him? He—he is not like Patches."

"No. He will die. It is a merciful dispensation. He has just missed Hell, and fallen far short of Heaven."

"Had I met you earlier, before I went as a beggar girl, he would never have known me."

"Yes, he would. That is perhaps one of the advantages of your escapade. You should then have tempted him, but under my protection."

"Ah! and then he would have fallen. I think it was best that the temptation should have come to me as it did, for I was stronger. When will he die?"

"I expect to-night at midnight, for now there is no reason why he should live. But he may be longer. It depends upon when St Armand and myself have come to terms. It is only mortals who can foretell the future; to others it is the great game, uncertain."

But before he went away, he took her to the moonlit garden, and showed her the stables with a doorway built in them, no longer cupboard-sized.

"At midnight come through here, and of two roads choose that to the left. Either is right, but on the higher road you'll meet me sooner. I will come straight to you when I leave the High Priest's Palace. Good-bye for a little while."

And so saying, he kissed her and went away. And Alice and she walked through the moonlit gardens silently.

CHAPTER XXX

THAT afternoon the great High Priest had taken worse, and, as the evening set in, all knew certainly that he had little time to live. Nurses and physicians had been called to the dying bedside, and conspicuously amongst the number was St Armand. Not conspicuous for his attentions to the dying man, but simply for his presence there. He was the only one who dared to defy appearances, and occasionally to yawn. Moreover, he insisted on smoking his cigars — the High Priest was too far gone to object, he said. Thus on till nearly midnight—a gusty, showery night, with an eerie wind that rose and fell in sobbing intervals.

"Sister," said he, as the shutters were being closed and the lights turned on, "how do you expect his holiness to die easily, lying under a cross beam and with the windows shut?"

"I do not understand you, sir."

"How, in the name of the Serpent's three tails, is he to get away under those conditions?"

The nurse, who was a sensible woman, thought that he was jesting, and she paid no attention.

After a while it was noticed that the dying man was becoming excited and very restless. His hands worked incessantly, and his sinking eyes gleamed with fire; but he could not speak, and the doctors thought his tongue was partially paralysed, for he made many efforts to frame words, but could not. Two or three times he tried to get out of bed, but was forcibly restrained.

"If you don't open the windows he's safe to be like that," said St Armand, and he went over himself and unlocked the shutters, flinging open the window and looking out into the blackness of the night.

Everything without was absolutely silent, but for the rustling trees, swishing and bending in the wind, and the pattering rain-drops. For the skies above the gardens at Marble House were moonlit and serene—these storm-tossed and full of desolation.

And suddenly, in one of the long, intense pauses between gust and gust, was heard the soft rumbling of wheels, the rhythmic trampling of horses; and they came nearer and nearer into the courtyard underneath. And every one who heard them—besides St Armand there were five persons in the room—stood still and looked at one another,

for there had been the sound of many hoofs, not few. The High Priest likewise, panting hard, sat up amongst his pillows, listening intently. Then, with a new excitement, he tried to speak, opening his mouth grotesquely, no sound issuing from the blue lips. It was so painful to see him, that those around, accustomed as most were to death-scenes, never forgot it.

But St Armand, curiously callous, after glancing once round at him, went abruptly from the room.

In the antechamber all was silent, till suddenly the panelled oaken door burst softly open, and Mr Barringcourt walked into the room.

"You're late."

"I've no morbid taste for watching people die. How is he?"

"Oh! very lively. Fidget! fidget! incessantly. Now, how about last night? All this is rather sudden."

"Oh! last night passed quite all right. That is why he's dying so soon, as you know."

St Armand had drawn himself up to that height when he matched the Master.

"I don't think it was so all right. So far as I have been able to make out, he underwent no temptation."

"Under the circumstances it would have been too strong for him. I kept him sleeping."

In the feeble light, each head thrown back, they looked at one another, and the gleaming lightning from each pair of eyes filled the room with a strange uncertainty.

"You kept him sleeping?"

"I did."

"And what of Marigold?"

"She underwent the temptation instead."

"That's no test for him."

"He is not qualifying for Heaven, you know --nor yet for Hell."

"I'm not so sure of that latter. He ought to be. So Marigold underwent the temptation? Well, I did for her what you should have done. I showed her the way to go about it."

"Yes. I think you rather went beyond the bounds of good taste."

"Oh no. I blundered slightly, owing to your keeping so distinctly neutral since your return. I wonder, Barringcourt, if you've shown any distinctive skill over this game, or if a kindly Providence has done the work for you. You seem to me to have been particularly blind all through."

