



The Last of the Peterkins

with Others of Their Kin

and The Queen of the Red Chessmen

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The Queen of the Red Chessmen

The box of chessmen had been left open all night. That was a great oversight! For everybody knows that the contending chessmen are but too eager to fight their battles over again by midnight, if a chance is only allowed them.

It was at the Willows,—so called, not because the house is surrounded by willows, but because a little clump of them hangs over the pond close by. It is a pretty place, with its broad lawn in front of the door-way, its winding avenue hidden from the road by high trees. It is a quiet place, too; the sun rests gently on the green lawn, and the drooping leaves of the willows hang heavily over the water.

No one would imagine what violent contests were going on under the still roof, this very night. It was the night of the first of May. The moon came silently out from the shadows; the trees were scarcely stirring. The box of chessmen had been left on the balcony steps by the drawing-room window, and the window, too, that warm night, had been left open. So, one by one, all the chessmen came out to fight over again their evening's battles.

It was a famously carved set of chessmen. The bishops wore their mitres, the knights pranced on spirited steeds, the castles rested on the backs of elephants,—even the pawns mimicked the private soldiers of an army. The skilful carver had given to each piece, and each pawn, too, a certain in-

dividuality. That night there had been a close contest. Two well-matched players had guided the game, and it had ended with leaving a deep irritation on the conquered side.

It was Isabella the Queen of the Red Chessmen, who had been obliged to yield. She was young and proud, and it was she, indeed, who held the rule; for her father, the old Red King, had grown to imbecile to direct affairs; he merely bore the name of sovereignty. And Isabella was loved by knights, pawns, and all; the bishops were willing to die in her cause, the castles would have crumbled to earth for her. Opposed to her, stood the detested White Queen. All the Whites, of course, were despised by her; but the haughty, self-sufficient queen angered her most.

The White Queen was reigning during the minority of her only son. The White Prince had reached the age of nineteen, but the strong mind of his mother had kept him always under restraint. A simple youth, he had always yielded to her control. He was pure-hearted and gentle, but never ventured to make a move of his own. He sought shelter under cover of his castles, while his more energetic mother went forth at the head of his army. She was dreaded by her subjects,—never loved by them. Her own pawn, it is true, had ventured much for her sake, had often with his own life redeemed her from captivity; but it was loyalty that bound even him,—no warmer feeling of devotion or love.

The Queen Isabella was the first to come out from her prison.

“I will stay here no longer,” she cried; “the blood of the Reds grows pale in this inactivity.”

She stood upon the marble steps; the May moon shone down upon her. She listened a moment to a slight murmuring within the drawing-room window. The Spanish lady, the Murillo-painted Spanish lady, had come down from her frame that bound her against the wall. Just for this one night in the year, she stepped out from the canvas to walk up and down the rooms majestically. She would not exchange a word with anybody; nobody understood her language. She

could remember when Murillo looked at her, watched over her, created her with his pencil. She could have nothing to say to little paltry shepherdesses, and other articles of *virtù*, that came into grace and motion just at this moment.

The Queen of the Red Chessmen turned away, down into the avenue. The May moon shone upon her. Her feet trod upon unaccustomed ground; no black or white square hemmed her in; she felt a new liberty.

“My poor old father!” she exclaimed, “I will leave him behind; better let him slumber in an ignoble repose than wander over the board, a laughing-stock for his enemies. We have been conquered,—the foolish White Prince rules!”

A strange inspiration stole upon her; the breath of the May night hovered over her; the May moon shone upon her. She could move without waiting for the will of another; she was free. She passed down the avenue; she had left her old prison behind.

Early in the morning,—it was just after sunrise,—the kind Doctor Lester was driving home, after watching half the night out with a patient. He passed the avenue to the Willows, but drew up his horse just as he was leaving the entrance. He saw a young girl sitting under the hedge. She was without any bonnet, in a red dress, fitting closely and hanging heavily about her. She was so very beautiful, she looked so strangely lost and out of place here at this early hour, that the Doctor could not resist speaking to her.

“My child, how came you here?”

The young girl rose up, and looked round with uncertainty.

“Where am I?” she asked.

She was very tall and graceful, with an air of command, but with a strange, wild look in her eyes.

“The young woman must be slightly insane,” thought the Doctor; “but she cannot have wandered far.”

“Let me take you home,” he said aloud. “Perhaps you come from the Willows?”

“O, don’t take me back there!” cried Isabella, “they will

imprison me again! I had rather be a slave than a conquered queen!"

"Decidedly insane!" thought the Doctor. "I must take her back to the Willows."

He persuaded the young girl to let him lift her into his chaise. She did not resist him; but when he turned up the avenue, she leaned back in despair. He was fortunate enough to find one of the servants up at the house, just sweeping the steps of the hall-door. Getting out of his chaise, he said confidentially to the servant,—

"I have brought back your young lady."

"Our young lady!" exclaimed the man, as the Doctor pointed out Isabella.

"Yes, she is a little insane, is she not?"

"She is not our young lady," answered the servant; "we have nobody in the house just now, but Mr. and Mrs. Fogerty, and Mrs. Fogerty's brother, the old geologist."

"Where did she come from?" inquired the Doctor.

"I never saw her before," said the servant, "and I certainly should remember. There's some foreign folks live down in the cottage, by the railroad; but they are not the like of her!"

The Doctor got into his chaise again, bewildered.

"My child," he said, "you must tell me where you came from."

"O, don't let me go back again!" said Isabella, clasping her hands imploringly. "Think how hard it must be never to take a move of one's own! to know how the game might be won, then see it lost through folly! O, that last game, lost through utter weakness! There was that one move! Why did he push me down to the king's row? I might have checkmated the White Prince, shut in by his own castles and pawns,—it would have been a direct checkmate! Think of his folly! he stopped to take the queen's pawn with his bishop, and within one move of a checkmate!"

"Quite insane!" repeated the Doctor. "But I must have my breakfast. She seems quiet; I think I can keep her till after

breakfast, and then I must try and find where the poor child's friends live. I don't know what Mrs. Lester will think of her."

They rode on. Isabella looked timidly round.

"You don't quite believe me," she said, at last. "It seems strange to you."

"It does," answered the Doctor, "seem very strange."

