

DAUGHTERS OF CAIN

By ETTA W. PIERCE

CHAPTER IX.

"Death!" echoed Guy Fleetwood, with a face as white as the island girls, for, somehow, she seemed to communicate her dark forebodings to him. "Do not say such things, Esther. No trouble shall come to you through me—no sorrow. I swear to cherish you tenderly till I die! I swear to love you for ever and ever!"

The wind screamed mockingly around the tall tower, the waves beat mockingly on the rocks below. Did Fleetwood think of his cousin Maud then? If he did, the thought had no power to stay his new, impetuous passion. The two were strangers, they knew next to nothing of each other, yet here in the tempestuous night, at the top of the old lighthouse, they stood plighting their troth.

"You have seen me but three times," sighed Esther. "How strange—how very strange it all seems!"

"I knew, the moment I first looked upon you, that my doom was sealed," he answered, passionately. "What has love to do with times and seasons? I love you, and all the rest of the world may go. I have laughed at the grand passion in my day; I have thought it a foolish delusion; and in this way, you see, it takes revenge upon me at last."

With the shining black braids and the face like carved pearl pressed against his breast, he might well forget his loyalty to Maud, his honor, his social obligations.

"Will you marry me, Esther?" he said, through set teeth. "If you do not, no other woman ever shall!"

"Your sick mother in Canada—what will she say to your choice?" faltered Esther Hart.

"She may not like it at first," he answered, frankly. "Indeed, I am sure she will not; but time will reconcile her to it, and when she sees you she will love you. Anyway, I cannot marry to please my mother."

She was barely eighteen, and very shy, in spite of all her pride, so she questioned him no more, and he volunteered no further information. They went back down the stairs to the house. Granter Joe Rummel and Aunt Deb, crooning over the kitchen fire, were startled to see this pair of young creatures flashing suddenly up to them with such a light on their faces as never was on land nor sea.

"Mr. Rummel," began Fleetwood, with manly candor, "I love your granddaughter, and she has promised to become my wife. Give us your blessing."

Crippled with rheumatism Granter Joe undoubtedly was, but at these words he bounced up like a rubber ball from his flag-bottomed chair. Fright and dismay mingled in his wrinkled face, and seemed to choke his breath. As for Aunt Deb, she uttered a shrill scream.

"There! father," she cried, "it's come just as I thought it would—it's come, and you and I are ruined!"

To this outbreak, which seemed quite as strange to Esther as it did to Fleetwood, Granter responded, with a furious snort:

"You scoundrel! Who be you that's come to rob us of Esther? If I was a strong man I'd throw you over the rocks. No, sir! Esther shall not marry you nor anybody else! Esther is our main stay here. She belongs to us, she ain't a-going to leave us for any stranger!" And then, swinging his arm in air, he shouted, at the top of his lungs: "Be off!"

It was not pleasant, this sudden transformation of a hospitable host into a belligerent enemy; but Fleetwood confronted the old light-keeper with a calm smile.

"Pardon, it is impossible for me to leave the island tonight, Mr. Rummel; and, permit me to add, it is extremely selfish of you to reject my suit for such reasons as you have just given. Esther loves me, and her happiness should be your first thought. You ask who I am. A gentleman by birth, and I trust, by nature also. I have sufficient means to support your granddaughter in plenty, and I can give you indisputable proofs that her future is safe in my keeping."

"Oh!" groaned Aunt Deb; "we're ruined, father, we're ruined! This is worse than rheumatiz, or blowing away in storms. I thought we had Essie safe out on this rock!" Then, turning on Fleetwood, like an angry cat, she hissed: "Cursed be the hour you entered this house! I wish you had drowned coming over to the rock tonight!"

"Aunt Deb!" interposed Esther, in shame and indignation; "have you and granter gone mad? what does this absurd talk mean? Not love for me, surely? You have both been kind to me; you have never treated me ill, and yet—sadly—I have always felt, always known that you did not love me."

"I not love you, and you my dead sister's child!" cried Aunt Deb, with a curious, frightened look on her fussy face. "You're an ungrateful hussy, to talk in such a way. One thing's certain—shutting her thin lips with resolution—"this young man that goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, won't have you! Dad's not again it, and I'm not again it, and we're your natural guardians at present. He'll have to take you over our old corpses, if he takes you at all."

