

The American Senator

Vol. III

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by

Anthony Trollope

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The American Senator Volume III, by Anthony Trollope

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CHAPTER I. "I have Told Him Everything."

That evening was very long and very sad to the three ladies assembled in the drawing-room at Bragton Park, but it was probably more so to Lady Augustus than the other two. She hardly spoke to either of them; nor did they to her; while a certain amount of conversation in a low tone was carried on between Lady Ushant and Miss Trefoil. When Arabella came down to dinner she received a message from the sick man. He sent his love, and would so willingly have seen her instantly,—only that the doctor would not allow it. But he was so glad,—so very glad that she had come! This Lady Ushant said to her in a whisper, and seemed to say it as though she had heard nothing of that frightful story which had been told to her not much more than an hour ago. Arabella did not utter a word in reply, but put out her hand, secretly as it were, and grasped that of the old lady to whom she had told the tale of her later intrigues. The dinner did not keep them long, but it was very grievous to them all. Lady Ushant might have made some effort to be at least a complaisant hostess to Lady Augustus had she not heard this story,—had she not been told that the woman, knowing her daughter to be engaged to John Morton, had wanted her to marry Lord Rufford. The story having come from the lips of the girl herself had moved some pity in the old woman's breast in regard to her; but for Lady Augustus she could feel nothing but horror.

In the evening Lady Augustus sat alone, not even pretending to open a book or to employ her fingers. She seated herself on one side of the fire with a screen in her hand, turning over such thoughts in her mind as were perhaps customary to her. Would there ever come a period to her misery, an hour of release in which she might be in comfort ere she died? Hitherto from one year to another, from one decade to the following, it had all been struggle and misery, contumely and contempt. She thought that she had done her duty by her child, and her child hated and despised her. It was but the other day that Arabella had openly declared that in the event of her marriage she would not have her mother as a guest in her own house. There could be no longer hope for triumph and glory;—but how might she find peace so that she might no longer be driven hither and thither by this ungrateful tyrant child? Oh, how hard she had worked in the world, and how little the world had given her in return!

Lady Ushant and Arabella sat at the other side of the fire, at some distance from it, on a sofa, and carried on a fitful conversation in whispers, of which a word would now and then reach the ears of the wretched mother. It consisted chiefly of a description of the man's illness, and of the different sayings which had come from

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the doctors who had attended him. It was marvellous to Lady Augustus, as she sat there listening, that her daughter should condescend to take an interest in such details. What could it be to her now how the fever had taken him, or why or when? On the very next day, the very morning on which she would go and sit,—ah so uselessly,—by the dying man's bedside, her father was to meet Lord Rufford at the ducal mansion in Piccadilly to see if anything could be done in that quarter! It was impossible that she should really care whether John Morton's lease of life was to be computed at a week's purchase or at that of a month! And yet Arabella sat there asking sick-room questions and listening to sick-room replies as though her very nature had been changed. Lady Augustus heard her daughter inquire what food the sick man took, and then Lady Ushant at great length gave the list of his nourishment. What sickening hypocrisy! thought Lady Augustus.

Lady Augustus must have known her daughter well; and yet it was not hypocrisy. The girl's nature, which had become thoroughly evil from the treatment it had received, was not altered. Such sudden changes do not occur more frequently than other miracles. But zealously as she had practised her arts she had not as yet practised them long enough not to be cowed by certain outward circumstances. There were moments when she still heard in her imagination the sound of that horse's foot as it struck the skull of the unfortunate fallen rider;—and now the prospect of the death of this man whom she had known so intimately and who had behaved so well to her, to whom her own conduct had been so foully false,—for a time brought her back to humanity. But Lady Augustus had got beyond that and could not at all understand it.

By nine they had all retired for the night. It was necessary that Lady Ushant should again visit her nephew, and the mother and daughter went to their own rooms. "I cannot in the least make out what you are doing," said Lady Augustus in her most severe voice.

"I dare say not, mamma."

"I have been brought here, at a terrible sacrifice—"

"Sacrifice! What sacrifice? You are as well here as anywhere else."

"I say I have been brought here at a terrible sacrifice for no purpose whatever. What use is it to be? And then you pretend to care what this poor man is eating and drinking and what physic he is taking when, the last time you were in his company, you wouldn't so much as look at him for fear you should make another man jealous."

"He was not dying then."

"Psha!"

"Oh yes. I know all that. I do feel a little ashamed of myself when I am almost crying for him,"

"As if you loved him!"

"Dear mamma, I do own that it is foolish. Having listened to you on these subjects for a dozen years at least I ought to have got rid of all that. I don't suppose I do love him. Two or three weeks ago I almost thought I loved Lord Rufford, and now I am quite sure that I hate him. But if I heard tomorrow that he had broken his neck out hunting, I ain't sure but what I should feel something. But he would not send for me as this man has done."

"It was very impertinent"

"Perhaps it was ill-bred, as he must have suspected something as to Lord Rufford. However we are here now."

"I will never allow you to drag me anywhere again."

"It will be for yourself to judge of that. If I want to go anywhere, I shall go. What's the good of quarrelling? You know that I mean to have my way."

The next morning neither Lady Augustus nor Miss Trefoil came down to breakfast, but at ten o'clock Arabella was ready, as appointed, to be taken into the sick man's bedroom. She was still dressed in black but had taken some trouble with her face and hair. She followed Lady Ushant in, and silently standing by the bedside put her hand upon that of John Morton which was laying outside on the bed. "I will leave you now, John," said Lady Ushant retiring, "and come again in half an hour,"

"When I ring," he said.

"You mustn't let him talk for more than that," said the old lady to Arabella as she went.

It was more than an hour afterwards when Arabella crept into her mother's room, during which time Lady Ushant had twice knocked at her nephew's door and had twice been sent away. "It is all over, mamma!" she said.

