

Lucy Walford

A Game of Chess.

OUTSIDE the rain had ceased, and a burst of sunshine flooded the landscape.

Is sunshine ever unwelcome? Does it not glorify the fairest scene, transfigure the dullest? I have known a hideous suburb, the haunt of the builder, the revel of the scavenger, look almost pleasant on a bright spring morning, when its little blackened, stunted trees are in bud, and the mud glistens where the trampling of many feet has broken it into pools of slime. See the interminable rows of monotonous frontage with their deadly uniformity—they look cheerful and habitable beneath the wand of the magician. A cat basks in front of one open window; a bird-cage is hung out before another; the street boys go along whistling.

But sunshine in the broad open country, sunshine that brings with it the cawing of rooks, the cooing of wood-pigeons, the scents of wood and field refreshed by showers of rain, the renewed unveiling of blue horizon in which Nature alone plays a part—what words can paint the glorious power of such a visitant?

‘Dear me, how tiresome! The sun has come out!’ said the Rev. Octavius Wotherspoon, with a peevish glance at streaming window-panes, on which every drop was now transformed into a globe of light.

Mr. Wotherspoon sat in a comfortable armchair, with a plaid over his knees. In front of him was a chess-table, and on the other side of the table, Madeline.

Madeline had just drawn up her chair and arranged her men. As her father spoke she also turned her head to the window, but she did not echo the exclamation. Instead a faint, almost inaudible, sigh escaped.

‘I made sure it was going to be a wet afternoon,’ continued Mr. Wotherspoon in aggrieved accents, ‘or I should never have taken off my boots. It looked as black as night when I came in.’

These April days are a perfect nuisance; you never know where you are with them. Just look now!' indicating with the pawn in his hand the offending radiance of the sky and atmosphere. 'Just when we were comfortably settled! Had the fire lit, and everything!'

'Oh, well, papa'—Maddy, a firm little person, with a tendency to turn her bright blue eyes to the fair side of the foulest outlook, shook herself together resolutely, and hitched her low chair a shade nearer the chess-table—'we need not quarrel with the sun,' quoth she, sagely. 'It makes the room ever so much pleasanter. Oh, papa, the prism has sent its lights upon your head! Oh, you do look funny!' as he blinked and dodged. 'Wait one moment,' and she rose and moved towards an octagon-shaped piece of crystal, which was casting rainbow tints all about the room. 'There,' said Madeline, fondly arranging it elsewhere, 'it can still light us up without tormenting you, poor papa! And now for our game,' returning to her seat.

The rector, however, fidgeted uneasily in his chair; looked again at the window, anon at the chessboard, finally thrust it from him, and threw aside the plaid from his knees. Two pieces fell off the board.

'Oh, papa, what are you doing?'

'What I have got to do, I suppose. Put on my boots again and tramp away through mud and mire.'

'Indeed you shall do nothing of the kind. You were told to be careful of damp, and, what is more, *I* was told to make you obey orders. Put on that plaid again directly, sir,' and Miss Madeline picked up the fallen knight and castle and replaced them on their squares. 'Begin at once!' concluded she, authoritatively.

'Nonsense, child!' But mechanically the figure which had half risen relapsed into its former posture. 'Even if *I* don't go out—and perhaps you are right about myself, for I did feel a nip just then,' and one hand stole irresolutely towards the warm covering as Mr. Wotherspoon spoke—'but *you* ought not to be sitting indoors in a warm room with a fire, and sunshine like that without. Off you go, and I'll take a book,' and he sighed resignedly.

Madeline calmly made her first move.

'Pshaw! Nonsense! I tell you, Maddy, to go along. And, my dear, open the far window as you go and let me hear the birds shouting. There is an article in the *Nineteenth Century*—'

‘Which you are not going to read. We had made up our minds for a good fight—and you know you say yourself I can give you a very good fight at chess now—and we are not going to be put off because the day clears. Dear,’ said Madeline, tenderly, ‘you can’t suppose it is any hardship to me to give up such a little thing as——’

‘It *is* a hardship, whether I suppose it or not. The roads will be in splendid condition for your bicycle. Hollo! here they come to say so!’