Fleetwood, irritated indeed, but peaceably disposed, essayed the force of argument with the pair. It was like talking to the wind. Aunt Deb, with her apron over her head, refused to listen. The old man, stubborn as a mule, would answer nothing save:

"Ye can't have Essie! There's girls enough over at Cinderville, but ye can't have Essie!"

Talk being useless, Fleetwood gave up at last, but the look that he cast at Esther spoke volumes. This opposition, which neither could understand, but which plainly had some deep hidden meaning, only added fuel to the

flame of the young fellow's passion. Granter Joe hopped out of his chair at last, and began to hobble up and down the room in a high state of excitement.

"Go to bed, girl," he growled to Esther; "I'll watch the light myself for the rest of the night, and Mr. Fleetwood and I will talk some more togeth'."

"Fear nothing," whispered Fleetwood, as Esther swept by him in that low-ceiled room; "all will be well."

She raised her great velvety eyes to his own—that look sealed his fate. "All for love, and the world well lost!"

"Perish friends and honor," thought Fleetwood, recklessly; "perish all my promises to Maud! all the milk-and-water affection which I have felt for my cousin! Welcome reproach, dishonor, anything—everything, if only I can win this magnificent darling for my own!"

Esther, with her grand princess air, made a slight bow to her lover, and went off up the stairs to the second story of the cottage. Close upon her heels, stealthy as a cat, followed Aunt Deb, and as the girl reached the refuge of her own little room, that admirable spinster slammed the low door, and fastened it quickly upon the outside, thus making Esther, for this night at least, a prisoner.

After which, Aunt Deb skipped back to the room below, to help granter watch the beacon.

Guy Fleetwood had further conversation with the pair that night, but it was of a highly unsatisfactory character. Aunt Deb was sharp and reticent; granter ranted and swore, but stuck fast to his mysterious hostility concerning Esther's marriage.

"Ye shan't have Esther—whether ye be rich or poor, high or low, ye shan't have her!" he repeated, like a parrot. At last Fleetwood, with an insolent smile on his lips, and a dangerous flash in his eyes, said, airily:

"My dear sir, I am determined to marry Esther, either with or without your consent! Since you will not, to the satisfaction of any reasonable person, explain your objection to our union, you cannot expect me to give them respect or heed!"

There was no sleep for him that night. He sat moodily by the hearth which had of a sudden grown so hostile, and laid swift, reckless plans for the future. About midnight the storm began to subside, the wind died away. Up in the high tower the beacon burned on, shining across bare Porgy Island, and out over the tossing, foaming sea till the pink dawn blossomed in the sky.

There had been no outcry from Esther Hart's chamber through the night. The girl understood the situation, and submitted in proud silence; but, like her lover in the room below, she had not slept. She was standing at her small window, waiting, with such patience as she could command, for deliverance, when she saw Rube Dexter's boat, with Fleetwood in it, put off from Porgy Island, and dance away over the rough waters toward Cinderville.

She waved her handkerchief. He saw the signal and answered it with ardor. Surely he must know that she had been kept by unfair means from bidding him farewell. She watched the boat till it became a mere speck in the distance, then, of a sudden, the door of the chamber was thrown back, and on the threshold stood Aunt Deb, with her fussy face and cunning eyes, looking in on her niece.

"He's gone, Esther!" she whined; "you can come out now. Your granter didn't think it was best for you to see him again—drat him! If I'd dreamed, the first time he came here, what game he was up to, I'd have flung hot water on him, that I would!"

Esther Hart's big black eyes flashed lightnings on her relative.

"I detest you, Aunt Deb!" was all she said. Then she swept down-stairs to confront granter, who had just hobbled in from the tower.

He looked at her sheepishly.

"You wouldn't go to leave the island and your poor old gran'father with that strange man, now, would you, Essie?" he coaxed. "Who knows what he's got a wife somewhere a-ready? He has too many fine airs to please me. I misdoubt that kind, I do. He's too soddint! Rube Dexter, now, wouldn't ask to marry a girl like her, he hadn't seen but twice or thrice, would he?"

Oh, the scorn that blazed in her splendid face!

"Rube Dexter!" she echoed, in a withering tone; "what do I know or care about Rube Dexter? Your downer over me is limited, granter—don't be so foolish as to abuse it. I am eighteen years old—a fact that both you and Aunt Deb should remember. Do you know what she did last night? Locked me into my room, as though I was a disobedient child. She will never do it again!" with an ominous ring in her voice; "never!"

