



## CHAPTER I.

Vanity fair was at its height, and its chiefest mart of fashion was crowded in every part.

To and fro the people thronged, buying and selling, if only for hearts, chaffing for a smile from beauty, a bow from the great, for any and every trifle for which the world pays so high, and by which the wise set no store at all, the humbler ones fighting for a place whence they could the better view the orderly magnificence of a show most assuredly not to be matched in any other capital in Europe.

Jarring notes there may be, ugly blots of color representing those who come neither to buy nor sell, only to stare or gaze at the brave men and the fair women who seem of another race to themselves, but they cannot mar the absolute perfection in every detail of the scene, and in which the faultless horses, equipages and servants play a brilliant and conspicuous part.

Two persons chatting together near a window in Park lane, that overlooked Stanhope gate, had turned their backs on the geometrical flower beds that indicated the full flood tide of a London season, and the lady had a ruffled air, as of an orchid rudely hustled by an easterly wind, as she unfolded a letter and regarded it with extreme disfavor.

"I don't know how to tell you, I'm sure, Ronny," said Lady Appuldurcombe. "I know how you dislike girls, and really I never will forgive Malincourt, never!"

"Malincourt is the chap who lives in Somersetshire all the year round and married your half sister, isn't he?" inquired Ronny lazily, from the depths of his big chair.

"Yes. It was the first time I ever found Cecilia's taste at fault. I suppose if I had been born a beauty I should have made a muddle of my life too. But I'll read you his letter—the first I've had from him for five years, and I haven't seen him for ten."

"My dear Jane—I don't think I have troubled you much, but now I want you to do me a favor—ask my girl, Lesley, up to stop with you for a month. I'll warrant that four weeks of town, noticed by nobody, will break her of her tricks and make her glad enough, after jilting half the county, to put up with Bob Heatherley (dear me, Ronny, what a name!), the best fellow that ever breathed. She vows she won't come, but she shall, and if you will send to Waterloo to meet the 9 o'clock train this day week she and her maid shall be there. You needn't bother about her clothes. She has plenty. Lady Appuldurcombe groaned. Mind, I don't complain of her being too fond of the men. It's only that she encourages them to be too fond of her. And if I make my request curtly it is only because I know how barefaced and inexcusable it is. Your affectionate brother-in-law, MALINCOURT."

"And it is now 6:30," exclaimed Ronny, glancing at his watch. "Mother, why didn't you tell me in time, so that I might go and meet her?"

"My boy!" exclaimed his mother. "And when I have not had you back for more than 24 hours. I have sent the brougham and Parker. But how like Malincourt to think he is punishing a girl by packing her off to taste the whipped cream of a London season! However, he was always mad on that point. He could stand Paris for a week, when Cecilia wanted new frocks, but nothing would persuade him to sleep a night in town, and what was more amazing still, he persuaded my sister to think the same. She was always an extraordinarily well dressed woman," added Lady Appuldurcombe meditatively, "and she died of the country, no doubt. The child was then about 8, so the girl must be that odious age to everybody but herself, 18. Of course she is provincial to the last degree!"

"Now, mother," said Ronny, laughing. "Do allow the county to have a little taste. Some of the nicest girls in the world never come to town at all and show their sense, I think, by stopping away."

"Well, I can't forgive her," said Lady Appuldurcombe, crossing over to drop a loving kiss on his close cropped, curly head. "But it's too bad, after all these months of torture I've gone through, not knowing if you were alive or dead, for a silly, flirting girl to appear and spoil everything."

"The trouble is all over now, mother," he said cheerily. "and you know I always came back to you before, didn't I? I was in hopes those confounded newspapers would have let us alone!"

"Newspapers don't spare mothers," she said, then added softly: "Cynthia was a great comfort to me. She suffered horribly!"

"Mother, I didn't ask her to do it!" he burst out hotly and got up and stood looking across Park lane at the masses of bloom and the carriages that rolled with muffled roar beside them.

"I think I'll run down to the stables tonight," he said presently. "You are not going out, I hope?"

"I'm afraid I must. I can throw over the other things, but Green Park House is open this evening, and I must look in for an hour. If you will tell Charville you are out and refuse to go to your club or in the park because you dread an ovation—has it not occurred to you that if you are the most popular man in England today I am the proudest mother in it?"

"Oh, mother," he said shamefacedly, for so it is that the men who are the very pith and marrow of English manhood, and who plant the English flag,

with bleeding hands maybe, but unwaveringly, in the far corners of the earth, cannot talk about it and will run a mile rather than hear their brave deeds mentioned.