And the door opened to admit visitors as he spoke.

‘Well, Miss Charlotte, Miss Ethel’—as two lively young creatures approached and peremptorily forbade the old gentleman’s rising to receive them—‘I thought you would come. I was just sending Maddy off to get ready. The rain was so heavy after luncheon that we fancied it had set in for a whole wet day. So you see what she’—indicating his daughter—‘inveigled me into. ’Pon my word, it looks rather disgraceful to be caught with a chessboard at this hour,’ bestowing a glance of would-be contempt upon the latter. ‘Quick now, Maddy, put on your things.’

‘But I am going to ask Charlotte to excuse me,’ said Maddy, giving unperceived by her father a slight pinch to Charlotte’s arm. ‘I don’t think I shall go to-day. It takes so long to get ready, that the sun may have gone in again if you wait for me,’ addressing the young ladies, and steadily keeping her face turned to them alone (by which means certain information was conveyed). ‘I may take a spin by myself later on. I might come and meet you in a couple of hours on your return from Hennerton. But that is all I care to do to-day.’

‘Is it me you’re stopping for?’—a suspicious voice in the rear. Maddy’s father had learned to be suspicious. ‘If you are saying *that* because you think I want this trumpery chess——’

Here, however, Charlotte Dewhurst interposed, guided by her friend’s face.

‘If Maddy would rather come to meet us, perhaps it would be better. We are late in starting as it is, and Hennerton is a long way off. Then, Ethel,’ and the young lady turned to her sister, ‘suppose we go, and Maddy follows, say in an hour and a half? There is no harm in her coming by herself, Mr. Wotherspoon, just for a mile or two along the high road. Houses all the way, you know. Then good-bye, and oh, don’t get up. I do hope you will get rid of your rheumatism soon,’ and Miss Charlotte tucked in the plaid with the freedom of an affectionate parishioner.

'Maddy, come and see us start. She won't be a minute,' nodding as they left the room.

Outside it was, 'Poor Maddy! I know you wanted to come. And it is such a lovely day! Well, you are a dear girl, and everybody says the best of daughters. And of course poor Mr. Wother- spoon did look so wistfully at his chessboard, it was quite pathetic! Ethel, you mount, and I'll catch you up; I like to mount by myself.'

Then Maddy's visitor too had her private facial communication. In obedience to it Maddy slackened her steps till both had fallen behind.

'I say, Maddy, *he* won't be best pleased to see us arrive by our two selves.'

Madeline was a fair-complexioned girl, with a smooth, clear skin, in which a blush showed cruelly. Mindful of this, Charlotte had sent on her sister. The blush did not matter for herself.

'I dare say you are right,' proceeded she in her companion's ear, 'though I don't know that I could have done it myself. But,' and she hesitated a moment, 'I suppose you know that it is his last day? He goes back to his vile Foreign Office and his still viler uncle to-morrow. Do you—do you think it is quite—I mean it is your last chance, Maddy, you know.'

'I know. Thank you, Charlotte.' A low response, but resolute.

'You are sure you won't come? We would wait as long as you please. I'd arrange it. Ethel would never guess. I'd say——'

'No, I'm not coming.' Madeline played with her friend's hand. 'I have thought it all over. Charlotte, I felt mean pretending, or at least letting you all suppose it was because of papa. It *was*, in a way. I do like to please him, and he had been looking forward to his game; but it was not altogether—you know what I mean. I can't and I won't run after any man.'

'My gracious! Who could call it running after him? Hasn't he run after you enough in all conscience? He never looks at another girl when you are in the room. He——'

'Come on!' from Ethel in front.

'What am I to say?' proceeded Charlotte, hurriedly. 'Am I to say your father kept you? That you stayed at home to play chess with him? Or, what? Oh, Maddy, I wish you would have come. I do think you ought to have come. But as you won't, at least tell me what to say. Tell me anything, and I'll

say it.' She took her bicycle from the wall as she spoke. 'Am I to say——'

'Oh, say what you like.' The sun was so warm, the air so sweet, the temptation so great, that all at once, and that when it was too late, something choked in the speaker's throat. Suppose Charlotte were right after all! Suppose her wisdom were the better wisdom—her knowledge the superior knowledge! Charlotte was a superior girl. At the moment poor Maddy recalled with a pang that she had always heard it observed that Charlotte Dewhurst's opinion was worth being sought by anybody.