"Not stranger than to me," said Isabella,—*"it is so very grand to me! All this motion! Look down at that great field there, not cut up into squares! If I only had my knights and squires there! I would be willing to give her as good a field, too; but I would show her where the true bravery lies. What a place for the castles, just to defend that pass!"*

The Doctor whipped up his horse.

Mrs. Lester was a little surprised at the companion her husband had brought home to breakfast with him.

"Who is it?" she whispered.

"That I don't know,—I shall have to find out," he answered a little nervously.

"Where is her bonnet?" asked Mrs. Lester; this was the first absence of conventionality she had noticed.

"You had better ask her," answered the Doctor.

But Mrs. Lester preferred leaving her guest in the parlor while she questioned her husband. She was somewhat disturbed when she found he had nothing more satisfactory to tell her.

"An insane girl! and what shall we do with her?" she asked.

"After breakfast I will make some inquiries about her," answered the Doctor.

"And leave her alone with us? that will never do! You must take her away directly,—at least to the Insane Asylum—somewhere! What if she should grow wild while you were gone? She might kill us all! I will go in and tell her that she cannot stay here."

On returning to the parlor, she found Isabella looking

dreamily out of the window. As Mrs. Lester approached, she turned.

"You will let me stay with you a little while, will you not?"

She spoke in a quiet tone, with an air somewhat commanding. It imposed upon nervous little Mrs. Lester. But she made a faint struggle.

"Perhaps you would rather go home," she said.

"I have no home now," said Isabella; "some time I may recover it; but my throne has been usurped."

Mrs. Lester looked around in alarm, to see if the Doctor were near.

"Perhaps you had better come in to breakfast," she suggested.

She was glad to place the Doctor between herself and their new guest.

Celia Lester, the only daughter, came down stairs. She had heard that her father had picked up a lost girl in the road. As she came down in her clean morning dress, she expected to have to hold her skirts away from some little squalid object of charity. She started when she saw the elegant-looking young girl who sat at the table. There was something in her air and manner that seemed to make the breakfast equipage, and the furniture of the room about her, look a little mean and poor. Yet the Doctor was very well off, and Mrs. Lester fancied she had everything quite in style. Celia stole into her place, feeling small in the presence of the stranger.

After breakfast, when the Doctor had somewhat refreshed himself by its good cheer from his last night's fatigue, Isabella requested to speak with him.

"Let me stay with you a little while," she asked, beseechingly; "I will do everything for you that you desire. You shall teach me anything;—I know I can learn all that you will show me, all that Mrs. Lester will tell me."

"Perhaps so,—perhaps that will be best," answered the

Doctor, "until your friends inquire for you; then I must send you back to them."

"Very well, very well," said Isabella, relieved. "But I must tell you they will not inquire for me. I see you will not believe my story. If you only would listen to me, I could tell it all to you."

"That is the only condition I can make with you," answered the Doctor, "that you will not tell your story,—that you will never even think of it yourself. I am a physician. I know that it is not good for you to dwell upon such things. Do not talk of them to me, nor to my wife or daughter. Never speak of your story to any one who comes here. It will be better for you."

"Better for me," said Isabella, dreamily, "that no one should know! Perhaps so. I am, in truth, captive to the White Prince; and if he should come and demand me,—I should be half afraid to try the risks of another game."

"Stop, stop!" exclaimed the doctor, "you are already forgetting the condition. I shall be obliged to take you away to some retreat, unless you promise me—"

"O, I will promise you anything," interrupted Isabella; "and you will see that I can keep my promise."

Meanwhile Mrs. Lester and Celia had been holding a consultation.

"I think she must be some one in disguise," suggested Celia.

Celia was one of the most unromantic of persons. Both she and her mother had passed their lives in an unvarying routine of duties. Neither of them had ever found time from their sewing even to read. Celia had her books of history laid out, that she meant to take up when she should get through her work; but it seemed hopeless that this time would ever come. It had never come to Mrs. Lester, and she was now fifty years old. Celia had never read any novels. She had tried to read them, but never was interested in them. So she had a vague idea of what romance was, conceiving of it only as something quite different from her ev-

ery-day life. For this reason the unnatural event that was taking place this very day was gradually appearing to her something possible and natural. Because she knew there was such a thing as romance, and that it was something quite beyond her comprehension, she was the more willing to receive this event quietly from finding it incomprehensible.

"We can let her stay here to-day, at least," said Mrs. Lester. "We will keep John at work in the front dooryard, in case we should want him. And I will set Mrs. Anderson's boy to weeding in the border; we can call him, if we should want to send for help."

She was quite ashamed of herself, when she had uttered these words, and Isabella walked into the room, so composed, so refined in her manners.

"The Doctor says I may stay here a little while, if you will let me," said Isabella, as she took Mrs. Lester's hands.

"We will try to make you comfortable," replied Mrs. Lester.

"He says you will teach me many things,—I think he said, how to sew."

"How to sew! Was it possible she did not know how to sew?" Celia thought to herself, "How many servants she must have had, never to have learned how to sew, herself!"

And this occupation was directly provided, while the Doctor set forth on his day's duties, and at the same time to inquire about the strange apparition of the young girl. He was so convinced that there was a vein of insanity about her, that he was very sure that questioning her only excited her the more. Just as he had parted from her, some compunction seized her, and she followed him to the door.

"There is my father," said she.

"Your father! where shall I find him?" asked the Doctor.

"O, he could not help me," she replied; "it is a long time since he has been able to direct affairs. He has scarcely been conscious of my presence, and will hardly feel my absence, his mind is so weak."

"But where can I find him?" persisted the Doctor.

"He did not come out," said Isabella; "the White Queen would not allow it, indeed."

"Stop, stop!" exclaimed the Doctor, "we are on forbidden ground."

He drove away.

"So there is insanity in the family," he thought to himself. "I am quite interested in this case. A new form of monomania! I should be quite sorry to lose sight of it. I shall be loath to give her up to her friends."

But he was not yet put to that test. No one could give him any light with regard to the strange girl. He went first to the Willows, and found there so much confusion that he could hardly persuade any one to listen to his questions. Mrs. Fogerty's brother, the geologist, had been riding that morning, and had fallen from his horse and broken his leg. The Doctor arrived just in time to be of service in setting it. Then he must linger some time to see that the old gentleman was comfortable, so that he was obliged to stay nearly the whole morning. He was much amused at the state of disturbance in which he left the family. The whole house was in confusion, looking after some lost chessmen.