Lady Augustus looked into her daughter's eyes and saw that she had really been weeping. "All over!"

"I mean for me,—and you. We have only got to go away."

"Will he die?"

"It will make no matter though he should live for ever. I have told him everything. I did not mean to do it because I thought that he would be weak; but he has been strong enough for that."

"What have you told him?"

"Just everything—about you and Lord Rufford and myself,—and what an escape he had had not to marry me. He understands it all now."

"It is a great deal more than I do."

"He knows that Lord Rufford has been engaged to me." She clung to this statement so vehemently that she had really taught herself to believe that it was so.

"Well!"

"And he knows also how his lordship is behaving to me. Of course he thinks that I have deserved it. Of course I have deserved it. We have nothing to do now but to go back to London."

"You have brought me here all the way for that"

"Only for that! As the man was dying I thought that I would be honest just for once. Now, that I have told him I don't believe that he will die. He does not look to be so very ill."

"And you have thrown away that chance!"

"Altogether. You didn't like Bragton you know, and therefore it can't matter to you."

"Like it!"

"To be sure you would have got rid of me had I gone to Patagonia. But he will not go to Patagonia now even if he gets well; and so there was nothing to be gained. The carriage is to be here at two to take us to the station and you may as well let Judith come and put the things up."

Just before they took their departure Lady Ushant came to Arabella saying that Mr. Morton wanted to speak one other word to her before she went. So she returned to the room and was again left alone at the man's bedside. "Arabella," he said, "I thought that I would tell you that I have forgiven everything."

"How can you have forgiven me? There are things which a man cannot forgive."

"Give me your hand," he said,—and she gave him her hand. "I do forgive it all. Even should I live it would be impossible that we should be man and wife."

"Oh yes."

"But nevertheless I love you. Try,—try to be true to some one."

"There is no truth left in me, Mr. Morton. I should not dishonour my husband if I had one, but still I should be a curse to him. I shall marry some day I suppose, and I know it will be so. I wish I could change with you,—and die."

"You are unhappy now."

"Indeed I am. I am always unhappy. I do not think you can tell what it is to be so wretched. But I am glad that you have forgiven me." Then she stooped down and kissed his hand. As she did so he touched her brow with his hot lips, and then she left him again. Lady Ushant was waiting outside the door. "He knows it all," said Arabella. "You need not trouble yourself with the message I gave you. The carriage is at the door. Good-bye. You need not come down. Mamma will not expect it." Lady Ushant, hardly knowing how she ought to behave, did not go down. Lady Augustus and her daughter got into Mr. Runciman's carriage without any farewells, and were driven back from the park to the Dillsborough Station. To poor Lady Ushant the whole thing had been very terrible. She sat silent and unoccupied the whole of that evening wondering at the horror of such a history. This girl had absolutely dared to tell the dying man all her own disgrace,—and had travelled down from London to Bragton with the purpose of doing so! When next she crept into the sick-room she almost expected that her nephew would speak to her on the subject; but he only asked whether that sound of wheels which he heard beneath his window had come from the carriage which had taken them away, and then did not say a further word of either Lady Augustus or her daughter.

"And what do you mean to do now?" said Lady Augustus as the train approached the London terminus.

"Nothing."

"You have given up Lord Rufford?"

"Indeed I have not"

"Your journey to Bragton will hardly help you much with him."

"I don't want it to help me at all. What have I done that Lord Rufford can complain of? I have not abandoned Lord Rufford for the sake of Mr. Morton. Lord Rufford ought only to be too proud if he knew it all."

"Of course he could make use of such an escapade as this?"

"Let him try. I have not done with Lord Rufford yet, and so I can tell him. I shall be at the Duke's in Piccadilly to-morrow morning."

"That will be impossible, Arabella."

"They shall see whether it is impossible. I have got beyond caring very much what people say now. I know the kind of way papa would be thrown over if there is no one there to back him. I shall be there and I will ask Lord Rufford to his face whether we did not become engaged when we were at Mistletoe."

"They won't let you in."

"I'll find a way to make my way in. I shall never be his wife. I don't know that I want it. After all what's the good of living with a man if you hate each other,—or living apart like you and papa?"

"He has income enough for anything!" exclaimed Lady Augustus, shocked at her daughter's apparent blindness.

"It isn't that I'm thinking of, but I'll have my revenge on him. Liar! To write and say that I had made a mistake! He had not the courage to get out of it when we were together; but when he had run away in the night, like a thief, and got into his own house, then he could write and say that I had made a mistake! I have sometimes pitied men when I have seen girls hunting them down, but upon my word they deserve it!" This renewal of spirit did something to comfort Lady Augustus. She had begun to fear that her daughter, in her despair, would abandon altogether the one pursuit of her life;—but it now seemed that there was still some courage left for the battle.

That night nothing more was said, but Arabella applied all her mind to the present condition of her circumstances. Should she or should she not go to the House in Piccadilly on the following morning? At last she determined that she would not do so, believing that should her father fail she might make a better opportunity for herself afterwards. At her uncle's house she would hardly have known where or how to wait for the proper moment of her appearance. "So you are not going to Piccadilly," said her mother on the following morning.

"It appears not," said Arabella.

CHAPTER II. "Now What have You got to Say?"