But Charlotte was mounting even as the reflection was made.

'Go back to your chess then, my dear, and' (Ethel had whirred round, and was again within hearing) 'I'll give your love to Mrs. Goldney,' concluded Charlotte, cleverly.

The two set off, but as they turned into the high road, one at least noted that a figure was still standing in the doorway watching.

'I do trust no harm will come of this,' thought the kindly girl as she sped along.

Even Madeline's father, albeit an unenlightened male creature, experienced a dim sense of something amiss as his prospective antagonist now seated herself with a more than usually determined air—a demeanour which conveyed not only that she meant to play well, but to play in defiance of some opposing influence, some unknown quantity whose nature he could not fathom, and whose force he could not gauge. He almost wished he had not so dutiful a daughter. It was bad for a man—pampered selfishness. As for the little disappointment about his game, a mere trifle like that would have been got over in a minute, and he would have been able to rejoice that the poor child—a lonely little thing, motherless and sisterless—was having a merry afternoon in the fresh air and with pleasant companions. It was too bad—yes, it really was too bad that he should be allowed no say in his own affairs. But even as the good man frowned, he tried a new and brilliant opening which had been much commented upon at a recent chess tournament, and the venture was so absorbing that soon all else was forgotten.

Perhaps Maddy did not do her best, or it might be that the new opening disconcerted her. Certain it was that she was quickly vanquished, and that although more than one oversight had been pointed out and given back.

'You are not giving your mind to it,' said her father, sharply.

With him chess was chess, and to play with only half a mind was an insult to the game. 'If you don't care to play, say so,' proceeded he. 'I never asked for it; I never thought of it. It was you yourself who said it would pass the time. Even when the sun came out, you insisted on not going with those girls, though I knew it would be better for you, and if your poor mother had been alive she would not have allowed you to sit indoors on a day like this; but you would have your own way. Well, I suppose it was kindly meant, only don't be so self-willed another time. I know I bother you with my hobby, but I thought you were beginning to take some kind of interest in it for its own sake.'

'Papa, what nonsense! Come, come, sir; don't be silly. "Some kind of interest" indeed! Don't I think there is no game in the world like it? Is it not one of the ambitions of my life to be a good player—a really *good* player?' A gleam stole over the rector's brow. 'And just because you have given me a beating, a merciless beating, one that makes me tingle for revenge, you add a scolding to it! As if it were my fault that you cheviad my poor king into a corner and left him no loophole for escape!'

'You played badly, my dear—badly all through. You ought never to have moved your bishop from that line.'

'Papa, look here, I won't be lectured! I hate going through a game for the second time. When it is done, it is done. But if I don't make you sit up, dear gentleman,' and she bustled to place her pieces, while he cheerfully did the same, 'I give you leave to call me a fool, or any other name you please,' concluded Maddy, setting her teeth.

And she played—good heavens! how she played! The sun faded from the room, a fresh blast of April rain rattled against the windows, the fire sank, but still the fight went on.

Never had Mr. Wotherspoon enjoyed one like it. He spoke of it for years after. A very fiend, he said, seemed to have possessed his whilom pupil. It was impossible to baffle her; it was all he could do to hold his own against her.

Gradually—was it credible? but so it actually seemed—she was drawing ahead. The rector 'Pished' and 'Pshawed,' half indignant, half amused, more and more eager to win at last. It was all very well to be defied, to have his best powers drawn out and his most stringent efforts demanded, but he meant to show

himself master in the long run. The chit was laughing at him, was she?

In truth, it seemed no matter to Maddy what moves she made, she had *that* in her which inspired each one. Insensibly she too became absorbed, enthralled.