"There was nothing," said Mrs. Fogerty, apologetically, "that would soothe her brother so much as a game of chess. That, perhaps, might keep him quiet. He would be willing to play chess with Mr. Fogerty by the day together. It was so strange! they had a game the night before, and now some of the pieces could not be found. Her brother had lost the game, and to-day he was so eager to take his revenge!

"How absurd!" thought the Doctor; "what trifling things people interest themselves in! Here is this old man more disturbed at losing his game of chess than he is at breaking his leg. It is different in my profession, where one deals with life and death. Here is this young girl's fate in my hands, and they talk to me of the loss of a few paltry chessmen!"

The "foreign people" at the cottage knew nothing of Isabella. No one had seen her the night before, or at any time. Dr. Lester even drove ten miles to Dr. Giles's Retreat for the Insane, to see if it were possible that a patient could have wandered from there. Dr. Giles was deeply interested in the account Dr. Lester gave. He would very gladly take such a person under his care.

"No," said Dr. Lester, "I will wait awhile. I am interested in the young girl. It is not possible but that I shall in time find out from her, by chance, perhaps, who her friends are, and where she came from. She must have wandered away in some delirium of fever,—but it is very strange, for she appears perfectly calm now. Yet I hardly know in what state I shall find her."

He returned to find her very quiet and calm, learning from his wife and daughter how to sew. She seemed deeply interested in this new occupation, and had given all her time and thought to it. Celia and her mother privately confided to the Doctor their admiration of their strange guest. Her ways were so graceful and beautiful! all that she said seemed so new and singular! The Doctor, before he went away, had exhorted Mrs. Lester and Celia to ask her no questions about her former life, and everything had gone on very smoothly. And everything went on as smoothly for some weeks. Isabella seemed willing to be as silent as the Doctor upon all exciting subjects. She appeared to be quite taken up with her sewing, much to Mrs. Lester's delight.

"She will turn out quite as good a seamstress as Celia," said she to the Doctor. "She sews steadily all the time, and nothing seems to please her so much as to finish a piece of work. She will be able to do much more than her own sewing, and may prove quite a help to us."

"I shall be very glad," said the Doctor, "if anything can be a help, to prevent you and Celia from working yourselves to death. I shall be glad if you can ever have done with that eternal sewing. It is time that Celia should do something about cultivating her mind."

"Celia's mind is so well regulated," interrupted Mrs. Lester.

"We won't discuss that," continued the Doctor,—“we never come to an agreement there. I was going on to say that I am becoming so interested in Isabella, that I feel towards her as if she were my own. If she is of help to the family, that is very well,—it is the best thing for her to be able to make herself of use. But I don't care to make any profit to ourselves out of her help. Somehow I begin to think of her as belonging to us. Certainly she belongs to nobody else. Let us treat her as our own child. We have but one, yet God has given us means enough to care for many more. I confess I should find it hard to give Isabella up to any one else. I like to find her when I come home,—it is pleasant to look at her.”

"And I, too, love her," said Mrs. Lester. "I like to see her as she sits quietly at her work."

So Isabella went on learning what it was to be one of the family, and becoming, as Mrs. Lester remarked, a very experienced seamstress. She seldom said anything as she sat at her work, but seemed quite occupied with her sewing; while Mrs. Lester and Celia kept up a stream of conversation, seldom addressing Isabella, as, indeed, they had few topics in common.

One day, Celia and Isabella were sitting together.

"Have you always sewed?" asked Isabella.

"O, yes," answered Celia,—“since I was quite a child.”

"And do you remember when you were a child?" asked Isabella, laying down her work.

"O, yes, indeed," said Celia; "I used to make all my doll's dresses myself."

"Your doll's dresses!" repeated Isabella.

"O, yes," replied Celia,—“I was not ashamed to play with dolls in that way.”

"I should like to see some dolls," said Isabella.

"I will show you my large doll," said Celia; "I have always

kept it, because I fitted it out with such a nice set of clothes. And I keep it for children to play with."

She brought her doll, and Isabella handled it and looked at it with curiosity.

"So you dressed this, and played with it," said Isabella, inquiringly, "and moved it about as one would move a piece at chess?"

Celia started at this word "chess." It was one of the forbidden words. But Isabella went on:—

"Suppose this doll should suddenly have begun to speak, to move, and walk round, would not you have liked it?"

"O, no!" exclaimed Celia. "What! a wooden thing speak and move! It would have frightened me very much."

"Why should it not speak if it has a mouth and walk if it has feet?" asked Isabella.

"What foolish questions you ask!" exclaimed Celia, "of course it has not life."

"O, life,—that is it!" said Isabella. "Well what is life?"

"Life! why it is what makes us live," answered Celia. "Of course you know what life is."

"No, I don't know," said Isabella, "But I have been thinking about it lately, while I have been sewing,—what it is."

"But you should not think, you should talk more, Isabella, said Celia, "Mamma and I talk while we are at work, but you are always very silent."

"But you think sometimes?" asked Isabella.

"Not about such things," replied Celia. "I have to think about my work."

"But your father thinks, I suppose, when he comes home and sits in his study alone?"

"O, he reads when he goes into his study,—he reads books and studies them," said Celia.

"Do you know how to read?" asked Isabella.

"Do I know how to read!" cried Celia, angrily.

"Forgive me," said Isabella, quickly, "but I never saw you reading. I thought perhaps—women are so different here!"

She did not finish her sentence, for she saw Celia was really angry. Yet she had no idea of hurting her feelings. She had tried to accommodate herself to her new circumstances. She had observed a great deal, and had never been in the habit of asking questions. Celia was disturbed at having it supposed that she did not know how to read; therefore it must be a very important thing to know how to read, and she determined she must learn. She applied to the Doctor. He was astonished at her entire ignorance, but he was very glad to help her. Isabella gave herself up to her reading, as she had done before to her sewing. The Doctor was now the gainer. All the time he was away, Isabella sat in his study, poring over her books; when he returned, she had a famous lesson to recite to him. Then he began to tell her of books that he was interested in. He made Celia come in, for a history class. It was such a pleasure to him to find Isabella interested in what he could tell her of history!