The Master laughed lightly.

"You've just hit it. I've been as blind as a bat, with the one redeeming feature that I was there at the climax. I wondered you had left the coast so clear."

"Yes. I presumed too far upon a lover's quarrel."

"And you've discovered your mistake."

"That confounded beggar girl! She tricked me, she tricked you, she tricked him, and she tricked herself. Would I have wasted two minutes over her, if I had known from the first who she was? 'Remarkably pretty girl,' thought I at first; 'too pretty to have been made for nothing.' Then I saw Alphonso casting sheep's-eyes that way. 'Just the tool I want,' thought I. 'The one I've been looking for all over.' And so she led us on all through, skill-less and innocent. All the same, she's a fascinating little thing, Barringcourt. Just when you think she's going to do something very, very bad, she does something exceptionally good — and when you anticipate something most saintly, then you'll have to be careful. What are those papers?"

"For him to sign."

"You've settled to close to-night, then?"

"Yes. I'm taking back all we ever gave him. There won't be much left for you then."

"No. I'm not keen on a husk. All the same, I think Vestasian should have given him another chance."

"What! In all the record of these pages there

is not one 'Thank you'—not one sincere and humble prayer of thanks."

"I mean you should have given him a chance of going to Hell."

"You'll never miss him. The crowd is amply big enough. I must go in. Good-night."

"Good-night. Remember me to Marigold when next you see her. Till we meet again!"

And so he went—and that little game was over. Plucritus checkmate—yet most even-tempered through it all.

And the Master went into the death-chamber, and the doctors, recognising him, made way, for, though he was but Dr Quack, he never advertised, and they had gained so much from his advice to them when struggling, unknown doctors, that they had called him "the Physician," not knowing who he was.

The Master took the feverish pulse in his cool hand, his eyes looked into the restless dying ones, and a calmness settled on the room —only the shallow gasps were heard in quick succession.

And at last, to the surprise of all those who had watched beside him, the High Priest panted "Pen and ink," and almost instantly the shallow breath had flown, and life departed.

And afterwards they thought all kinds of

things, and wondered what he wished to write—wondering in vain.

That done, the Master left the High Priest's Palace, and took the direct path to where he had fixed to meet Marigold.

Meanwhile, at midnight, as he had directed her, she had passed through the door in the shadowy stables—remembering how she had first crept through there—the terror and emotion.

And turning to the left, she walked on through the silent country, thinking on all the strange events of the past, so curiously linked with those of the present.

And she thought of Alice too—Alice, who would not be comforted — even with a comfortable pension, paid each month. And then most naturally her thoughts flew to the Master, and all the long waiting and the tender love, and the misunderstandings that, if possible, had endeared them to each other.

And, as the road grew steeper, her attention was directed to the scenes around.

Below, the blue abysses, hidden in mists, with jutting pinnacles of rock rising from out of them. Mountains and wooded plains on every side—massed peak behind peak into the far distance. Yet, covering the path where she was walking, a velvet carpet of mountain flowers blowing in the

moonlit breezes. And above, the mystic rowan berries, scarlet and drooping—a contrast to the white airy bells beneath. And, thrilled with the intense beauty of the scene, Marigold sat down and waited.

And then, in the far distance, she heard a merry whistling, rich and clear, that came vibrating on the moonbeams—a simple shepherd song they sang in the mountain valleys, in that Land of Song where she had lived—a child.

And Marigold rose to her feet, smiling and joyous; and, as the sound came nearer, she began to sing—the old sweet notes, yet now far sweeter, that Patches used to love. And her rich notes, mingled with that flute-like accompaniment, caused all the air to tremble, and, from the shading bowers and trees around, a thousand merry throats poured forth a song—the magic notes of the perfect nightingale—passion and tenderness and love all blended with gaiety and Heaven's sadness too, not that of duller spheres. Then, on an instant, the merry whistle ceased, Marigold's song, and the birds' ecstatic trills. For he had climbed the last steep point and stood beside her.

Intense stillness; the air still vibrating, though the song had gone in a thousand echoes up to Heaven.

Without a word, with eyes for no one else but him, she felt the strong arms round her, drawing her to his breast.

And thus they soared away, high over peaks and precipices, above the moon—the song of birds in the distance, like the lark in the deep blue sky; and beauty and light all round them, the rosy shafts of sunrise dyeing the silver rays of the moon.

THE END

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