'It is not much use hoping for a recognition,' said a voice through the open window. 'I may wait till Doomsday if I don't force an entrance,' and two long legs followed the voice and approached the chessboard. 'What determined players you are! Mr. Wotherspoon, I knew *you* were a swell at this, but I did not guess how you got your practice. Miss Wotherspoon, am I intruding? I see you are at a crucial point—at least, I suspect so, for I scarcely know a king from a queen—but may I sit down and watch? I promise not to speak a single word till the game is over.'

'Sit then,' said Madeline, nodding and laughing—but she trembled in every limb, though she spoke so lightly. 'Papa, if Mr. Umfreville will really do as he says, if he can be depended upon to keep his word, he may stay, may he not? But mind, not a syllable,' and she shook a warlike finger at the visitor, who had drawn up his chair.

'You see we really are so very near the end,' apologised the rector, all courtesy, but keeping a firm grip on the situation with his eyes, lest by the interruption he should lose a distinct advantage obtained by his last move, 'that if you would kindly——' and the polite accents died away. Bertie Umfreville leaned his head on his hand. 'He has the wit to see what a near thing it is, and to be really interested,' reflected the speaker.

And from that moment he did better.

Indeed, all Madeline's luck seemed to have deserted her. She blundered; then retrieved herself, only to blunder again. She would have liked to win, she was even more eager to win now than before, but the silent eyes of the watcher had a fatal effect—or else it was possible that they had a contrary one on her antagonist, that he was stimulated by what unnerved her.

Be this how it may, the game was lost and won within a much briefer period than either had in reality contemplated, age and experience coming out triumphant from the contest.

'Pon my word, I hardly thought I should, though!' cried the rector, with a sigh of relief and a crow of victory. 'Never was so put to it in my life! Half an hour ago it seemed all over with me! That chit, she played like the very hum—hum—hum! I

wish you had been here all through, Umfreville, as you seem to take an interest in looking on. Well, it has been a glorious match,' and he rubbed his hands, and took out his watch. 'We have been at it—let me see—we began at three o'clock, and it is nearly five. To have been held at bay all this time by *her!*'

'Miss Wotherspoon is a first-rate player, then?' Rather to Madeline's surprise, there was real and keen pleasure in the tone. 'I was told you had stayed at home to play chess, but I had no idea you were such an enthusiast,' and a smiling eye was turned upon her next. 'I am awfully glad. It—it must be such a resource. You play a great deal, I suppose?'

'Every winter night since she has been fit to give me a game,' Maddy's father, who was now ready to play the host and talker, answered for her. 'She has improved wonderfully of late. I shouldn't mind backing her against anyone in *this* neighbourhood. After to-day I'd even go further.'

'Indeed! It is a charming accomplishment.'

'Tis more than an accomplishment, 'tis a science—as Maddy plays it. I have taught her, so she has had the best of teaching; but she took to it naturally.' And he prattled on.

Then tea came in; but although Mr. Umfreville stayed for tea, and strolled out into the garden afterwards, and there *was* the opportunity (for so Madeline assured her friend subsequently), nothing came of it. No, Bertie was as nice as ever, as pleasant as ever, and—and—just a little at the last—a little—Charlotte knew what! 'It was when saying "Good-bye," holding my hand, and begging for the flower it held—I wish now I had not given it, but somehow he seemed to take it of himself—still——' and the speaker's eyes fell, and her lip quivered a little, for the hour had come and gone, and borne no fruit.

'And I was so pleased when I saw him rush off, and knew he had come straight here,' sighed Charlotte, sympathetically. 'I put that horrid chess all upon your father—let it appear that you were almost made to stay. I am afraid I was rather unfair to poor dear Mr. Wotherspoon.'

'It is no matter, Charlotte. Papa would not mind. But it did no good. Only'—and there was a sudden stiffening of the small figure, and a setting of the firm little mouth—'only I am glad, more glad than I can say, that I stayed; and stayed, as he saw for himself, because of a paltry game of chess!'

Spring had passed into summer, and an invitation came for Madeline. It was from Mrs. Goldney, the lady to whose house, it will be remembered, the bicycle party resorted on the day above narrated. Mrs. Goldney was going to pass a week in Town, and would Maddy Wotherspoon go with her, and be her guest in the empty flat kindly placed at her disposal by an absent friend? Maddy, who had been drooping somewhat in the warm May weather, accepted with a long-drawn breath of gratitude. Change of any sort was welcome, and change to London! She looked brighter than she had done for weeks past when she ran up to her father for leave to say 'Yes.'

