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She stood rejoicing now by Gilbert's side.

"They will all be immensely pleased," continued the writer, opening the paper and envelope case, and proceeding to rummage through its contents.

"Are you looking for anything?" inquired she.

He was, in the hope of turning up a sheet with a coroneted stamp; for not being learned in such lore, he could not help thinking the august Lady Caroline must be entitled to such.

"Is that paper not right?" questioned Rosamund, solicitously. "I am afraid it is rather a small size. Mamma never writes on any but the smallest paper, and no one else uses her davenport. This is her especial davenport, you know. There is every kind of paper on the library table. Would you not rather—"

But he would not rather at all.

It took his fancy amazingly thus to set his foot, as it were, on the neck of his enemy at the very outset of his career, and he protested that the smallest-sized paper in the world would do for all that was required.

All the household were Gilbert's adherents. If they thought at all of Lord Hartland, the other eligible bachelor, it was to conjecture that he was not yet ripe for matrimony, but that he would, in all probability, one day bring home a titled dame, who would reinstate his fortunes, and enable him to fill Lady Julia's place when Lady Julia should be no longer there.

That day, all devoutly hoped, would be long in coming.

So my lord was not wed just yet. That being settled, Major Gilbert was a fine suitor for Miss Rosamund; and his being in her lady-mother's black books rather added to his popularity than diminished it. He had precisely the sort of jovial authoritative air which most tells with inferiors; he was liberal with his money; and he gave himself no airs. Added to which, it was a treat to see him riding at the head of his men through the streets of Longminster; and a comely corporal, spanking over now and again, in full uniform, with a note or a message, and an important notion of the officer who had despatched it—all went into the same scale.

It stood to reason that the rescue of Billy Barley placed the already well-disposed hearts of all at Gilbert's feet.

"Do be quick, Esther. There's the five-minutes gong."

"If you jump about like that, miss, I can't find the fastenings."

"Skip one or two. No one will be the wiser."

"I shall have done in a minute, miss."

"How nicely this frock fits, Esther!"

"I thought you had complained of the shoulder-straps, Miss Rosamund. I had been going to see about altering them to-morrow."

"Never mind troubling about them now. I must have been mistaken. They look very well to-night."

"Do they not cut you, miss?"

"Cut me? No. Or if they do, I don't feel it. Oh, they are all right—quite nice, quite comfortable." ("And they will not be needed long," thought the fair wearer, with a bounding heart. "Soon, soon I shall leave them, and all besides, behind me. Frederick and I together, what fun we will have! He likes fun as well as I do. Even now the change has begun, for I am to be taken to the flower-show after all, and he scouted the very idea of our places being filled up at the luncheon. He said that all his fellows would want to see me, and be introduced. What fun! How grand I shall feel! Some of the officers are married already; but I, as the major's wife, will take precedence of them all, for the colonel is not here. The idea of mamma and Aunt Julia not seeing all this in their absurd infatuation about Hartland! I hope their eyes are opened at last. Why, Hartland went over on purpose to give his support to Frederick—at least I am sure he did. Frederick said he was so very kind about it. Frederick said—")

"Miss Rosamund, you will never be finished if you don't stand still a moment."

"Oh yes, yes, yes. Yes, Esther, I shall—I will—I am finished. There's a good Esther. What? Have I not washed my hands yet? Oh, this nice hot water," plunging in the round dimpled arms, "oh—how—nice! The second gong! Dear me! Dear me! Coming—coming—coming. My little gold locket, Esther. Oh, not that stupid old thing. The tiny one with the ruby, and the thin gold band for the neck. There, that's it," bundling her neck to have the clasp fastened.

"There now, I'm off." And light as a swallow she skimmed down the broad oaken staircase, just as Major Gilbert appeared in the hall from another set of chambers.

He caught her in his arms—and Lady Caroline saw it.