It may be a question whether Lord Augustus Trefoil or Lord Rufford looked forward to the interview which was to take place at the Duke's mansion with the greater dismay. The unfortunate father whose only principle in life had been that of avoiding trouble would have rather that his daughter should have been jilted a score of times than that he should have been called upon to interfere once. There was in this demand upon him a breach of a silent but well-understood compact. His wife and daughter had been allowed to do just what they pleased and to be free of his authority, upon an understanding that they were never to give him any trouble. She might have married Lord Rufford, or Mr. Morton, or any other man she might have succeeded in catching, and he would not have troubled her either before or after her marriage. But it was not fair that he should be called upon to interfere in her failures. And what was he to say to this young lord? Being fat and old and plethoric he could not be expected to use a stick and thrash the young lord. Pistols were gone,—a remembrance of which fact perhaps afforded some consolation. Nobody now need be afraid of anybody, and the young lord would not be afraid of him. Arabella declared that there had been an engagement. The young lord would of course declare that there had been none. Upon the whole he was inclined to believe it most probable that his daughter was lying. He did not think it likely that Lord Rufford should have been such a fool. As for taking Lord Rufford by the back of his neck and shaking him into matrimony, he knew that that would be altogether out of his power. And then the hour was so wretchedly early. It was that little fool Mistletoe who had named ten o'clock,—a fellow who took Parliamentary papers to bed with him, and had a blue book brought to him every morning at half-past seven with a cup of tea. By ten o'clock Lord Augustus would not have had time to take his first glass of soda and brandy preparatory to the labour of getting into his clothes. But he was afraid of his wife and daughter, and absolutely did get into a cab at the door of his lodgings in Duke Street, St. James', precisely at a quarter past ten. As the Duke's house was close to the corner of Clarges Street the journey he had to make was not long.

Lord Rufford would not have agreed to the interview but that it was forced upon him by his brother-in-law. "What good can it do?" Lord Rufford had asked. But his brother-in-law had held that that was a question to be answered by the other side. In such a position Sir George thought that he was bound to concede as much as this,—in fact to concede almost anything short of marriage. "He can't do the girl

any good by talking," Lord Rufford had said. Sir George assented to this, but nevertheless thought that any friend deputed by her should be allowed to talk, at any rate once. "I don't know what he'll say. Do you think he'll bring a big stick?" Sir George who knew Lord Augustus did not imagine that a stick would be brought. "I couldn't hit him, you know. He's so fat that a blow would kill him." Lord Rufford wanted his brother-in-law to go with him; but Sir George assured him that this was impossible. It was a great bore. He had to go up to London all alone,—in February, when the weather was quite open and hunting was nearly coming to an end. And for what? Was it likely that such a man as Lord Augustus should succeed in talking him into marrying any girl? Nevertheless he went, prepared to be very civil, full of sorrow at the misunderstanding, but strong in his determination not to yield an inch. He arrived at the mansion precisely at ten o'clock and was at once shown into a back room on the ground floor. He saw no one but a very demure old servant who seemed to look upon him as one who was sinning against the Trefoil family in general, and who shut the door upon him, leaving him as it were in prison. He was so accustomed to be the absolute master of his own minutes and hours that he chafed greatly as he walked up and down the room for what seemed to him the greater part of a day. He looked repeatedly at his watch, and at half-past ten declared to himself that if that fat old fool did not come within two minutes he would make his escape.

"The fat old fool" when he reached the house asked for his nephew and endeavoured to persuade Lord Mistletoe to go with him to the interview. But Lord Mistletoe was as firm in refusing as had been Sir George Penwether. "You are quite wrong," said the young man with well-informed sententious gravity. "I could do nothing to help you. You are Arabella's father and no one can plead her cause but yourself." Lord Augustus dropped his eyebrows over his eyes as this was said. They who knew him well and had seen the same thing done when his partner would not answer his call at whist or had led up to his discard were aware that the motion was tantamount to a very strong expression of disgust. He did not, however, argue the matter any further, but allowed himself to be led away slowly by the same solemn servant. Lord Rufford had taken up his hat preparatory to his departure when Lord Augustus was announced just five minutes after the half hour.

When the elder man entered the room the younger one put down his hat and bowed. Lord Augustus also bowed and then stood for a few moments silent with his fat hands extended on the round table in the middle of the room. "This is a very disagreeable kind of thing, my Lord," he said.

"Very disagreeable, and one that I lament above all things," answered Lord Rufford:

"That's all very well;—very well indeed;—but, damme, what's the meaning of it all? That's what I want to ask. What's the meaning of it all?" Then he paused as though he had completed the first part of his business,—and might now wait awhile till the necessary explanation had been given. But Lord Rufford did not seem disposed to give any immediate answer. He shrugged his shoulders, and, taking up his hat, passed his hand once or twice round the nap. Lord Augustus opened his eyes very wide as he waited and looked at the other man; but it seemed that the other man had nothing to say for himself. "You don't mean to tell me, I suppose, that what my daughter says isn't true."

"Some unfortunate mistake, Lord Augustus;—most unfortunate."

"Mistake be—." He stopped himself before the sentence was completed, remembering that such an interview should be conducted on the part of him, as father, with something of dignity. "I don't understand anything about mistakes. Ladies don't make mistakes of that kind. I won't hear of mistakes." Lord Rufford again shrugged his shoulders. "You have engaged my daughter's affections."

"I have the greatest regard for Miss Trefoil."

"Regard be—." Then again he remembered himself. "Lord Rufford, you've got to marry her. That's the long and the short of it"

"I'm sure I ought to be proud."

"So you ought."

"But—"

"I don't know the meaning of but, my Lord. I want to know what you mean to do."

"Marriage isn't in my line at all"

"Then what the d— business have you to go about and talk to a girl like that? Marriage not in your line? Who cares for your line? I never heard such impudence in all my life. You get yourself engaged to a young lady of high rank and position and then you say that—marriage isn't in your line." Upon that he opened his eyes still wider, and glared upon the offender wrathfully.

"I can't admit that I was ever engaged to Miss Trefoil."

"Didn't you make love to her?"

The poor victim paused a moment before he answered this question, thereby confessing his guilt before he denied it. "No, my Lord; I don't think I ever did."

"You don't think! You don't know whether you asked my daughter to marry you or not! You don't think you made love to her!"

"I am sure I didn't ask her to marry me."

"I am sure you did. And now what have you got to say?" Here there was another shrug of the shoulders. "I suppose you think because you are a rich man that you may do whatever you please. But you'll have to learn the difference. You must be exposed, Sir."