There was not even the worry of leaving him. He also was going away. It was the time for his annual visit to an old chum at Oxford, and Mrs. Goldney, knowing this, had bethought her of Madeline. Nothing could have worked better.

'You will not mind my paying a few tiresome calls, my dear?' It was the second day after the ladies' arrival at their pretty little nest in St. James' Place. 'I promise you a few gay houses, but just let us go through one or two duty calls first. Put on your smartest things, Maddy. Make yourself look as pretty as you please,' and when Maddy presently exhibited herself in proof of obedience, the elder lady took her in critically point by point. 'You want a bunch of flowers at your waist, my dear—roses to match your hat. Otherwise you are just right. We will get the roses as we go. And later on we will send away the victoria and sit in the Park.'

'And perhaps we may meet *him* there!' thought Maddy.

There could be no harm in such a meeting. She had schooled herself to feel that nothing more was ever to be expected from the pleasant friend who had made so much of her down in the depths of the country, now that the episode was over, and she was sure, quite sure, that all she wished or thought of was to see him now and again, and, quite calmly and unconcernedly, have a little aimless, agreeable talk. Moreover, it would be as well to show that she was nothing loath so to meet; it would be for her own credit, for her own pride, to exhibit herself gay and good-humoured, enjoying her little bit of 'season,' and entering into it with zest.

Mrs. Goldney would narrate all they were going to do and see, while she, Madeline, would stand smiling by; and perhaps in her pretty summer toilette he would even look at her as he used to do, approvingly, admiringly. She smiled in anticipation—smiled to herself—as the victoria flew along. It almost went too

fast, Maddy thought; she hoped the calls would not be got through too soon for the correct hour in the Park.

‘Perhaps you would not mind coming in here, my dear? ’Tis only an old man—but you get on so well with old men. And he is something of an invalid.’ The large front door of a mansion in Grosvenor Square stood open, and Mrs. Goldney had returned from making her own query on the door-step. ‘He is at home, and able to see us. I asked myself, because I wanted to hear from the old butler how he really was. We need not stay long.’

‘What splendid rooms!’ murmured Maddy as she followed her leader. Mrs. Goldney looked at her rather curiously at the words.

At length the last room was reached, and from the farthest corner a bent figure reared itself upright as the ladies approached. In front of the broad armchair now vacant was displayed a chess-board. Instinctively Maddy thought of her father.

‘You are playing chess all by yourself?’ said Mrs. Goldney, glancing at the board.

‘Trying a few moves, ma’am. I have my paper here with the account of some,’ and he proceeded to enlarge. On a sudden he perceived that the perfunctory interest on one auditor’s countenance was not shared by the other, that the younger lady was really listening with intelligent comprehension. He wheeled round and addressed her. ‘I’m an old bore, Miss—Miss—excuse me, I don’t know your name. But a chess-player is a bore or nothing; and you seem to——’

‘My father, sir, is a chess-player, and so am I.’

‘You?’ A pair of shaggy eyebrows stood out in a sort of amused contempt.

‘Indeed she is,’ struck in Mrs. Goldney, prepared to dissipate the contempt. ‘So good a one that her father seldom cares for any other antagonist. You play regularly, my dear, I think?’

‘But do you mean——? Come, come, is not your friend going a little too far? Your father a regular player, and you fight him! Forgive me, my dear young lady, but when I look at you——’

‘You try her,’ cried Mrs. Goldney, nettled by the incredulity of his air. ‘You will not doubt my word a second time. Maddy, I am in earnest,’ laughing and glancing at the clock. ‘Allow me to leave you here for half an hour while I go round the north side of the Park—all uninteresting people there, my dear—and I will pick you up when I have dropped my cards about. Shall I?’

‘Dear me, I am flattered; but what does your young lady say? It is rather cruel——’

'No, indeed. I shall be delighted. Do let me,' cried Madeline sincerely. She was not disinclined to show her skill, and at all times was ready to fall in with the whims of others. Obviously Mrs. Goldney wished her to stay, and as for the poor old gentleman, it was like her dear daddy over again, the alacrity with which he popped his men on to their places.