Old Joe knew his granddaughter's temper. He saw that it would be no easy task to manage her in this matter. A pathetic grin overspread his wrinkles.

"Lord love ye, Essie; don't ye know yer Aunt Deb is a little cranky at times? It makes her raging mad to think of losing ye. Then there's Jim—nobody seems to have thought about Jim at all," brightening up. "You wouldn't go for to take that young cock-of-the-walk without writing to Jim about it? It would raise his dander powerful to have you choose a husband unbeknown to him. Let's rest upon it a while, Essie. Mr. Fleetwood may have been a fooling ye—men of his sort do such things often enough. I'd better think no more about him for the present."

An odd smile curled her lips.

"You're very wise, granter. I'm sure I ought to obey you," she answered, dully.

Neither Aunt Deb nor granter said anything more to the island girl about her lover. Life at Porgy Rock went on

in its usual groove, until the noon of Monday, at which time Tom Dexter appeared at the light in his catboat, bringing supplies and also a letter for Esther Hart. Rolling his quid of tobacco from one cheek to the other and mournfully winking one eye as though he knew that this little manoeuvre was blighting the happiness of his son Rube, the old fisherman thrust the message surreptitiously into Esther's hand.

"The landing at ten tonight!" he whispered; "by which time that scriterter Debbie ought to be in her bed."

Esther's heart leaped into her throat. What had her lover written? She took the note to the shelter of the Merman's Chair, and there read his letter undisturbed:

"I shall be at the island landing-place," it ran, "tonight at 10 o'clock. If you love me, meet me then and there, prepared to become my wife. I have procured the proper license, and engaged the clergyman at Cinderville to perform the ceremony."

"Do you love me? Can you trust me? I know the test is severe! If you show yourself equal to it? Oh, my darling! something tells me that you will! The last few hours have been to me a nightmare—a purgatory—your lover in life and in death."

Esther Hart sat for a long time with this message in her hand, staring out on the wild, gloomy sea. The breakers dashed over her head. She saw nothing, heard nothing. Finally she started up, tore Fleetwood's letter to fragments, tossed it into the boiling surf, and went thoughtfully back to the lighthouse.

Tom Dexter had left for Cinderville when she reached the tower. Esther went over to Aunt Debbie's wood-wheel, a great, bold affair, at which her superb figure stood with striking poise, and set to work in feverish haste. Perhaps the cottage had never looked so sombre and cheerless to her eyes as it did upon this eventful afternoon. Through an open window before her, the rocks of Porgy Island loomed up in all their native barrenness, relieved by no vegetation save the dogwood and Aunt Deb's scattered hills of potatoes. And out beyond that solitude, and the desolation of trap-rock and mutinous waves, lay a world of verdure and bloom—a world of life and joy and love.

The house went by swiftly; a tall clock in a corner ticked them off with solemn tones. The sun set in purple and gold across the low, black waste of waters. Night fell on Porgy Rock—a still, peaceful night, full of stars.

The girl felt no compunction concerning what she was about to do. She was in no way indebted either to granter or Aunt Deb. She did not love them, they did not love her.

Fate placed few difficulties in her way. Aunt Deb grew drowsy, and went to sleep. Her chair by the Granter's bed took her by the tower, and remained there in the most accommodating fashion. Breathlessly Esther Hart stole up to her chamber under the cottage-eaves, and there, robed herself with trembling fingers for her wedding.

Unlike most girls of her station, she possessed a wardrobe that seemed to lack nothing. No pupil at Barton academy had dressed in better style than the light-keeper's granddaughter. Her wardrobe, she arrayed herself now with particular care, then crowded some traveling bags with her belongings, put a well-filled purse in her pocket, donned a long cloak of fine gray cloth, a hat and thick veil, and stood ready for departure.

"Shall I ever regret this madness?" she asked herself, with a pang of misgiving. "Do I go to happiness or to sorrow?"

At the head of her white bed a narrow window opened toward the west. As Esther glanced that way, she saw a golden crescent sinking like a broken ring of fire, down the purple slope of the night. A new moon, seen over her left shoulder, and through glass, too! The beautiful, superstitious creature experienced a queer creeping chill.

"Sorrow!" she muttered; "I am going to sorrow, not happiness!"

Then Guy Fleetwood's blind face rose up before her with irresistible power. Guy Fleetwood's voice seemed to ring in her ears:

"If you love me—if you trust me! Golden love, him—she trusted him. The clock in the room below struck the hour of ten. Her dark thoughts fled like bats before the sunlight. Passion conquered. She snatched up her bundles and flew noiselessly down the stairs and out of the house.