"All this really happened," said Isabella to Celia once,—
"these people really lived!"

"Yes, but they died," responded Celia, in an indifferent tone,—
"and ever so long ago, too!"

"But did they die," asked Isabella, "if we can talk about them, and imagine how they looked? They live for us as much as they did then."

"That I can't understand," said Celia. "My uncle saw Napoleon when he was in Europe, long ago. But I never saw Napoleon. He is dead and gone to me, just as much as Alexander the Great."

"Well, who does live, if Alexander the Great, if Napoleon, and Columbus do not live?" asked Isabella, impatiently.

"Why, papa and mamma live," answered Celia, "and you—"

"And the butcher," interrupted Isabella, "because he brings you meat to eat; and Mr. Spool, because he keeps the thread store. Thank you for putting me in, too! Once—"

"Once!" answered Celia, in a dignified tone, "I suppose

once you lived in a grander circle, and it appears to you we have nobody better than Mr. Spool and the butcher."

Isabella was silent, and thought of her "circle," her former circle. The circle here was large enough, the circumference not very great, but there were as many points in it as in a larger one. There were pleasant, motherly Mrs. Gibbs, and her agreeable daughters,—the Gresham boys, just in college,—the Misses Tarletan, fresh from a New York boarding-school,—Mr. Lovell, the young minister,—and the old Misses Pendleton, that made raspberry-jam,—together with Celia's particular friends, Anna and Selina Mountfort, who had a great deal of talking with Celia in private, but not a word to say to anybody in the parlor. All these, with many others in the background, had been speculating upon the riddle that Isabella presented—"Who was she? and where did she come from?"

Nobody found any satisfactory answer. Neither Celia nor her mother would disclose anything. It is a great convenience in keeping a secret, not to know what it is. One can't easily tell what one does not know.

"The Doctor really has a treasure in his wife and daughter," said Mrs. Gibbs, "they keep his secrets so well! Neither of them will lisp a word about this handsome Isabella."

"I have no doubt she is the daughter of an Italian refugee," said one of the Misses Tarletan. "We saw a number of Italian refugees in New York."

This opinion became prevalent in the neighborhood. That Dr. Lester should be willing to take charge of an unknown girl did not astonish those who knew of his many charitable deeds. It was not more than he had done for his cousin's child, who had no especial claim upon him. He had adopted Lawrence Egerton, educated him, sent him to college, and was giving him every advantage in his study of the law. In the end Lawrence would probably marry Celia and the pretty property that the Doctor would leave behind for his daughter.

"She is one of my patients," the Doctor would say, to any one who asked him about her.

The tale that she was the daughter of an Italian refugee became more rife after Isabella had begun to study Italian. She liked to have the musical Italian words linger on her tongue. She quoted Italian poetry, read Italian history. In conversation, she generally talked of the present, rarely of the past or of the future. She listened with wonder to those who had a talent for reminiscence. How rich their past must be, that they should be willing to dwell in it! Her own she thought very meagre. If she wanted to live in the past, it must be in the past of great men, not in that of her own little self. So she read of great painters and great artists, and because she read of them she talked of them. Other people, in referring to by-gone events, would say, "When I was in Trenton last summer,"—"In Cuba the spring that we were there"; but Isabella would say, "When Raphael died, or when Dante lived." Everybody liked to talk with her,—laughed with her at her enthusiasm. There was something inspiring, too, in this enthusiasm; it compelled attention, as her air and manner always attracted notice. By her side, the style and elegance of the Misses Tarletan faded out; here was a moon that quite extinguished the light of their little tapers. She became the centre of admiration; the young girls admired her, as they are prone to admire some one particular star. She never courted attention, but it was always given.

"Isabella attracts everybody," said Celia to her mother. "Even the old Mr. Spencers, who have never been touched by woman before, follow her, and act just as she wills."

Little Celia, who had been quite a belle hitherto, sunk into the shade by the side of the brilliant Isabella. Yet she followed willingly in the sunny wake that Isabella left behind. She expanded somewhat, herself, for she was quite ashamed to know nothing of all that Isabella talked about so earnestly. The sewing gave place to a little reading, to Mrs. Lester's horror. The Mountforts and the Gibbises met

with Isabella and Celia to read and study, and went into town with them to lectures and to concerts.

A winter passed away and another summer came. Still Isabella was at Dr. Lester's; and with the lapse of time the harder did it become for the Doctor to question her of her past history,—the more, too, was she herself weaned from it.

The young people had been walking in the garden one evening.

“Let me sit by you here in the porch,” said Lawrence Egerton to Celia,—“I want rest, for body and spirit. I am always in a battle-field when I am talking with Isabella. I must either fight with her or against her. She insists on my fighting all the time. I have to keep my weapons bright, ready for use, every moment. She will lead me, too, in conversation, sends me here, orders me there. I feel like a poor knight in chess, under the sway of a queen—”

“I don't know anything about chess,” said Celia, curtly.

“It is a comfort to have you a little ignorant,” said Lawrence. “Please stay in bliss awhile. It is repose, it is refreshment. Isabella drags one into the company of her heroes, and then one feels completely ashamed not to be on more familiar terms with them all. Her Mazzinis, her Tancreds, heroes false and true,—it makes no difference to her,—put one into a whirl between history and story. What a row she would make in Italy, if she went back there!”

“What could we do without her?” said Celia; “it was so quiet and commonplace before she came!”

“That is the trouble,” replied Lawrence, “Isabella won't let anything remain commonplace. She pulls everything out of its place,—makes a hero or heroine out of a piece of clay. I don't want to be in heroics all the time. Even Homer's heroes ate their suppers comfortably. I think it was a mistake in your father, bringing her here. Let her stay in her sphere queening it, and leave us poor mortals to our bread and butter.”

“You know you don't think so,” expostulated Celia; “you worship her shoe-tie, the hem of her garment.”

"But I don't want to," said Lawrence,—“it is a compulsory worship. I had rather be quiet.”

"Lazy Lawrence!" cried Celia, "it is better for you. You would be the first to miss Isabella. You would find us quite flat without her brilliancy, and would be hunting after some other excitement."

"Perhaps so," said Lawrence. "But here she comes to goad us on again. Queen Isabella, when do the bull-fights begin?"