'So far, so good,' said Mrs. Goldney, as she left the room. She was gone longer than she said, but an outcry against so speedy a return assailed her ears on re-entering.

'Oh, dear, I *can't* go,' from Maddy.

'That you can't,' cried her antagonist, gleefully. 'No, indeed, Mrs. Goldney, I'll send her after you. She can have the carriage to go when she pleases. But here she must stay—that is, pardon me, I am a selfish curmudgeon, I ought to have said, "On my knees I beg you to stay."' It was a pretty sight. Mrs. Goldney might be excused for thinking she never saw a prettier, and for letting her eyes linger for a moment, first on the softened outlines of a countenance naturally harsh and forbidding, and secondly on the bright features of the fearless, radiant young creature, who, so innocent of the momentous issues at stake, thus as it were played with destiny.

'Will you stay, Maddy?'

Maddy signified a willing consent. 'Thank you, my child; God bless you,' said the old man.

* * * *

'Well, and you got on so grandly that you actually won one game out of three! That was a triumph. I am so glad!' cried the good-natured chaperon, on hearing the history of the afternoon. 'I feel as proud as if I had got the better of the old fellow myself, with his airs and graces. 'Pon my word, he was hardly civil.'

'Indeed, Mrs. Goldney, he was. Oh, you mean in despising me for an adversary. But I assure you he was more than civil before I had done with him. You should have heard how he complimented me. I am to go again—that is, if you will spare me. I said to-morrow morning, but, of course, if you have anything else for me to do——'

'To-morrow morning,' mused Mrs. Goldney, as though turning over engagements in her mind; 'no, I don't think to-morrow morning is filled up. To-morrow is rather a free day. There are so many things one can do on a Saturday afternoon, I left it open for us to decide among them. I have had the offer of Hurlingham tickets, and there are matinées; but we need not fix

to-night. Anyhow, the morning is vacant, and as it is a kindness— Are you to write?’

‘Not if I go. I said eleven o’clock, and—and he wanted me to stay for luncheon, but——’

‘Very well, my dear; why not? It would suit me very well. I can lunch with some friends, and call for you afterwards. You would not mind going by yourself? And Taylor could convey you to the house.’

‘Thank you. Oh, I should like it; he is a dear old gentleman, and you know I am accustomed to going about by myself. It was so funny,’ continued Madeline, laughing. ‘Neither of us knew the other’s name, not even at the last, though we made such friends, and had our tea together. He was quite in a fuss because there wasn’t much of a tea, and said his servants got into bad ways with having only himself to bring it for, and he never eats sweet things. However, it was all very grandly set out, and a number of menservants fidgeting round; and I couldn’t help thinking how sad it must be to sit there so lonely——’

‘Very sad, my dear. All the middle part of the day he is quite solitary, except on Saturdays, I believe, when he has a relation who comes home early, and whom you may possibly see to-morrow.’ The speaker paused, looking keenly, but the face before her was as innocent as ever.

‘What is his name, Mrs. Goldney?—I mean, my old friend. Who is he?’

‘Maddy, if you don’t mind, I should prefer not to tell you just yet. It is a name rather well known, and you might be a little abashed——’

‘Oh, I am quite easy with him now, Mrs. Goldney.’

‘Go on being so. But you have done so well that just for to-morrow——’

‘All right,’ said Maddy, laughing.

She could not help being a little curious, however, and her adventure assumed a new aspect. A well-known name? Probably in the chess world. If so, what news for her father! What tribute to the old rector’s powers, and what a theme for his tongue, should it prove that she, who had had no other instruction than his own, had been pitted against some ‘well-known’ authority, and further, evoked commendation where scepticism had been previously ill-concealed! Maddy chuckled as she rang the bell with a loud peal. She had come to play chess, and she

did not care how loud was the demand, nor how big the door which opened to admit her.

And she was obviously expected and made welcome. She felt it, knew it. The very footman who preceded her up the broad staircase let it be seen that he did so with alacrity; whilst within the vast saloon, in the selfsame corner where he had been found before, sat her old friend, his chess-board ready in front of him.