Almost before she reached the landing place she found herself in the arms of Fleetwood.

"My darling," he cried, as he folded her to his heart; "I knew you would come! I knew you could not disappoint me! You shall never regret this step, dearest. I will show you that you have not trusted me in vain. Look! Here is Tom Dexter with his catboat. We must be off without a moment's delay."

She yielded to his kisses, his embraces. The die was cast. Her lot and his were henceforth one. In this blind, insouciant fate, bending so tenderly over her own, she must look for her future happiness.

"Speak," he urged, gently; "you do not fear to come with me, Esther?"

"No," she answered.

"Bless you, my brave, beautiful darling! Are we likely to be pursued? Does your grandfather or that shepherd dragon, Aunt Deb, suspect anything?"

"I think not."

"Heaven be praised!"

The next instant she was in the boat, gliding away from the landing place. Did granter hear in the tower, or see aught to disturb his vigil? It seemed not, for there was no outcry.

The girl who was in a literal sense a treasure to him, and whom he valued in his own way, and the audacious stranger who was robbing him of her, swept, unchallenged, past Porgy Rock, and the red beacon, and vanished swiftly into darkness and distance.

The lovers sat like statues. Tom Dexter trimmed his sail, groaning inwardly over this total wreck of Rube's hopes. Presently the lights of Cinderville began to twinkle in the far darkness. Toward these the catboat sped like a living thing. It lacked but a few minutes to eleven o'clock when the little craft glided up to the old wharf by the fish-house, and Guy Fleetwood assisted the girl to step ashore.

The inhabitants of Cinderville kept early hours. Nearly all the lights had gone out in the houses. Fleetwood and Esther left Tom Dexter at the wharf,

and turned their steps toward the principal street of the town.

Here stood the public house, a church and a little white parsonage. In the latter lamps were still burning, as if in expectation of visitors. Fleetwood and his companion went up a walk of cobblestones and rang the bell.

"By this time," whispered the lover, "they have discovered your flight from the island. I greatly fear, my darling, that we shall be pursued. Your grandfather is your nearest of kin, and probably he has full power over you."

"No," she corrected, quietly; "he is not my nearest of kin, and he has no power over me."

He was surprised at the answer, even then, but before another word could be spoken, the Rev. David Lane, the white-haired shepherd of the Cinderville sheep, opened the parsonage door with his own hand, and bade the pair enter.

They followed him into a neat little parlor, lighted by kerosene lamps. Here the clergyman's wife was waiting to witness the marriage.

"Will you take off your hat and cloak, my dear?" she said to Esther, in a gentle, motherly voice.

The bewildered girl dropped her outer garments, burst from them, as it seemed, like a butterfly from a chrysalis—at any rate, she quite took her lover's breath.

She had knotted her magnificent hair in one silken, shining mass at the nape of her milk-white neck, and pierced it through with a great pin of solid gold. Her wedding gown was of thick, lustrous silk, like the gray-blue bloom on the ripe grape, in color, and it fitted her queenly shape like a glove. Some fine, creamy lace fell over the corsage, and was fastened at the throat by an arrow of big, luminous pearls. She had put on no other ornaments, although she possessed a generous share of such things. Her faultless face was with a vestige of color. The great, velvety eyes shone like stars. She was regal—she was marvelous!

The Rev. Mr. Lane looked at the marriage license and found it satisfactory. Esther slipped her small, tremulous hand into Fleetwood's—in spite of her grand air the island girl was quaking like a leaf—then the solemn voice of the clergyman arose and filled the room for a few moments, and it was over—she was Guy Fleetwood's lawfully wedded much happiness, my dear," said Mrs. Lane, and she kissed the bride as a mother might.

"Mine, now—mine forever!" whispered Fleetwood, triumphantly, as he folded the gray cloak around Esther again. Then he put the marriage fee into the clergyman's hand, and stepped forth with his bride into the still summer midnight.

The sea was murmuring on the shore; the stars shone bright overhead. What had he done? Deceived and wronged Maud Loftus! Indeed, but at the same time, the desire of his eyes. Esther was now his wife, and before this supreme fact all other things sank into insignificance.

He carried her to the little inn beyond the Cinderville church.