"I wish I were Queen Isabella!" she exclaimed. "Have you read the last accounts from Spain? I was reading them to the Doctor to-day. Nobody knows what to do there. Only think what an opportunity for the Queen to show herself a queen! Why will not she make of herself such a queen as the great Isabella of Castile was?"

"I can't say," answered Lawrence.

"Queens rule in chess," said Horace Gresham. "I always wondered that the king was made such a poor character there. He is not only ruled by his cabinet, bishops, and knights, but his queen is by far the more warlike character."

"Whoever plays the game rules,—you or Mr. Egerton," said Isabella, bitterly; "it is not the poor queen. She must yield to the power of the moving hand. I suppose it is so with us women. We see a great aim before us, but have not the power."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Lawrence, "it is just the reverse. With some women,—for I won't be personal,—the aim, as you call it, is very small,—a poor amusement, another dress, a larger house—"

"You may stop," interrupted Isabella, "for you don't believe this. At least, keep some of your flings for the women that deserve them; Celia and I don't accept them."

"Then we'll talk of the last aim we were discussing,—the ride to-morrow."

The next winter was passed by Mrs. Lester, her daughter, and Isabella in Cuba. Lawrence Egerton accompanied them thither, and the Doctor hoped to go for them in the spring.

They went on Mrs. Lester's account. She had worn herself out with her household labors,—very uselessly, the Doctor thought,—so he determined to send her away from them. Isabella and Celia were very happy all this winter and spring. With Isabella, Spanish took the place of Italian studies. She liked talking in Spanish. They made some friends among the residents, as well as among the strangers, particularly the Americans. Of these last, they enjoyed most the society of Mrs. Blanchard and her son, Otho, who were at the same hotel with them.

The opera, too, was a new delight to Isabella, and even Celia was excited by it.

"It is a little too absurd, to see the dying scene of Romeo and Juliet sung out in an opera!" remarked Lawrence Egerton, one morning; "all the music of the spheres could not have made that scene, last night, otherwise than supremely ridiculous."

"I am glad you did not sit by us, then," replied Celia; "Isabella and I were crying."

"I dare say," said Lawrence. "I should be afraid to take you to see a tragedy well acted. You would both be in hysterics before the killing was over."

"I should be really afraid," said Celia, "to see Romeo and Juliet finely performed. It would be too sad."

"It would be much better to end it up comfortably," said Lawrence. "Why should not Juliet marry her Romeo in peace?"

"It would be impossible!" exclaimed Isabella,—"impossible to bring together two such hostile families! Of course the result must be a tragedy."

"In romances," answered Lawrence, "that may be necessary; but not in real life."

"Why not in real life?" asked Isabella. "When two thunder-clouds meet, there must be an explosion."

"But we don't have such hostile families arrayed against each other now-a-days," said Lawrence. "The Bianchi and

the Neri have died out; unless the feud lives between the whites and the blacks of the present day."

"Are you sure that it has died out everywhere?" asked Isabella.

"Certainly not," said Otho Blanchard; "my mother, Bianca Bianco, inherits her name from a long line of ancestry, and with it come its hatreds as well as its loves."

"You speak like an Italian or Spaniard," said Lawrence. "We are cold-blooded Yankees, and in our slow veins such passions do die out. I should have taken you for an American from your name."

"It is our name Americanized; we have made Americans of ourselves, and the Bianchi have become the Blanchards."

"The romance of the family, then," persisted Lawrence, "must needs become Americanized too. If you were to meet with a lovely young lady of the enemy's race, I think you would be willing to bury your sword in the sheath for her sake."

"I hope I should not forget the honor of my family," said Otho. "I certainly never could, as long as my mother lives; her feelings on the subject are stronger even than mine."

"I cannot imagine the possibility of such feelings dying out," said Isabella. "I cannot imagine such different elements amalgamating. It would be like fire and water uniting. Then there would be no longer any contest; the game of life would be over."

"Why will you make out life to be a battle always?" exclaimed Lawrence; "won't you allow us any peace? I do not find such contests all the time,—never, except when I am fighting with you."

"I had rather fight with you than against you," said Isabella, laughing. "But when one is not striving, one is sleeping."

"That reminds me that it is time for our siesta," said Lawrence; "so we need not fight any longer."

Afterwards Isabella and Celia were talking of their new friend Otho.

"He does not seem to me like a Spaniard," said Celia, "his complexion is so light; then, too, his name sounds German."

"But his passions are quick," replied Isabella. "How he colored up when he spoke of the honor of his family!"

"I wonder that you like him," said Celia; "when he is with his mother, he hardly ventures to say his soul is his own."

"I don't like his mother," said Isabella; "her manner is too imperious and unrefined, it appears to me. No wonder that Otho is ill at ease in her presence. It is evident that her way of talking is not agreeable to him. He is afraid that she will commit herself in some way."

"But he never stands up for himself," answered Celia; "he always yields to her. Now I should not think you would like that."

"He yields because she is his mother," said Isabella; "and it would not be becoming to contradict her."

"He yields to you, too," said Celia; "how happens that?"

"I hope he does not yield to me more than is becoming," answered Isabella, laughing; "perhaps that is why I like him. After all, I don't care to be always sparring, as I am with Lawrence Egerton. With Otho I find that I agree wonderfully in many things. Neither of us yields to the other, neither of us is obliged to convince the other."

"Now I should think you would find that stupid," said Celia. "What becomes of this desire of yours never to rest, always to be struggling after something?"

"We might strive together, we might struggle together," responded Isabella.

She said this musingly, not in answer to Celia, but to her own thoughts,—as she looked away, out from everything that surrounded her. The passion for ruling had always been uppermost in her mind; suddenly there dawned upon her the pleasure of being ruled. She became conscious of

the pleasure of conquering all things for the sake of giving all to another. A new sense of peace stole upon her mind. Before, she had felt herself alone, even in the midst of the kindness of the home that had been given her. She had never dared to think or to speak of the past, and as little of the future. She had gladly flung herself into the details of every-day life. She had given her mind to the study of all that it required. She loved the Doctor, because he was always leading her on to fresh fields, always exciting her to a new knowledge. She loved him, too, for himself, for his tenderness and kindness to her. With Mrs. Lester and Celia she felt herself on a different footing. They admired her, but they never came near her. She led them, and they were always behind her.