But he hurriedly pushed it aside to greet her. He stood up, gout and all, as he acknowledged her punctuality and expressed his obligations. Finally he suggested that as the room was warm, and she had kindly promised to remain for luncheon—(question mark, to which Maddy signified assent)—she should take off her hat and cape.

She did so, and sat down to play, in her simple morning frock, as though within the walls of her own home, and Bertie Umfreville, coming in two hours later, found her thus.

‘My nephew,’ said Madeline’s antagonist, looking up as the latter approached. ‘My nephew, Miss—Miss—dear me, I am so stupid I have not yet—but you know each other?’ in surprise, as the two shook hands. ‘But you did not tell me so yesterday, Bertie.’

‘You did not tell *me*, sir, the name of—’

‘Hum—ah—yes, of course. Ha! ha! ha! rather comical, to be sure. I only told him I had enjoyed a delightful afternoon, and owed it to the presence of a very—no, I must not repeat all I said, must I, nephew? Well, perhaps *you* will introduce *me* now, for I believe we are in mutual ignorance.’

The young man smiled. ‘My uncle, Sir John Umfreville—Miss Wotherspoon. The uncle you have often heard me speak of. As I see the game is over—’

‘But we are going to have another before luncheon,’ cried Sir John, eagerly. ‘There is plenty of time. Miss Wotherspoon does me the honour to stay—*Damnation! what are you doing, sir?*’ For Miss Wotherspoon was being led gently from the room.

‘Madeline,’ said a voice in her ear, ‘will you trust me for a few short minutes? All will be explained directly. I love you—have loved you always—and thought, hoped, fancied you returned—oh, don’t look at me like that. You *will* forgive me, I know, when you hear all. I could not ask you without his leave,’ signifying by a gesture to whom he referred, ‘and even to let you know my heart seemed an insult if I could do no more. Then, when I found you were a chessplayer—and a really good one—it came to me all at once to devise this trap. I thought it would

work, and it has. Mrs. Goldney—no, you must not be angry with her either. She is the kindest and best of creatures. Without her aid I could never have managed. Now, dear, one moment; wait for me here’—he had brought her to an empty room—‘and when I return——’.

Perhaps she ought not to have waited. Perhaps it was beneath her dignity to accept the part thrust upon her by an artful lover and his accomplice; but poor Maddy certainly could not have walked away had she tried. The world was spinning round with her. And, moreover, had she attempted to escape she must needs have passed through the other apartment, in which the little drama was now being worked out to its close.

‘Upon my word, I couldn’t have believed it of you, Herbert.’

Herbert carefully silent.

‘To want to marry a country parson’s daughter! A pretty girl, I allow, and—for I won’t take back my word—as nice a girl as I have ever met. But to befool your poor old uncle like this; get at him on his weak side——’

‘All’s fair in love and war, you know, sir.’

‘Tis a rascally proverb, nephew, invented of the devil! But to say “No” now, would be to put an affront upon an innocent young lady. You swear she knew nothing of it? I believe you, for I had the testing of my own eyes, and, faith! I thought she’d have had a fit when you walked in! Well, well, we do want a petticoat in this dull house, that’s certain; and if one of us must marry, rather you than I. And she’s a good girl, and a pretty one—yes, she is, uncommonly pretty, you dog; that’s what fetched *you*—not the goodness. And—and—she plays a very tolerable game of chess; though I could improve her if I had her in my own hands. Tut, tut, bring her in!’—and one stride took his auditor to the door.

Left to himself, the old man returned to his board. ‘See if I don’t give that old parson father of hers a drubbing,’ muttered he to himself.

But to Madeline he only said, ‘My dear, if you take this unworthy scapegrace I’ll do all that lies in my power to make you happy. He is not, perhaps, quite so bad a fellow as you might think, although he has played us both a shabby trick. We must forgive him, I suppose; and it still wants half an hour to luncheon, but’—looking first into one face and then into the other as he shuffled past on his way to the door—‘somehow I don’t think there’s time for a game of chess!’