"And you will take that poor girl with you, of course, mother?" he added eagerly. "I want you to be nice to her." And he looked lovingly at the tall woman, whose elegance was erroneously supposed to be in excess of her heart. "After all, what harm do you know of her? Merely that she is not as fond of the men as the men are of her. Give her a good time, and then let her marry her own Bob Heatherley, or some one else's Bob, and be happy."

"As if she would have a frock fit to go in!" said his mother, looking shocked. "You forget, my dear, that any one under my wing is certain to be observed, and really I don't know how to explain it. An Appuldurcombe, a Kilmurray and a Malincourt, all closely related. Really it hardly sounds respectable!"

Ronny's eyes twinkled. His mother knew what was coming, smiled and beat a retreat, her marriage, not his, being a standing joke between them. When she had gone, he thought how few people would have honored the blank check Malincourt had drawn on their kindness as she had done, but indeed, though a woman of society, Lady Appuldurcombe was an absurd person, who could not get rid of a heart, and if you're born so, with a hankering to do kind things, you may get rapped over your knuckles 60 times a day, but you will go on doing them simply because you cannot help it.

Looking at the shifting stream that, to him, was not even picturesque, but simply monotonous, Major Kilmurray's face fell into the stern lines of one in whom sight and thought are suddenly arrested, and action, keen, swift and decisive, takes their place. With head thrown back, and in his nostrils the wild flicker and savor of fight, he lived once more those supreme moments that, when rightly seized, prove the hero and pass as a national heritage into the history of a man's country.

The reality of life, not the mockery of it, had always claimed Ronald Kilmurray for its own, and if birth and circumstance had thrust him into the dallying ways of society he had struck out with all the fierceness of a drowning swimmer against them and not in vain.

A man must belong to himself (and, I am afraid, Ronny added his horse), but he need not caper round in self imposed lot of pleasure and spend his life in trying to convince people he loved it.

He was glad to be home. He loved his mother as it is given to but few happy mothers to be loved when a boy's earliest school days are over. He had men friends by the score and horses that were almost more to him than his friends, but one disagreeable fact just then stuck in his recollection, and that fact was a woman.

He would meet her tonight, of course, and—and he turned suddenly, with angry brows, to see Charville retreating in the distance and at his elbow the scapegrace Lesley.

O youth, youth! The sap in the tree, the blossom on the bough, to which unconsciously we yearn as to spring, and yet it was youth, shy and proud and ashamed, that stood looking at Ronald with eyes that asked him wistfully: "Do I look such a desperate character? What have I done to be thrust upon your unwilling hospitality like this?"

He laughed as he took her hand and shook it heartily. "You are awfully welcome, Cousin Lesley," he said, but he saw how, with that keenness of the senses which goes only with the morning of life, she was still examining him, hoping, but not quite sure, that she had found a friend.

"Poor little son!" he said to himself as he took a dainty bag containing purse and handkerchief from her, observing thankfully as he did so that there was not the faintest perfume of any kind about it. Perhaps Cynthia de Salis' greatest fault, in his eyes, bar one, was the faint perfume of violets by which her approach was always made known.

"Mother will be here directly," he said, "and meanwhile you must let me give you some tea."

But Lesley declined tea, though she looked as if she really wanted it. He thought how awkward it would be if she starved herself, and after a moment's hesitation told her so.

"And how would you like it," she flashed out, "if you were packed off like a parcel labeled 'This side up' to people you had never seen or scarcely heard of, and who didn't want to see you in the very least?"

"We really ought to know something of each other, because we are cousins, you know," said Ronny, rather taken aback to find that, when she was angry, she stood nearly as tall as he did.

"Only half," she said, still with that insultingly tall air. Her shame seemed quite gone now.

"To be sure," said Ronny cheerfully. "But the fact is, we've got rather a way of marrying twice in our family, you know. That's why I'm a Kilmurray."

But mother draws the line at third marriages. She thinks matrimony might become a bad habit if too long persisted in.

"Are you married?" inquired Lesley. "No one would ever undertake me," said Ronny cheerfully. "Too many

vices, you know, and too little money."

Lesley smiled and walked out on to the balcony, looking with interest at the park.

"It's almost as good as the country," she said, "only with the pulse of life beating through. It's not a bit like dad told me, all bricks and mortar and blacks and miserable people. Oh, what lovely horses!" she cried out suddenly and joyfully, just like a little child, as Lady Appuldurcombe's voice was heard approaching them.