With Otho she experienced a new feeling. He seemed, very much as she did herself, out of place in the world just around him. He was a foreigner,—was not yet acclimated to the society about him. He was willing to talk of other things than every-day events. He did not talk of “things,” indeed, but he speculated, as though he lived a separate life from that of mere eating and drinking. He was not content with what seemed to every-day people possible, but was willing to believe that there were things not dreamed of in their philosophy.

“It is a satisfaction,” said Lawrence once to Celia, “that Isabella has found somebody who will go high enough into the clouds to suit her. Besides, it gives me a little repose.”

“And a secret jealousy at the same time; is it not so?” asked Celia. “He takes up too much of Isabella’s time to please you.”

“The reason he pleases her,” said Lawrence, “is because he is more womanly than manly, and she thinks women ought to rule the world. Now if the world were made up of such as he, it would be very easily ruled. Isabella loves power too well to like to see it in others. Look at her when she is with Mrs. Blanchard! It is a splendid sight to see them together!”

"How can you say so? I am always afraid of some outbreak."

These families were, however, so much drawn together, that, when the Doctor came to summon his wife and daughter and Isabella home, Mrs. Blanchard was anxious to accompany them to New England. She wondered if it were not possible to find a country-seat somewhere near the Lesters, that she could occupy for a time. The Doctor knew that the Willows was to be vacant this spring. The Fogertys were all going to Europe, and would be very willing to let their place.

So it was arranged after their return. The Fogertys left for Europe, and Mrs. Blanchard took possession of the Willows. It was a pleasant walking distance from the Lesters, but it was several weeks before Isabella made her first visit there. She was averse to going into the house, but, in company with Celia, Lawrence, and Otho, walked about the grounds. Presently they stopped near a pretty fountain that was playing in the midst of the garden.

"That is a pretty place for an Undine," said Otho.

"The idea of an Undine makes me shiver," said Lawrence. "Think what a cold-blooded, unearthly being she would be!"

"Not after she had a soul!" exclaimed Isabella.

"An Undine with a soul!" cried Lawrence. "I conceive of them as malicious spirits, who live and die as the bubbles of water rise and fall."

"You talk as if there were such things as Undines," said Celia. "I remember once trying to read the story of Undine, but I never could finish it."

"It ends tragically," remarked Otho.

"Of course all such stories must," responded Lawrence; "of course it is impossible to bring the natural and the unnatural together."

"That depends upon what you call the natural," said Otho.

"We should differ, I suppose," said Lawrence, "if we tried

to explain what we each call the natural. I fancy your 'real life' is different from mine."

"Pictures of real life," said Isabella, "are sometimes pictures of horses and dogs, sometimes of children playing, sometimes of fruits of different seasons heaped upon one dish, sometimes of watermelons cut open."

"That is hardly your picture of real life," said Lawrence, laughing,—“a watermelon cut open! I think you would rather choose the picture of the Water Fairies from the Düsseldorf Gallery.”

"Why not?" said Isabella. "The life we see must be very far from being the only life that is."

"That is very true," answered Lawrence; "but let the fairies live their life by themselves, while we live our life in our own way. Why should they come to disturb our peace, since we cannot comprehend them, and they certainly cannot comprehend us?"

"You do not think it well, then," said Isabella, stopping in their walk, and looking down,—“you do not think it well that beings of different natures should mingle?"

"I do not see how they can," replied Lawrence. "I am limited by my senses; I can perceive only what they show me. Even my imagination can picture to me only what my senses can paint."

"Your senses!" cried Otho, contemptuously,—“it is very true, as you confess, you are limited by your senses. Is all this beauty around you created merely for you,—and the other insects about us? I have no doubt it is filled with invisible life.”

"Do let us go in!" said Celia. "This talk, just at twilight, under the shade of this shrubbery, makes me shudder. I am not afraid of the fairies. I never could read fairy stories when I was a child; they were tiresome to me. But talking in this way makes one timid. There might be strollers or thieves under all these hedges."

They went into the house, through the hall, and different apartments, till they reached the drawing-room. Isabella

stood transfixed upon the threshold. It was all so familiar to her!—everything as she had known it before! Over the mantel-piece hung the picture of the scornful Spanish lady; a heavy bookcase stood in one corner; comfortable chairs and couches were scattered round the room; beautiful landscapes against the wall seemed like windows cut into foreign scenery. There was an air of ease in the room, an old-fashioned sort of ease, such as the Fogertys must have loved.

“It is a pretty room, is it not?” said Lawrence. “You look at it as if it pleased you. How much more comfort there is about it than in the fashionable parlors of the day? It is solid, substantial comfort.”

“You look at it as if you had seen it before,” said Otho to Isabella. “Do you know the room impressed me in that way, too?”

“It is singular,” said Lawrence, “the feeling, that ‘all this has been before,’ that comes over one at times. I have heard it expressed by a great many people.”

“Have you, indeed, ever had this feeling?” asked Isabella.

“Certainly,” replied Lawrence; “I say to myself sometimes, ‘I have been through all this before!’ and I can almost go on to tell what is to come next,—it seems so much a part of my past experience.”

“It is strange it should be so with you,—and with you too,” she said, turning to Otho.

“Perhaps we are all more alike than we have thought,” said Otho.

Otho’s mother appeared, and the conversation took another turn.

Isabella did not go to the Willows again, until all the Lester family were summoned there to a large party that Mrs. Blanchard gave. She called it a house-warming, although she had been in the house some time. It was a beautiful evening. A clear moonlight made it as brilliant outside on the lawn as the lights made the house within. There was a band of music stationed under the shrubbery,

and those who chose could dance. Those who were more romantic wandered away down the shaded walks, and listened to the dripping of the fountain.

Lawrence and Isabella returned from a walk through the grounds, and stopped a moment on the terrace in front of the house. Just then a dark cloud appeared in the sky, threatening the moon. The wind, too, was rising, and made a motion among the leaves of the trees.

“Do you remember,” asked Lawrence, “that child’s story of the Fisherman and his Wife? how the fisherman went down to the sea-shore, and cried out,—

“ ‘O man of the sea,
Come listen to me!
For Alice, my wife,
The plague of my life,
Has sent me to beg a boon of thee!’