"I wish, my darling," he said, gravely, "that I could conduct you to my own house and present you to my mother this very hour; but that cannot be. It is best that we should remain in this place for a few days, at least."

The average American girl looks upon herself as a match for the best of men. It never occurred to Esther that the relatives of her well-born Canadian husband might consider his hasty marriage a misalliance. She simply said:

"I will try to love your mother, Guy; I want your friends to be my friends also."

In the still, small hours of that fate-filled night, in a chamber of the seaside inn, the young husband, tossing uneasily in his sleep, muttered and swore, as though the words were the keynote of his dreams. Esther, wakened suddenly, heard them—listened—heard them repeated, "Forgive me, Maud!" and wondered.

Who was Maud, and for what transgression did he, her bridegroom, desire to be forgiven?

CHAPTER X.
Friends and Foes.

"I am here at Rookwood, dear papa, in the very house where you were born, and here I must live, I suppose till you come to carry me back to our Colorado valley. Poor, meek Aunt Elmor is as kind and lovable as ever. Uncle Philip I find courteous and Jesuitical—he was never a favorite of mine, and as for Cyril, you know how I regard him. Last night he asked me to marry him, and you need not be told that I promptly declined. He was so rude that a gentleman, the guest of one of our neighbors, was obliged to come to my assistance. We have some very interesting neighbors at Rookwood. I shall make a study of them till you arrive. Do you ask what possession I hold most precious in the east? My black horse Ranchero, for you sent me as a birthday gift five years ago. He is as sleek and swift as a gazelle, and you need not be told that I have just been to Rookwood stables to give him some sugar, and put his velvet nose, and talk to him about the dear old ranch where we both were born. Ah, dearest papa, for a long time your letters have been very meagre and unsatisfactory. You rarely tell me anything about yourself, and you never mention the ranch save in a vague way. It is plain that you are very much absorbed in cattle-raising, or you are growing indifferent to your exiled Mignon, who thinks of you and longs to see you every hour in the day."

Mignon Vye folded the letter, from which the above lines are an extract, slipped it into an envelope and rose up from her writing desk just as the door opened, and in flattered Maud Loftus like a brisk breeze.

"Writing to papa?" she said, lightly. "What a dutiful daughter! Did you mention your adventure with that daring soldier last night? Don't reckon so silently, my dear. If my eyes did not deceive me in the mere glimpse which I got of him, your Captain Shirraw was too—too absurdly good-looking for anything. And now the pony carriage is waiting, and you are to take the ribbons and shew me the beauties of the Dale."

"Ready—ready!" laughed Mignon. "I will post my letter on the way."

And ten minutes later the two girls were rolling in a smart pony carriage

along the romantic road by the river.

The had gone but a short distance when they suddenly encountered an English dog attached to four prancing, turbulent horses. Abel Lispenard held the lines, and his military guest, Shirraw, sat by his side.

The dwarf, who seemed to be managing the fiery beasts with admirable skill, made no sign of recognition; but Shirraw boldly claimed acquaintance with the occupants of the pony carriage by lifting his hat and dazzling Mignon with his swift, bright glance.

"Oh, oh!" ejaculated the vicious Canadian, as the dog dashed by and vanished on the river road; "what a pair of eyes! what an Adonis generally! But his companion—the object who was driving—was it a man or an enormous frog? And does he belong to the side-show of some circus or to civilized society?"

"That object," replied Mignon, laughing and reddening, "is Mr. Lispenard, the owner of the gray tower across the river. I met him by chance last night in Uncle Philip's library, and, speaking very fast, 'I think him uncommonly considerate in failing to recognize me even by a glance, for he knows it cannot be pleasant for me to remember the circumstances.'"

And then she related to her friend the incident of the previous night.

"Your cousin Cyril will yet give you no end of trouble, dear; see if he does not!" commented Maud. "It's a pity that Mr. Lispenard is such a fright. There is really no amusement, you know, in flirting with a monster. Ugh! he makes my flesh creep! By the way, Mignon, dear, I received a letter from dear Guy this morning, and, with two wrinkles coming out betwixt her blue eyes, 'It perplexes me greatly. He has shaken the dust of Colorado from his feet, and is en route home. The party which was planned in Chicago; but, strange to say, he did not speak of coming here to Rookwood to see me on his way; only said that important business called him to some town on the coast of Maine, where he might be compelled to tarry for awhile. Maine! a miserable, obscure place, I'm sure! What can be the business that would induce him to pass me by for a trip to Maine?'"