Lesley turned, with a wild, startled gesture that completely disarmed her aunt—the girl was so young to begin to be ashamed of herself—so she took her in her arms and kissed as much of the extremely small face as she conveniently could. "We are very glad to see you, my dear," she said, at the same time taking in every detail of her appearance with a sense of astonishment that Ronny did not share, though he afterward remarked that he knew Lesley's clothes must have been all right, because he did not notice them. If they had been all wrong, they would have infallibly stuck in his recollection, as most disagreeable things did.

"And how is Malincourt?" inquired Lady Appuldurcombe.

"Dad is always well," said Lesley, her eyes following Ronald as he left the room.

"What is his name?" she said, sitting down opposite her aunt.

"He is Ronny Kilmurray," said his mother proudly, just as if she had said, "He is the pope."

"I like him," said Lesley calmly. "He is not handsome, but he has a kind face, and I like the way his chin curves up." She took her own small chin in her palm and turned it up fiercely. "I wonder dad never said anything to me about him."

"Do you never read the newspapers?" said Lady Appuldurcombe coldly.

"Never. Dad left off reading them long ago, and I never began. You see," Leslie looked out thoughtfully at the fast thinning park, "we live in the open air, dad and I, and we don't want to hear about things and people we are not interested in."

"And do you never read?" exclaimed her aunt, horror struck. "Or is your father the man who has a library full of books not one of which has ever been out?"

Lesley laughed. It was a baffling laugh, and her aunt could have boxed her ears for it. The girl was moving about the beautiful saloons, expressing surprise at nothing, but pausing only to look at what was rarest and best.

"There are no Malincourts here," she said as she came back slowly, and lifting her head in a way peculiar to her mother's family, who had all been swift of foot, long of limb, like herself.

"And none of your mother's people are at Malincourt, I suppose?" said Lady Appuldurcombe a little coldly.

"It's a fine old place, I believe, but your father never wished to see any of us in it."

"And yet," said Lesley in a voice that trembled, "he believes you capable of turning a silly fool into a sensible woman! You are the only one he ever spoke of, ever admired. And poor mamma died so young! Dad says you were abroad with your first husband all the while she was at Malincourt."

"Poor Cecilia," said Lady Appuldurcombe, and her heart warmed to her sister's child, at once so wild, yet so independent, pride making her carry off a difficult position with an ease she was far from feeling.

Lesley came over and knelt down, and the two women looked into each other's eyes.

"I will be good," said Lesley quite simply, but struggling to keep down the tears in her throat. "I've come to you with a bad character, I know, but I'll leave you with a clean one! I can't forgive dad yet—for humiliating me so, but probably he'll be so wretched with-out me he'll send for me back before the end of the week!"

"And supposing you don't want to go?" said Lady Appuldurcombe—"that is to say, of course, if you can do without Bob!"

"Oh, spare me!" cried Lesley, starting up and putting her hands to cheeks upon which lay a bloom so rich, so soft, as almost to simulate art. "There is one comfort, at least, that I am rid of him! It's in the bond that he is not to venture near town while I am here!"

"My dear," said her aunt solemnly, if irrelevantly, "who makes your frocks?"

Lesley ran over a short list that made her aunt open her eyes.

"None of these people was in vogue when Cecilia died," she remarked. "Pray, who has taken you in hand and sent you to exactly the right new ones?"

And then her maid—she does your hair very cleverly, and, in a crush, if her aunt open her eyes.

"None of these people was in vogue when Cecilia died," she remarked. "Pray, who has taken you in hand and sent you to exactly the right new ones?"

And then her maid—she does your hair very cleverly, and, in a crush, if

At his elbow the scapegrace Lesley.

you only take care of your head, you may safely leave Providence to look after your skirts. But now we must really dress for dinner, and tomorrow morning you shall come to my boudoir for a chat.



## General Agency

BOARD OF TRADE BUILDING, CANTERBURY STREET,

ST. JOHN, N. B.

Controlling the largest line of

BICYCLES REPRESENTED IN THE DOMINION.

Send Your Address for our

1896 Catalogue

Which we will forward as soon as published.

General Agent for the Maritime Provinces for

The Yost Writing Machine Co.,

The American Typewriter Co.,

The Blickensderfer Typewriter Co.,

The Edison Mimeograph Typewriter.