"I hope for the lady's sake that as little as possible may be said of it."

"D— the—!" Lord Augustus in his assumed wrath was about to be very severe on his daughter, but he checked himself again. "I'm not going to stop here talking all day," he said. "I want to hear your explanation and then I shall know how to act." Up to this time he had been standing, which was unusual with him. Now he flung himself into an armchair.

"Really, Lord Augustus, I don't know what I've got to say. I admire your daughter exceedingly. I was very much honoured when she and her mother came to my house at Rufford. I was delighted to be able to show her a little sport. It gave me the greatest satisfaction when I met her again at your brother's house. Coming home from hunting we happened to be thrown together. It's a kind of thing that will occur, you know. The Duchess seemed to think a great deal of it; but what can one do? We could have had two post chaises, of course,—only one doesn't generally send a young lady alone. She was very tired and fainted with the fatigue. That I think is about all."

"But,—damme, Sir, what did you say to her?" Lord Rufford again rubbed the nap of his hat. "What did you say to her first of all, at your own house?"

"A poor fellow was killed out hunting and everybody was talking about that. Your daughter saw it herself."

"Excuse me, Lord Rufford, if I say that that's what we used to call shuffling, at school. Because a man broke his neck out hunting—"

"It was a kick on the head, Lord Augustus."

"I don't care where he was kicked. What has that to do with your asking my daughter to be your wife?"

"But I didn't"

"I say you did,—over and over again." Here Lord Augustus got out of his chair, and made a little attempt to reach the recreant lover;—but he failed and fell back again into his armchair. "It was first at Rufford, and then you made an appointment to meet her at Mistletoe. How do you explain that?"

"Miss Trefoil is very fond of hunting."

"I don't believe she ever went out hunting in her life before she saw you. You mounted her,—and gave her a horse,—and took her out,—and brought her home. Everybody at Mistletoe knew all about it. My brother and the Duchess were told of it. It was one of those things that are plain to everybody as the nose on your face. What did you say to her when you were coming home in that post chaise?"

"She was fainting."

"What has that to do with it? I don't care whether she fainted or not. I don't believe she fainted at all. When she got into that carriage she was engaged to you, and when she got out of it she was engaged ever so much more. The Duchess knew all about it. Now what have you got to say?" Lord Rufford felt that he had nothing to say. "I insist upon having an answer."

"It's one of the most unfortunate mistakes that ever were made."

"By G—!" exclaimed Lord Augustus, turning his eyes up against the wall, and appealing to some dark ancestor who hung there. "I never heard of such a thing in all my life; never!"

"I suppose I might as well go now," said Lord Rufford after a pause.

"You may go to the D—, Sir,—for the present" Then Lord Rufford took his departure leaving the injured parent panting with his exertions. As Lord Rufford went away he felt that that difficulty had been overcome with much more ease than he had expected. He hardly knew what it was that he had dreaded, but he had feared something much worse than that. Had an appeal been made to his affections he would hardly have known how to answer. He remembered well that he had assured the lady that he loved her, and had a direct question been asked him on that subject he would not have lied. He must have confessed that such a declaration had been made by him. But he had escaped that. He was quite sure that he had never uttered a hint in regard to marriage, and he came away from the Duke's house almost with an assurance that he had done nothing that was worthy of much blame.

Lord Augustus looked at his watch, rang the bell, and ordered a cab. He must now go and see his daughter, and then he would have done with the matter—for ever. But as he was passing through the hall his nephew caught hold of him and took him back into the room. "What does he say for himself?" asked Lord Mistletoe.

"I don't know what he says. Of course he swears that he never spoke a word to her."

"My mother saw him paying her the closest attention."

"How can I help that? What can I do? Why didn't your mother pin him then and there? Women can always do that kind of thing if they choose."

"It is all over, then?"

"I can't make a man marry if he won't. He ought to be thrashed within an inch of his life. But if one does that kind of thing the police are down upon one. All the same, I think the Duchess might have managed it if she had chosen." After that he went to the lodgings in Orchard Street, and there repeated his story. "I have done all I can," he said, "and I don't mean to interfere any further. Arabella should know how to manage her own affairs."

"And you don't mean to punish him?" asked the mother.

"Punish him! How am I to punish him? If I were to throw a decanter at his head, what good would that do?"

"And you mean to say that she must put up with it?" Arabella was sitting by as these questions were asked.

"He says that he never said a word to her. Whom am I to believe?"

"You did believe him, papa?"

"Who said so, Miss? But I don't see why his word isn't as good as yours. There was nobody to hear it, I suppose. Why didn't you get it in writing, or make your uncle fix him at once? If you mismanage your own affairs I can't put them right for you."

"Thank you, papa. I am so much obliged to you. You come back and tell me that every word he says is to be taken for gospel, and that you don't believe a word I have spoken. That is so kind of you! I suppose he and you will be the best friends in the world now. But I don't mean to let him off in that way. As you won't help me, I must help myself."

"What did you expect me to do?"

"Never to leave him till you had forced him to keep his word. I should have thought that you would have taken him by the throat in such a cause. Any other father would have done so."

"You are an impudent, wicked girl, and I don't believe he was ever engaged to you at all," said Lord Augustus as he took his leave.

"Now you have made your father your enemy," said the mother.

"Everybody is my enemy," said Arabella. "There are no such things as love and friendship. Papa pretends that he does not believe me, just because he wants to shirk the trouble. I suppose you'll say you don't believe me next."