Her jealous tone made Mignon laugh. "Remember the gypsy's warning she said lightly.

"Nonsense!" replied Maud, loftily. "I fear no rival. Guy has probably gone to the Maine coast to fish or—or recuperate. Doubtless the wounds inflicted by that Colorado robber are not yet wholly healed. But it was just his route. He will pass me by on his homeward route. He will be obliged to explain his queer conduct. Really I cannot endure anything like mysteries in connection with Guy."

"Quite right, I'm sure," answered Mignon, thoughtfully. "I hate mysterious things in connection with anything."

It was high noon before the two girls returned to Rookwood, and guests were expected to lunch. As Mignon was crossing the wainscoted hall of the old house she heard some one call her name, and, turning, she found herself face to face with Cyril Vye. She had not seen him since the previous night.

"Pray, let me make my peace with you, Mignon," he began, humbly. "But there are some things we love each other. He will pass me by on his homeward route. He will be obliged to explain his queer conduct. Really I cannot endure anything like mysteries in connection with Guy."

"Quite right, I'm sure," answered Mignon, thoughtfully. "I hate mysterious things in connection with anything."

It was high noon before the two girls returned to Rookwood, and guests were expected to lunch. As Mignon was crossing the wainscoted hall of the old house she heard some one call her name, and, turning, she found herself face to face with Cyril Vye. She had not seen him since the previous night.

"Pray, let me make my peace with you, Mignon," he began, humbly. "But there are some things we love each other. He will pass me by on his homeward route. He will be obliged to explain his queer conduct. Really I cannot endure anything like mysteries in connection with Guy."

"Quite right, I'm sure," answered Mignon, thoughtfully. "I hate mysterious things in connection with anything."

It was high noon before the two girls returned to Rookwood, and guests were expected to lunch. As Mignon was crossing the wainscoted hall of the old house she heard some one call her name, and, turning, she found herself face to face with Cyril Vye. She had not seen him since the previous night.

"Pray, let me make my peace with you, Mignon," he began, humbly. "But there are some things we love each other. He will pass me by on his homeward route. He will be obliged to explain his queer conduct. Really I cannot endure anything like mysteries in connection with Guy."

"Quite right, I'm sure," answered Mignon, thoughtfully. "I hate mysterious things in connection with anything."

It was high noon before the two girls returned to Rookwood, and guests were expected to lunch. As Mignon was crossing the wainscoted hall of the old house she heard some one call her name, and, turning, she found herself face to face with Cyril Vye. She had not seen him since the previous night.

"Pray, let me make my peace with you, Mignon," he began, humbly. "But there are some things we love each other. He will pass me by on his homeward route. He will be obliged to explain his queer conduct. Really I cannot endure anything like mysteries in connection with Guy."

"Quite right, I'm sure," answered Mignon, thoughtfully. "I hate mysterious things in connection with anything."

It was high noon before the two girls returned to Rookwood, and guests were expected to lunch. As Mignon was crossing the wainscoted hall of the old house she heard some one call her name, and, turning, she found herself face to face with Cyril Vye. She had not seen him since the previous night.

"Pray, let me make my peace with you, Mignon," he began, humbly. "But there are some things we love each other. He will pass me by on his homeward route. He will be obliged to explain his queer conduct. Really I cannot endure anything like mysteries in connection with Guy."

"Quite right, I'm sure," answered Mignon, thoughtfully. "I hate mysterious things in connection with anything."

It was high noon before the two girls returned to Rookwood, and guests were expected to lunch. As Mignon was crossing the wainscoted hall of the old house she heard some one call her name, and, turning, she found herself face to face with Cyril Vye. She had not seen him since the previous night.

"Pray, let me make my peace with you, Mignon," he began, humbly. "But there are some things we love each other. He will pass me by on his homeward route. He will be obliged to explain his queer conduct. Really I cannot endure anything like mysteries in connection with Guy."

"Quite right, I'm sure," answered Mignon, thoughtfully. "I hate mysterious things in connection with anything."

It was high noon before the two girls returned to Rookwood, and guests were expected to lunch. As Mignon was crossing the wainscoted hall of the old house she heard some one call her name, and, turning, she found herself face to face with Cyril Vye. She had not seen him since the previous night.