The Edison Automatic Mimeograph,

The Edison Hand Mimeograph,

The Duplograph Manufacturing Co.,

The Electric Heat Alarm Co., &amp;c., &amp;c.

All kinds of bicycles, Typewriters and other intricate machines carefully repaired

Typewriter and Mimeograph

Supplies of all kinds.

IRA CORNWALL, General Agent,

I. E. CORNWALL, Special Agent.

When she had shown Lesley to her room—a very different Lesley to the put-in-the-corner one who had arrived an hour or two before—Lady Appuldurcombe slowly and thoughtfully, as one who revolves many things in her mind, descended the stairs in search of Ronny.

"She wears gowns made by Felix, and she had never even heard of you!" she said, sitting down helplessly, when she had discovered her darling deep in a pile of racing papers, dated some months back.

"Thank God!" said Ronny. "Now, mother, didn't I always tell you what a mistake it was to read the newspapers? They are written for ghouls and cannibals, not decent people, and, as to geography, especially when there is any fighting going on, why, it ought to be one of the lost arts of one's childhood. But, mother," he looked disconsolately down the column of entries he was studying, "what a lot of good things I have missed by being away, to be sure!"

## CHAPTER II.

The roar of conversation rose and fell like the lions' voices at feeding time in the zoo. There were no carpets on the polished floors of Green Park House, and it was curious to note how a lull would come in which you might almost hear a pin drop, then out would swell the raucous sounds again, though apparently the menagerie effect was observed by only one newcomer present—Lesley.

There was never any music here, which made the house extremely popular, the music of our own voices being so much sweeter than any other sound we ever heard or shall hear.

"You needn't worry, mother," said Ronny when presently he found her looking round for Lesley. "She is going like hot cakes. The men here seem to be in the same condition as the county—one half jilted and the other wanting to be."

"And I don't know what Lesley's quality was, if she were magnetic or only human, but when she came into a room it grew brighter and fresher, and people began to smile after the first half dozen words with her and disliked leaving her company."

"She is like a glass of tiptop champagne, only you don't get a headache afterward," said one of her fox hunting lovers not very elegantly, and tonight men smiled under their bearded lips at the irrepressible gaiety and youth of this country girl, who had appeared on the scene just as all the other women's bloom was fading, and who wore a white frock that only an artist genuinely in love with youth could have created.

Through the jaded assemblage a rustle, a freshness went with her, and a rustle of another kind accompanied Ronald, who was stopped at every step, praised, congratulated and made generally to feel as sick as the average Briton does when he is entreated to roar.

"Why do they all run after my cousin like sheep?" inquired Lesley, a little indignant, as most women would be, at seeing a mere man create a greater sensation than herself.

The quiet, distinguished looking man whose breast was crossed by a star and ribbon, and who enjoyed to the full this tripping vision of youth and brightness, smiled and said:

"He is a very brave man. All men should be brave. Do you mean to say that the others here are cowards?"

"Some would be if they dared."

"And you?"

His excellency turned to look at her meditatively.

For all her exquisite freshness, which was able subtly to suggest the fragrance of a morning meadow, there was a total lack of rusticity in her and a fearless knowledge of the hearts of men that surprised him.

"You matter me," he said and smiled again when she lifted her head with that proud little gesture that distinguished her and actually blushed.

"And yet you have never been in town before?" he said tentatively. "It was wise of you to wait till the season is at its very best."

"My father knows nothing about the seasons," she said. "He only recognizes the hunting, the shooting and the fishing ones. When he sent me up here, he had no idea!" She stopped.

"He sent you? You did not wish to come, then?"

"Oh, no! It was a punishment!"

"And what had you done?" inquired his excellency, with a pretty good idea of what her delinquencies had been.

"Nothing."

If she had been nearer 5 feet than 5 feet 8, she would have looked a very spry of mischief and devilry as she turned her face upon him, and it struck Ronny vividly, who just then came up, that she did not look as if she had ever been ashamed of herself or sorry in her life.

"Are you getting tired?" he said, when he had saluted her companion. "I think mother is quite ready to go home"—which was a lie. Lady Appuldurcombe shone gloriously among mothers that night and was enjoying herself down to the ground.

"No," said Lesley; "I am not ready. Who is the red woman in scarlet behind you?" she inquired of his excellency, and while he was putting up his eye-glass and turning round to see she quietly slipped off, making a sign to Ronny to follow.

"His excellency," he began.