CHAPTER III. Mrs. Morton Returns

A few days after that on which Lady Augustus and her daughter left Bragton old Mrs. Morton returned to that place. She had gone away in very bitterness of spirit against her grandson in the early days of his illness. For some period antecedent to that there had been causes for quarrelling. John Morton had told her that he had been to Reginald's house, and she, in her wrath, replied that he had disgraced himself by doing so. When those harsh words had been forgotten, or at any rate forgiven, other causes of anger had sprung up. She had endeavoured to drive him to repudiate Arabella Trefoil, and in order that she might do so effectually had contrived to find out something of Arabella's doings at Rufford and at Mistletoe. Her efforts in this direction had had an effect directly contrary to that which she had intended. There had been moments in which Morton had been willing enough to rid himself of that burden. He had felt the lady's conduct in his own house, and had seen it at Rufford. He, too, had heard something of Mistletoe. But the spirit within him was aroused at the idea of dictation, and he had been prompted to contradict the old woman's accusation against his intended bride, by the very fact that they were made by her. And then she threatened him. If he did these things,—if he would consort with an outcast from the family such as Reginald Morton, and take to himself such a bride as Arabella Trefoil, he could never more be to her as her child. This of course was tantamount to saying that she would leave her money to some one else,—money which, as he well knew, had all been collected from the Bragton property. He had ever been to her as her son, and yet he was aware of a propensity on her part to enrich her own noble relatives with her hoards,—a desire from gratifying which she had hitherto been restrained by conscience. Morton had been anxious enough for his grandmother's money, but, even in the hope of receiving it, would not bear indignity beyond a certain point. He had therefore declared it to be his purpose to marry Arabella Trefoil, and because he had so declared he had almost brought himself to forgive that young lady's sins against him. Then, as his illness became serious, there arose the question of disposing of the property in the event of his death. Mrs. Morton was herself very old, and was near her grave. She was apt to speak of herself as one who had but a few days left to her in this world. But, to her, property was more important than life or death;—and rank probably more important than either. She was a brave, fierce, evil-minded, but conscientious old woman,—one, we may say, with very bad lights indeed, but who was steadfastly minded to walk by those lights, such as they were. She did not scruple to tell her grandson that it was his duty to leave the property away from his cousin Reginald, nor to allege as a reason for his doing so

that in all probability Reginald Morton was not the legitimate heir of his great-grandfather, Sir Reginald. For such an assertion John Morton knew there was not a shadow of ground. No one but this old woman had ever suspected that the Canadian girl whom Reginald's father had brought with him to Bragton had been other than his honest wife;—and her suspicions had only come from vague assertions, made by herself in blind anger till at last she had learned to believe them. Then, when in addition to this, he asserted his purpose of asking Arabella Trefoil to come to him at Bragton, the cup of her wrath was overflowing, and she withdrew from the house altogether. It might be that he was dying. She did in truth believe that he was dying. But there were things more serious to her than life or death. Should she allow him to trample upon all her feelings because he was on his death-bed,—when perhaps in very truth he might not be on his death-bed at all? She, at any rate, was near her death,—and she would do her duty. So she packed up her things—to the last black skirt of an old gown, so that every one at Bragton might know that it was her purpose to come back no more. And she went away.

Then Lady Ushant came to take her place, and with Lady Ushant came Reginald Morton. The one lived in the house and the other visited it daily. And, as the reader knows, Lady Augustus came with her daughter. Mrs. Morton, though she had gone,—for ever,—took care to know of the comings and goings at Bragton. Mrs. Hopkins was enjoined to write to her and tell her everything; and though Mrs. Hopkins with all her heart took the side of Lady Ushant and Reginald, she had never been well inclined to Miss Trefoil. Presents too were given and promises were made; and Mrs. Hopkins, not without some little treachery, did from time to time send to the old lady a record of what took place at Bragton. Arabella came and went, and Mrs. Hopkins thought that her coming had not led to much. Lady Ushant was always with Mr. John,—such was the account given by Mrs. Hopkins;—and the general opinion was that the squire's days were numbered.

Then the old woman's jealousy was aroused, and, perhaps, her heart was softened. It was still hard black winter, and she was living alone in lodgings in London. The noble cousin, a man nearly as old as herself whose children she was desirous to enrich, took but little notice of her, nor would she have been Nappy had she lived with him. Her life had been usually solitary,—with little breaks to its loneliness occasioned by the visits to England of him whom she had called her child. That this child should die before her, should die in his youth, did not shock her much. Her husband had done so, and her own son, and sundry of her noble brothers and sisters. She was hardened against death. Life to her had never been joyous, though the trappings of life were so great in her eyes. But it broke her heart that her child should die in the arms of another old woman who had always been to her as an enemy. Lady Ushant, in days now long gone by but still remembered as though they were yesterday, had counselled the reception of the Canadian female. And

Lady Ushant, when the Canadian female and her husband were dead, had been a mother to the boy whom she, Mrs. Morton, would so fain have repudiated altogether. Lady Ushant had always been "on the other side;" and now Lady Ushant was paramount at Bragton.

And doubtless there was some tenderness, though Mrs. Morton was unwilling to own even to herself that she was moved by any such feeling. If she had done her duty in counselling him to reject both Reginald Morton and Arabella Trefoil,—as to which she admitted no doubt in her own mind;—and if duty had required her to absent herself when her counsel was spurned, then would she be weak and unmindful of duty should she allow any softness of heart to lure her back again. It was so she reasoned. But still some softness was there; and when she heard that Miss Trefoil had gone, and that her visit had not, in Mrs. Hopkins's opinion, "led to much," she wrote to say that she would return. She made no request and clothed her suggestion in no words of tenderness; but simply told her grandson that she would come back—as the Trefoils had left him.

And she did come. When the news were first told to Lady Ushant by the sick man himself, that Lady proposed that she should at once go back to Cheltenham. But when she was asked whether her animosity to Mrs. Morton was so great that she could not consent to remain under the same roof, she at once declared that she had no animosity whatsoever. The idea of animosity running over nearly half a century was horrible to her; and therefore, though she did in her heart of hearts dread the other old woman, she consented to stay. "And what shall Reginald do?" she asked. John Morton had thought about this too, and expressed a wish that Reginald should come regularly,—as he had come during the last week or two.