The sea muttered and roared;—do you remember? There was always something impressive to me in the descriptions, in the old story, of the changes in the sea, and of the tempest that rose up, more and more fearful, as the fisherman’s wife grew more ambitious and more and more grasping in her desires, each time that the fisherman went down to the sea-shore. I believe my first impression of the sea came from that. The coming on of a storm is always associated with it. I always fancy that it is bringing with it something beside the tempest,—that there is something ruinous behind it.”

“That is more fanciful than you usually are,” said Isabella; “but, alas! I cannot remember your story, for I never read it.”

“That is where your education and Celia’s was fearfully neglected,” said Lawrence; “you were not brought up on fairy stories and Mother Goose. You have not needed the first, as Celia has; but Mother Goose would have given a tone to your way of thinking, that is certainly wanting.”

A little while afterwards, Isabella stood upon the balcony steps leading from the drawing-room. Otho was with her.

The threatening clouds had driven almost every one into the house. There was distant thunder and lightning; but through the cloud-rifts, now and then, the moonlight streamed down. Isabella and Otho had been talking earnestly,—so earnestly, that they were quite unobservant of the coming storm, of the strange lurid light that hung around.

“It is strange that this should take place here!” said Isabella,—“that just here I should learn that you love me! Strange that my destiny should be completed in this spot!”

“And this spot has its strange associations with me,” said Otho, “of which I must some time speak to you. But now I can think only of the present. Now, for the first time, do I feel what life is,—now that you have promised to be mine!”

Otho was interrupted by a sudden cry. He turned to find his mother standing behind him.

“You are here with Isabella! she has promised herself to you!” she exclaimed. “It is a fatality, a terrible fatality! Listen, Isabella! You are the Queen of the Red Chessmen; and he, Otho, is the King of the White Chessmen,—and I, their Queen. Can there be two queens? Can there be a marriage between two hostile families? Do you not see, if there were a marriage between the Reds and the Whites, there were no game? Look! I have found our old prison! The pieces would all be here,—but we, we are missing! Would you return to the imprisonment of this poor box,—to your old mimic life? No, my children, go back! Isabella, marry this Lawrence Egerton, who loves you. You will find what life is, then. Leave Otho, that he may find this same life also.”

Isabella stood motionless.

“Otho, the White Prince! Alas! where is my hatred? But life without him! Even stagnation were better! I must needs be captive to the White Prince!”

She stretched out her hand to Otho. He seized it passionately. At this moment there was a grand crash of

thunder. A gust of wind extinguished at once all the lights in the drawing-room. The terrified guests hurried into the hall, into the other rooms.

"The lightning must have struck the house!" they exclaimed.

A heavy rain followed; then all was still. Everybody began to recover his spirits. The servants relighted the candles. The drawing-room was found untenanted. It was time to go; yet there was a constraint upon all the party, who were eager to find their hostess and bid her good-bye.

But the hostess could not be found! Isabella and Otho, too, were missing! The Doctor and Lawrence went everywhere, calling for them, seeking them in the house, in the grounds. They were nowhere to be found,—neither that night, nor the next day, nor ever afterwards!

The Doctor found in the balcony a box of chessmen fallen down. It was nearly filled; but the red queen, and the white king and queen, were lying at a little distance. In the box was the red king, his crown fallen from his head, himself broken in pieces. The Doctor took up the red queen, and carried it home.

"Are you crazy?" asked his wife. "What are you going to do with that red queen?"

But the Doctor placed the figure on his study-table, and often gazed at it wistfully.

Whenever, afterwards, as was often the case, any one suggested a new theory to account for the mysterious disappearance of Isabella and the Blanchards, the Doctor looked at the carved image on his table and was silent.

The small, greenish, rough-coated creature, so like a flattened burr, is an *Echinus*. It is hardly domiciliated, being a new-comer, and creeps restlessly across the glass.

Under this sand-mound some one lies self-buried,—not dead, but only hiding from the crowd in this bustling watering-place. He must learn that there is no lasting retirement in Newport; so tap with a stick at his lodging. With anger vexed, forth rushes the Swimming-Crab and dashes away from the unwelcome visitor. As if he knew a bore to be the most persistent of hunters, he plies his paddles with rapid beat until far from his invaded chamber. His swimming is more like the fluttering of a butterfly than the steady poise of a fish. Pretty as is his variegated coat by day, it is far more beautiful by night; then his limbs shine with metallic lustre, and every joint seems tinged with molten gold.

I could spend the day in showing you my Aquarium;—the merry antics of the blithe Minnows; the slow wheeling of the less vivacious Sticklebacks; the beautiful siphon of the Quahaug and the Clam; the starry disk of the *Serpula*; the snug tent of the Limpet; the lithe proboscis of the busy *Buccinum*; the erect and rapid march of his little flesh-tinted cousin; the slow Horsefoot, balancing his huge umbrella as he goes; the ——— But I cannot name them all.

Neither could you learn to know them at a single visit. Come and sit by this

indoor sea, day by day, and learn to love its people. Many a lesson for good have they taught me. When weary and disheartened, the patient perseverance of these undoubting beings has given me new impulses upward and onward. Remembering that their sole guide is instinct, while mine is the voice behind me, saying, "This is the way," I have risen with new resolve to walk therein. Seeing the blind persistency with which some straying zoöphyte has refused to follow other counsel than its own, I have learned that self-reliance and strength of will are not, in higher natures, virtues for gratulation, but, if unsanctified, faults to blush for. Finding each creature here so fitted with organs and instincts for the life it was meant to lead, I have considered that to me also is given all that I ought to wish, more than I have ever rightly used.

New evidences are here disclosed to me of God's care for his creation, deepening my faith in the fact that he is not merely the great First Cause, but still the watchful Father. New revelations teach me of his sympathy in our joys, as well as of his care for our necessities. The Maker's love of the beautiful fills me with gladness, and I catch new glimpses of those boundless regions where the perfection of his conceptions has never been marred by sin; and where each of us who may attain thereto shall find a fitting sphere for every energy, an answering joy for every pure aspiration.

THE QUEEN OF THE RED CHESSMEN.

THE box of chessmen had been left open all night. That was a great oversight! For everybody knows that the contending chessmen are but too eager to fight their battles over again by midnight, if a chance is only allowed them.