They did not know she was there, and no one ever knew why she had been there, but there she was. Slowly making her way across the ante-room, whose door stood always open—a way she had never been known to take before, since it was a distinct round from her own dressing-room—Lady Caroline had been arrested by sounds from without, and turning round to seek the cause, she was an involuntary beholder of a spectacle which made every vein tingle.

There was Rosamund, her beautiful, brilliant young daughter, her wild, half-blown rosebud, the one human being who had stirred a spark of natural feeling in her cold and selfish nature, for whom in her heart she had prognosticated a gorgeous destiny, and mapped out what that destiny should be—and there, holding her in his embrace, was the man who had frustrated her hopes and set her will at defiance!

Poor Gilbert! Little did he know the agony he was inflicting. His affectionate, exulting, monopolising attitude ought perhaps to have been kept for another and a more secluded spot; but still, he might have been forgiven, or at least Lady Caroline might have turned away her eyes. She did neither. With deliberate tread she advanced to the doorway, and like the knell of doom sounded her leaden accents, "Rosamund, I want you."

Gilbert's arms fell by his side; Rosamund almost spurted from his embrace; and both flushed with vexation.

"Pray remember," said Lady Caroline, "that there are others in this house beside yourselves. Do not let this occur again!" and the chill measured tones seemed to clank like a prison chain round the bright free moment gone before.

"Could mamma ever have been young? Could she ever have been loved?" muttered the now humbled and indignant girl, following her parent with sullen, shame-faced steps, and not even reassured by the presence of her fellow-criminal.

In vain did the combined forces struggle for serenity, for cheerfulness, and ease. The dancing light in Rosamund's eyes died out completely ere the terrible meal was over; and long, long before the last dish had gone its round, her lover had given up attempting conciliation.

"I suppose we must not slip off anywhere by ourselves, must we?" whispered Gilbert, when at length the wearisome repast was over, and the party had reassembled as lugubrious as before in the drawing-room. He really felt as if he must escape the tainted atmosphere, poor fellow; it choked him, strangled him, unnerved and bewildered him. He had not expected it. With some pardonable self-complacency he had anticipated a little surprise, and a considerable relenting on Lady Caroline's part, once he had made his offer with its appropriate accompaniments; and that, instead of this, he should be met with not only increased acerbity of countenance, but with the addition of a silence so profound, so hopeless, and so impenetrable, that all seemed to quail before it, was discomfiting beyond measure.

He would not, however, suffer himself to be quite snuffed out. If he durst not speak to his love, nor touch her, nor hardly look at her before her jailer, he would make a shift to evade the jailer's watchfulness. "What do you say? Can we run off? To the library, or somewhere?" he suggested, accordingly.

The pair were by the piano, to which Rosamund has betaken herself, under the pretext of arranging some music, on the opening of the dining-room door, and the approach of her father and lover. It was, she well knew, the farthest spot to which she might go, away from that motionless figure on the large, solemn sofa at the other end.

"Is not this far enough?" and she glanced round, with a smile.

"By Jove! no. I should just say not. I have so much to say to you."

"Have you?"

"May I come over early to-morrow?"

"Oh yes—to luncheon."

"Not till luncheon?"

"Mamma does not care for visitors before then, you know."

"But I don't come to see 'mamma,'" protested Gilbert, laughing; "I should never think of intruding upon 'mamma' at all," he added, maliciously. "You could meet me outside, couldn't you?"

"Perhaps I could—at least I think so—if—if," said Rosamund, with another hurried glance round—for after all, she was but a simple girl, and all unversed in the pretty ways of our modern bells—"if mamma does not mind; but I think she would perhaps rather you came to the house." She could stand up and defy her mother to the face, but she would never deceive her, she would not put out her foot by a single step on a slippery way.

Gilbert, looking at her, saw this, and in his heart approved. ("Jolly good little creature," he thought. "No underhand tricks about her. She did not even see

(Continued on page 8.)

AT DEATH'S DOOR.

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