It was just a week from the day on which the Trefoils had gone that Mrs. Morton was driven up to the door in Mr. Runciman's fly. This was at four in the afternoon, and had the old woman looked out of the fly window she might have seen Reginald making his way by the little path to the bridge which led back to Dillsborough. It was at this hour that he went daily, and he had not now thought it worth his while to remain to welcome Mrs. Morton. And she might also have seen, had she looked out, that with him was walking a young woman. She would not have known Mary Masters; but had she seen them both, and had she known the young woman, she would have declared in her pride that they were fit associates. But she saw nothing of this, sitting there behind her veil, thinking whether she might still do anything, and if so; what she might do to avert the present evil destination of the Bragton estate. There was an honourable nephew of her own,—or rather a great-nephew,—who might easily take the name, who would so willingly take the name! Or if this were impracticable, there was a distant Morton, very distant, whom she had never seen and certainly did not love, but who was clearly a Morton, and who would certainly be preferable to that enemy of forty years' standing. Might there

not be some bargain made? Would not her dying grandson be alive to the evident duty of enriching the property and leaving behind him a wealthy heir? She could enrich the property and make the heir wealthy by her money.

"How is he?" That of course was the first question when Mrs. Hopkins met her in the hall. Mrs. Hopkins only shook her head and said that perhaps he had taken his food that day a little better than on the last. Then there was a whisper, to which Mrs. Hopkins whispered back her answer. Yes,—Lady Ushant was in the house,—was at this moment in the sick man's room. Mr. Reginald was not staying there,—had never stayed there,—but came every day. He had only just left. "And is he to come still?" asked Mrs. Morton with wrath in her eyes. Mrs. Hopkins did not know but was disposed to think that Mr. Reginald would come every day. Then Mrs. Morton went up to her own room,—and while she prepared herself for her visit to the sick room Lady Ushant retired. She had a cup of tea, refusing all other refreshment, and then, walking erect as though she had been forty instead of seventy-five, she entered her grandson's chamber and took her old place at his bedside.

Nothing was then said about Arabella, nor, indeed, at any future time was her name mentioned between them;—nor was anything then said about the future fate of the estate. She did not dare to bring up the subject at once, though, on the journey down from London, she had determined that she would do so. But she was awed by his appearance and by the increased appanages of his sick-bed. He spoke, indeed, of the property, and expressed his anxiety that Chowton Farm should be bought, if it came into market. He thought that the old acres should be redeemed, if the opportunity arose,— and if the money could be found. "Chowton Farm!" exclaimed the old woman, who remembered well the agony which had attended the alienation of that portion of the Morton lands.

"It may be that it will be sold."

"Lawrence Twentyman sell Chowton Farm! I thought he was well off." Little as she had been at Bragton she knew all about Chowton Farm,—except that its owner was so wounded by vain love as to be like a hurt deer. Her grandson did not tell her all the story, but explained to her that Lawrence Twentyman, though not poor, had other plans of life and thought of leaving the neighbourhood. She, of course, had the money; and as she believed that land was the one proper possession for an English gentleman of ancient family, she doubtless would have been willing to buy it had she approved of the hands into which it would fall. It seemed to him that it was her duty to do as much for the estate with which all her fortune had been concerned. "Yes," she said; "it should be bought,—if other things suited. We will talk of it to-morrow, John." Then he spoke of his mission to Patagonia and of his regret that it should be abandoned. Even were he ever to be well again his strength

would return to him too late for this purpose. He had already made known to the Foreign Office his inability to undertake that service. But she could perceive that he had not in truth abandoned his hopes of living, for he spoke much of his ambition as to the public service. The more he thought of it, he said, the more certain he became that it would suit him better to go on with his profession than to live the life of a country squire in England. And yet she could see the change which had taken place since she was last there and was aware that he was fading away from day to day.

It was not till they were summoned to dine together that she saw Lady Ushant. Very many years had passed since last they were together, and yet neither seemed to the other to be much changed. Lady Ushant was still soft, retiring, and almost timid; whereas Mrs. Morton showed her inclination to domineer even in the way in which she helped herself to salt. While the servant was with them very little was said on either side. There was a word or two from Mrs. Morton to show that she considered herself the mistress there,—and a word from the other lady proclaiming that she had no pretensions of that kind. But after dinner in the little drawing-room they were more communicative. Something of course was said as to the health of the invalid. Lady Ushant was not the woman to give a pronounced opinion on such a subject. She used doubtful, hesitating words, and would in one minute almost contradict what she had said in the former. But Mrs. Morton was clever enough to perceive that Lady Ushant was almost without hope. Then she made a little speech with a fixed purpose. "It must be a great trouble to you, Lady Ushant, to be so long away from home."

"Not at all," said Lady Ushant in perfect innocence. "I have nothing to bind me anywhere."

"I shall think it my duty to remain here now,—till the end."

"I suppose so. He has always been almost the same to you as your own."

"Quite so; quite the same. He is my own." And yet,—she left him in his illness! She, too, had heard something from Mrs. Hopkins of the temper in which Mrs. Morton had last left Bragton. "But you are not bound to him in that way."

"Not in that way certainly."

"In no way, I may say. It was very kind of you to come when business made it imperative on me to go to town, but I do not think we can call upon you for further sacrifice."

"It is no sacrifice, Mrs. Morton." Lady Ushant was as meek as a worm, but a worm will turn. And though innocent, she was quick enough to perceive that at this, their first meeting, the other old woman was endeavouring to turn her out of the house.

"I mean that it can hardly be necessary to call upon you to give up your time."

"What has an old woman to do with her time, Mrs. Morton?"

Hitherto Mrs. Morton had smiled. The smile indeed had been grim, but it had been intended to betoken outward civility. Now there came a frown upon her brow which was more grim and by no means civil. "The truth is that at such a time one who is almost a stranger—"

"I am no stranger," said Lady Ushant.