"Pray, let me make my peace with you, Mignon," he began, humbly. "But there are some things we love each other. He will pass me by on his homeward route. He will be obliged to explain his queer conduct. Really I cannot endure anything like mysteries in connection with Guy."

"Quite right, I'm sure," answered Mignon, thoughtfully. "I hate mysterious things in connection with anything."

It was high noon before the two girls returned to Rookwood, and guests were expected to lunch. As Mignon was crossing the wainscoted hall of the old house she heard some one call her name, and, turning, she found herself face to face with Cyril Vye. She had not seen him since the previous night.

"Pray, let me make my peace with you, Mignon," he began, humbly. "But there are some things we love each other. He will pass me by on his homeward route. He will be obliged to explain his queer conduct. Really I cannot endure anything like mysteries in connection with Guy."

"Quite right, I'm sure," answered Mignon, thoughtfully. "I hate mysterious things in connection with anything."

It was high noon before the two girls returned to Rookwood, and guests were expected to lunch. As Mignon was crossing the wainscoted hall of the old house she heard some one call her name, and, turning, she found herself face to face with Cyril Vye. She had not seen him since the previous night.

"Pray, let me make my peace with you, Mignon," he began, humbly. "But there are some things we love each other. He will pass me by on his homeward route. He will be obliged to explain his queer conduct. Really I cannot endure anything like mysteries in connection with Guy."

"Quite right, I'm sure," answered Mignon, thoughtfully. "I hate mysterious things in connection with anything."

It was high noon before the two girls returned to Rookwood, and guests were expected to lunch. As Mignon was crossing the wainscoted hall of the old house she heard some one call her name, and, turning, she found herself face to face with Cyril Vye. She had not seen him since the previous night.

"Pray, let me make my peace with you, Mignon," he began, humbly. "But there are some things we love each other. He will pass me by on his homeward route. He will be obliged to explain his queer conduct. Really I cannot endure anything like mysteries in connection with Guy."

"Quite right, I'm sure," answered Mignon, thoughtfully. "I hate mysterious things in connection with anything."

It was high noon before the two girls returned to Rookwood, and guests were expected to lunch. As Mignon was crossing the wainscoted hall of the old house she heard some one call her name, and, turning, she found herself face to face with Cyril Vye. She had not seen him since the previous night.

them—the two turned their backs on each other, and sat down with the rest of the party to a lunch table sumptuous with old plate and crystal and Sevres porcelain and glistening with foreign fruits, salads, jellies and cold game.

Elmor Vye, pale and impassive, presided at the board. She started nervously at every movement of her lord, and her plaintive, "Oh, I beg pardon!" was more frequent than ever this day.

"If there is one person above another whom I pity, it is your Aunt Elmor," whispered Nina Berkeley to Mignon; "even now, have you yet been to Lispenard's tower across the river? It abounds in wonderful things—priceless fancies, old St. Domingo mahogany, carved oak presses, Bokhara tapestries, marvelous tapestries and Oriental curios—the accumulation of generations of cultured and traveled people. The Lispenards, you know, are intensely old and aristocratic. One was governor of this about twenty years ago, and minister to Russia—your neighbor drinks his tea from a magnificent samovar that was presented to his ancestor by some dead and buried czar."

"Indeed!" answered Mignon, absently.

She was wondering at that moment what Maud Loftus and Captain Shirraw could be talking about on the opposite side of the table.

"They were ever a remarkable race," went on Maud Berkeley, undisturbed; "but to Abel Lispenard, the last of his name, all the gifts of the gods seem to have fallen."

Mignon stared. The dwarf himself chanced to be seated at the other end of the board, with Philip Vye on one hand and the high church rector on the other. All three were conversing, and as the rector possessed a voice like a frog horn, the wild hum of Nina Berkeley's talk traveled no farther than the ear for which it was intended.

"All the gifts of the gods!" echoed Mignon; "surely you are jesting. He is rightfully ugly—he is deformed."

"How can you say that?" answered Miss Berkeley. "Are you one of the absurd multitude who can see no beauty save in certain conventional lines and tints? The man yonder is unique—magnificent! Both in body and soul he is unlike all others. You do not know him yet, and so you cannot appreciate his grandeur. To me he is the impersonation of sublime tragedy. In all the world there is but one Lispenard."

Mignon's velvety eyes opened wider yet.

"She is very far gone, indeed," she thought; "and, oh, horror! to lose one's heart to that dwarf, that frog-man! It is incredible!" Aloud she stammered: "Pray pardon me