"Was growing inquisitive," she said. "Would you mind telling me," she added naively, "why all these people are running after you more than any woman here? It isn't fair." This after Ronny had been violently laid hands on half a dozen times in as many steps.

"For no earthly reason," he replied crossly, "but that I have done what any schoolboy would—his duty."

"And to cap it all," said a voice behind them in one of the wild beast pauses of conversation, "he is cousin to the lovely Malincourt! The way that girl's head is set on her shoulders!"

"That comes of being Lady Appuldurcombe's niece," said Lesley ruefully as hers and Ronny's eyes met. "Oh, poor dad! To let me have my frocks made in Paris and send me as a penitent to enjoy myself under the wing of one of the greatest ladies in town!"

"How did you find that out?" he said, greatly amused.

"Come with me," she said gayly, and as he smiled and went somehow he seemed to have become quite old beside this buoyant moral whom every one turned to stare at.

"If Bob Heatherley could only see you now!" he said.

"Who told you about—Bob?" she said faintly, and for a moment looking somewhat as she did on her arrival.

"But he only laughed and said that he intended to watch over Bob's interests, for which she thanked him and said Bob was quite able to take excellent care of them himself."

The rooms were thinning; persons stood out with greater distinctness, and Lesley at that moment caught sight of something that made her exclaim:

"How wonderful! Who is she?"

Ronny looked everywhere but in the right direction, though in every nerve of his body he knew what was there.

"A woman in an orange gown, with barbaric gleams of red embroidery—she is looking at you—she is coming toward you now!"

Alas for the bravery of the bravest! If a trapdoor had been at his feet, down which he could have shot, Ronny, the hero, would have vanished through it there and then.

"How do you do, Miss de Salis?" he said coldly, then introduced Lesley as "My cousin, Miss Malincourt."

As Cynthia's glance swept the girl from head to foot, Lesley could scarcely have told why her heart went out to this poor woman—poor in her gorgeous robes of red and orange—except that she had always been nice to her own sex and never willfully taken their lovers away from them or done them any sort of mean trick, but the friendliness she now displayed did not wholly bridge over the discomfort of the situation, and Lady Appuldurcombe's sudden descent upon them was hailed by all as that of an angel from heaven.

She was really happy and much pleased with the lightness of her duties in chaperoning Lesley, congratulating herself on Malincourt and nature having managed things very nicely between them, and now Ronny was with Cynthia, and—

"I'm quite shocked," she said, looking radiant and touching Cynthia's arm affectionately. "We must have been here a whole hour and will soon be the last survivors!"

Then a chilliness in the air struck her, and her face changed as Cynthia, with some light words of farewell, moved away.

"You have been unkind to her, Ronald," she said reproachfully, but she addressed thin air, for he had made his escape.

"My dear," she said presently to Lesley as the carriage moved at a foot pace the few yards to Park lane, "I think you have come to save the county at the expense of town. But the most wonderful thing about you is your clothes."

"I think those of Miss de Salis much more wonderful," said Lesley. "Why won't Ronny love her?" she broke out suddenly.

"My dear, Ronny will never marry. All my other children have done so, but he never will."

"Oh, how mad, how silly of her to let him see how she cares!" cried Lesley passionately. "Doesn't she know"—she paused again, then went on irrelevantly, "Every tiny scrap a woman can make a man suffer is something off their tremendous debt to us women!"

"My dear!" said Lady Appuldurcombe, horrified. "And you do not read the newspapers?"

The carriage stopped at that moment, and Ronny was in waiting to hand them out.

"Are you prepared for more wild dissipation today?" he said, as Lesley stood on the pavement, a foam of white, looking back at the dawn that was already breaking. "Because Yelverton wants you both to go down on his coach to see those absurd new sports they call gymkhana, at Ranelagh."

"They are very absurd," said Lady Appuldurcombe as they went up stairs, "a sort of romp on horseback, you know—but you must ride well to be able to do any of the ridiculous tasks that are set. And now, my dear, I think we'll all go to bed."

And so they did, but Lesley found it impossible to sleep, this new world was so strange, so wonderful, and an hour later, hearing steps in the corridor, she opened her door to come face to face with Lady Appuldurcombe, who started at sight of Lesley and blushed like a girl.

"I have just been in to look at Ronny," she said. "He sleeps so sound, you know, or I should not venture. You see, my dear, I had only had him with me for 24 hours when you came—and for months and months I had been agonizing about him, not knowing if he were killed like Wilson and the others. Good night, or rather good morning, my child, and God bless you."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]