"You had not seen him since he was an infant."

"My name was Morton as is his, and my dear father was the owner of this house. Your husband, Mrs. Morton, was his grandfather and my brother. I will allow no one to tell me that I am a stranger at Bragton. I have lived here many more years than you."

"A stranger to him, I meant. And now that he is ill—"

"I shall stay with him—till he desires me to go away. He asked me to stay and that is quite enough." Then she got up and left the room with more dignity;—as also she had spoken with more earnestness,—than Mrs. Morton had given her credit for possessing. After that the two ladies did not meet again till the next day.

CHAPTER IV. The Two Old Ladies

On the next morning Mrs. Morton did not come down to breakfast, but sat alone upstairs nursing her wrath. During the night she had made up her mind to one or two things. She would never enter her grandson's chambers when Lady Ushant was there. She would not speak to Reginald Morton, and should he come into her presence while she was at Bragton she would leave the room. She would do her best to make the house, in common parlance, "too hot" to hold that other woman. And she would make use of those words which John had spoken concerning Chowton Farm as a peg on which she might hang her discourse in reference to his will. If in doing all this she should receive that dutiful assistance which she thought that he owed her,—then she should stand by his bed-side, and be tender to him, and nurse him to the last as a mother would nurse a child. But if, as she feared, he were headstrong in disobeying, then she would remember that her duty to her family, if done with a firm purpose, would have lasting results, while his life might probably be an affair of a few weeks,—or even days.

At about eleven Lady Ushant was with her patient when a message was brought by Mrs. Hopkins. Mrs. Morton wished to see her grandson and desired to know whether it would suit him that she should come now. "Why not?" said the sick man, who was sitting up in his bed. Then Lady Ushant collected her knitting and was about to depart. "Must you go because she is coming?" Morton asked. Lady Ushant, shocked at the necessity of explaining to him the ill feeling that existed, said that perhaps it would be best. "Why should it be best?" Lady Ushant shook her head, and smiled, and put her hand upon the counterpane,—and retired. As she passed the door of her rival's room she could see the black silk dress moving behind the partly open door, and as she entered her own she heard Mrs. Morton's steps upon the corridor. The place was already almost "too hot" for her. Anything would be better than scenes like this in the house of a dying man.

"Need my aunt have gone away?" he asked after the first greeting.

"I did not say so."

"She seemed to think that she was not to stay."

"Can I help what she thinks, John? Of course she feels that she is—"

"Is what?"

"An interloper—if I must say it."

"But I have sent for her, and I have begged her to stay."

"Of course she can stay if she wishes. But, dear John, there must be much to be said between you and me which,—which cannot interest her; or which, at least, she ought not to hear." He did not contradict this in words, feeling himself to be too weak, for contest; but within his own mind he declared that it was not so. The things which interested him now were as likely to interest his great-aunt as his grandmother, and to be as fit for the ears of the one as for those of the other.

An hour had passed after this during which she tended him, giving him food and medicine, and he had slept before she ventured to allude to the subject which was nearest to her heart. "John," she said at last, "I have been thinking about Chowton Farm."

"Well."

"It certainly should be bought"

"If the man resolves on selling it."

"Of course; I mean that. How much would it be?" Then he mentioned the sum which Twentyman had named, saying that he had inquired and had been told that the price was reasonable. "It is a large sum of money, John."

"There might be a mortgage for part of it."

"I don't like mortgages. The property would not be yours at all if it were mortgaged, as soon as bought. You would pay 5 per cent. for the money and only get 3 per cent. from the land." The old lady understood all about it.

"I could pay it off in two years," said the sick man.

"There need be no paying off, and no mortgage, if I did it I almost believe I have got enough to do it." He knew very well that she had much more than enough. "I think more of this property than of anything in the world, my dear."

"Chowton Farm could be yours, you know."

"What should I do with Chowton Farm? I shall probably be in my grave before the slow lawyer would have executed the deeds." And I in mine, thought he to himself, before the present owner has quite made up his mind to part with his land. "What would a little place like that do for me? But in my father-in-law's time it was part of the Bragton property. He sold it to pay the debts of a younger son, forgetting, as I thought, what he owed to the estate;—"It had in truth been sold on behalf of the husband of this old woman who was now complaining. "And if it can be recovered

it is our duty to get it back again. A property like this should never be lessened. It is in that way that the country is given over to shopkeepers and speculators and is made to be like France or Italy. I quite think that Chowton Farm should be bought. And though I might die before it was done, I would find the money."

"I knew what your feeling would be."

"Yes, John. You could not but know it well. But—" Then she paused a moment, looking into his face. "But I should wish to know what would become of it—eventually."

"If it were yours you could do what you pleased with it."

"But it would be yours."

"Then it would go with the rest of the property."

"To whom would it go? We have all to die, my dear, and who can say whom it may please the Almighty to take first?"

"In this house, ma'am, every one can give a shrewd guess. I know my own condition. If I die without children of my own every acre I possess will go to the proper heir. Thinking as you do, you ought to agree with me in that."

"But who is the proper heir?"

"My cousin Reginald. Do not let us contest it, ma'am. As certainly as I lie here he will have Bragton when I am gone."

"Will you not listen to me, John?"

"Not about that. How could I die in peace were I to rob him?"

"It is all your own,—to do as you like with."

"It is all my own, but not to do as I like with. With your feelings, with your ideas, how can you urge me to such an injustice?"

"Do I want it for myself? I do not even want it for any one belonging to me. There is your cousin Peter."

"If he were the heir he should have it,—though I know nothing of him and believe him to be but a poor creature and very unfit to have the custody of a family property."

"But he is his father's son."

"I will believe nothing of that," said the sick man raising himself in his bed. "It is a slander; it is based on no evidence whatsoever. No one even thought of it but you."

"John, is that the way to speak to me?"

"It is the way to speak of an assertion so injurious." Then he fell back again on his pillows and she sat by his bedside for a full half hour speechless, thinking of it all. At the end of that time she had resolved that she would not yet give it up. Should he regain his health and strength,—and she would pray fervently night and day that God would be so good to him,—then everything would be well. Then he would marry and have children, and Bragton would descend in the right line. But were it to be ordained otherwise, should it be God's will that he must die, then, as he grew weaker, he would become more plastic in her hands, and she might still prevail. At present he was stubborn with the old stubbornness, and would not see with her eyes. She would bide her time and be careful to have a lawyer ready. She turned it all over in her mind, as she sat there watching him in his sleep. She knew of no one but Mr. Masters whom she distrusted as being connected with the other side of the family,—whose father had made that will by which the property in Dillsborough had been dissevered from Bragton. But Mr. Masters would probably obey instructions if they were given to him definitely.

She thought of it all and then went down to lunch. She did not dare to refuse altogether to meet the other woman lest such resolve on her part might teach those in the house to think that Lady Ushant was the mistress. She took her place at the head of the table and interchanged a few words with her grandson's guest,—which of course had reference to his health. Lady Ushant was very ill able to carry on a battle of any sort and was willing to show her submission in everything,—unless she were desired to leave the house. While they were still sitting at table, Reginald Morton walked into the room. It had been his habit to do so regularly for the last week. A daily visitor does not wait to have himself announced. Reginald had considered the matter and had determined that he would follow his practice just as though Mrs. Morton were not there. If she were civil to him then would he be very courteous to her. It had never occurred to him to expect conduct such as that with which she greeted him. The old woman got up and looked at him sternly. "My nephew, Reginald," said Lady Ushant, supposing that some introduction might be necessary. Mrs. Morton gathered the folds of her dress together and without a word stalked out of the room. And yet she believed,—she could not but believe,—that her grandson was on his deathbed in the room, above!

"O Reginald, what are we to?" said Lady Ushant.

"Is she like that to you?"

"She told me last night that I was a stranger, and that I ought to leave the house."

"And what did you say?"

"I told her I should stay while he wished me to stay. But it is all so terrible, that I think I had better go."

"I would not stir a step—on her account."

"But why should she be so bitter? I have done nothing to offend her. It is more than half of even my long lifetime since I saw her. She is nothing; but I have to think of his comfort. I suppose she is good to him; and though he may bid me stay such scenes as this in the house must be a trouble to him." Nevertheless Reginald was strong in opinion that Lady Ushant ought not to allow herself to be driven away, and declared his own purpose of coming daily as had of late been his wont.

Soon after this Reginald was summoned to go upstairs and he again met the angry woman in the passage, passing her of course without a word. And then Mary came to see her friend, and she also encountered Mrs. Morton, who was determined that no one should come into that house without her knowledge. "Who is that young woman?" said Mrs. Morton to the old housekeeper.

"That is Miss Masters, my Lady."

"And who is Miss Masters,—and why does she come here at such a time as this?"

"She is the daughter of Attorney Masters, my Lady. It was she as was brought up here by Lady Ushant"

"Oh,—that young person."

"She's come here generally of a day now to see her ladyship."

"And is she taken up to my grandson?"

"Oh dear, no, my Lady. She sits with Lady Ushant for an hour or so and then goes back with Mr. Reginald."

"Oh—that is it, is it? The house is made use of for such purposes as that!"

"I don't think there is an purposes, my Lady," said Mrs. Hopkins, almost roused to indignation, although she was talking to the acknowledged mistress of the house whom she always called "my lady."

Lady Ushant told the whole story to her young friend, bitterly bewailing her position. "Reginald tells me not to go, but I do not think that I can stand it. I should not mind the quarrel so much,—only that he is so ill."

"She must be a very evil-minded person."

"She was always arrogant and always hard. I can remember her just the same; but that was so many years ago. She left Bragton then because she could not banish his

mother from the house. But to bear it all in her heart so long is not like a human being;—let alone a woman. What did he say to you going home yesterday?"

"Nothing, Lady Ushant."

"Does he know that it will all be his if that poor young man should die? He never speaks to me as if he thought of it."

"He would certainly not speak to me about it. I do not think he thinks of it. He is not like that."

"Men do consider such things. And they are only cousins; and they have never known each other! Oh, Mary!"

"What are you thinking of, Lady Ushant?"

"Men ought not to care for money or position, but they do. If he comes here, all that I have will be yours."

"Oh, Lady Ushant!"

"It is not much but it will be enough."

"I do not want to hear about such things now."

"But you ought to be told. Ah, dear;—if it could be as I wish!" The imprudent, weak-minded, loving old woman longed to hear a tale of mutual love,—longed to do something which should cause such a tale to be true on both sides. And yet she could not quite bring herself to express her wish either to the man or to the woman.

Poor Mary almost understood it, but was not quite sure of her friend's meaning. She was, however, quite sure that if such were the wish of Lady Ushant's heart, Lady Ushant was wishing in vain. She had twice walked back to Dillsborough with Reginald Morton, and he had been more sedate, more middle-aged, less like a lover than ever. She knew now that she might safely walk with him, being sure that he was no more likely to talk of love than would have been old Dr. Nupper had she accepted the offer which he had made her of a cast in his gig. And now that Reginald would probably become Squire of Bragton it was more impossible than ever. As Squire of Bragton he would seek some highly born bride, quite out of her way, whom she could never know. And then she would see neither him—nor Bragton any more. Would it not have been better that she should have married Larry Twentyman and put an end to so many troubles beside her own?

Again, she walked back with him to Dillsborough, passing as they always did across the little bridge. He seemed to be very silent as he went, more so than usual,—and as was her wont with him she only spoke to him when he addressed