It was at the Willows,—so called, not

because the house is surrounded by willows, but because a little clump of them hangs over the pond close by. It is a pretty place, with its broad lawn in front of the door-way, its winding avenue hidden from the road by high trees. It is a quiet place, too; the sun rests gently

on the green lawn, and the drooping leaves of the willows hang heavily over the water.

No one would imagine what violent contests were going on under the still roof, this very night. It was the night of the first of May. The moon came silently out from the shadows; the trees were scarcely stirring. The box of chessmen had been left on the balcony steps by the drawing-room window, and the window, too, that warm night, had been left open. So, one by one, all the chessmen came out to fight over again their evening's battles.

It was a famously carved set of chessmen. The bishops wore their mitres, the knights pranced on spirited steeds, the castles rested on the backs of elephants,—even the pawns mimicked the private soldiers of an army. The skilful carver had given to each piece, and each pawn, too, a certain individuality. That night there had been a close contest. Two well-matched players had guided the game, and it had ended with leaving a deep irritation on the conquered side.

It was Isabella, the Queen of the Red Chessmen, who had been obliged to yield. She was young and proud, and it was she, indeed, who held the rule; for her father, the old Red King, had grown too imbecile to direct affairs; he merely bore the name of sovereignty. And Isabella was loved by knights, pawns, and all; the bishops were willing to die in her cause, the castles would have crumbled to earth for her. Opposed to her, stood the detested White Queen. All the Whites, of course, were despised by her; but the haughty, self-sufficient queen angered her most.

The White Queen was reigning during the minority of her only son. The White Prince had reached the age of nineteen, but the strong mind of his mother had kept him always under restraint. A simple youth, he had always yielded to her control. He was pure-hearted and gentle, but never ventured to make a move of his own. He sought

shelter under cover of his castles, while his more energetic mother went forth at the head of his army. She was dreaded by her subjects,—never loved by them. Her own pawn, it is true, had ventured much for her sake, had often with his own life redeemed her from captivity; but it was loyalty that bound even him,—no warmer feeling of devotion or love.

The Queen Isabella was the first to come out from her prison.

"I will stay here no longer," she cried; "the blood of the Reds grows pale in this inactivity."

She stood upon the marble steps; the May moon shone down upon her. She listened a moment to a slight murmuring within the drawing-room window. The Spanish lady, the Murillo-painted Spanish lady, had come down from her frame that bound her against the wall. Just for this one night in the year, she stepped out from the canvas to walk up and down the rooms majestically. She would not exchange a word with anybody; nobody understood her language. She could remember when Murillo looked at her, watched over her, created her with his pencil. She could have nothing to say to little paltry shepherdesses, and other articles of *virgin*, that came into grace and motion just at this moment.

The Queen of the Red Chessmen turned away, down into the avenue. The May moon shone upon her. Her feet trod upon unaccustomed ground; no black or white square hemmed her in; she felt a new liberty.

"My poor old father!" she exclaimed, "I will leave him behind; better let him slumber in an ignoble repose than wander over the board, a laughing-stock for his enemies. We have been conquered,—the foolish White Prince rules!"

A strange inspiration stole upon her; the breath of the May night hovered over her; the May moon shone upon her. She could move without waiting for the will of another; she was free. She passed down the avenue; she had left her old prison behind.

Early in the morning,—it was just after sunrise,—the kind Doctor Lester was driving home, after watching half the night out with a patient. He passed the avenue to the Willows, but drew up his horse just as he was leaving the entrance. He saw a young girl sitting under the hedge. She was without any bonnet, in a red dress, fitting closely and hanging heavily about her. She was so very beautiful, she looked so strangely lost and out of place here at this early hour, that the Doctor could not resist speaking to her.

"My child, how came you here?"

The young girl rose up, and looked round with uncertainty.

"Where am I?" she asked.

She was very tall and graceful, with an air of command, but with a strange, wild look in her eyes.

"The young woman must be slightly insane," thought the Doctor; "but she cannot have wandered far."

"Let me take you home," he said aloud. "Perhaps you come from the Willows?"

"Oh, don't take me back there!" cried Isabella, "they will imprison me again! I had rather be a slave than a conquered queen!"

"Decidedly insane!" thought the Doctor. "I must take her back to the Willows."

He persuaded the young girl to let him lift her into his chaise. She did not resist him; but when he turned up the avenue, she leaned back in despair. He was fortunate enough to find one of the servants up at the house, just sweeping the steps of the hall-door. Getting out of his chaise, he said confidentially to the servant,—

"I have brought back your young lady."

"Our young lady!" exclaimed the man, as the Doctor pointed out Isabella.

"Yes, she is a little insane, is she not?"

"She is not our young lady," answered the servant; "we have nobody in the house just now, but Mr. and Mrs. Fo-

gerty, and Mrs. Fogerty's brother, the old geologist."

"Where did she come from?" inquired the Doctor.

"I never saw her before," said the servant, "and I certainly should remember. There's some foreign folks live down in the cottage, by the railroad; but they are not the like of her!"

The Doctor got into his chaise again, bewildered.

"My child," he said, "you must tell me where you came from."

"Oh, don't let me go back again!" said Isabella, clasping her hands imploringly. "Think how hard it must be never to take a move of one's own! to know how the game might be won, then see it lost through utter weakness! Oh, that last game, lost through utter weakness! There was that one move! Why did he not push me down to the king's row? I might have checkmated the White Prince, shut in by his own castles and pawns,—it would have been a direct checkmate! Think of his folly! he stopped to take the queen's pawn with his bishop, and within one move of a checkmate!"

"Quite insane!" repeated the Doctor. "But I must have my breakfast. She seems quiet; I think I can keep her till after breakfast, and then I must try and find where the poor child's friends live. I don't know what Mrs. Lester will think of her."

They rode on. Isabella looked timidly round.

"You don't quite believe me," she said, at last. "It seems strange to you."

"It does," answered the Doctor, "seem very strange."

"Not stranger than to me," said Isabella,—"it is so very grand to me! All this motion! Look down at that great field there, not cut up into squares! If I only had my knights and squares there! I would be willing to give *her* as good a field, too; but I would show her where the true bravery lies. What a place for the castles, just to defend that pass!"

The Doctor whipped up his horse.

Mrs. Lester was a little surprised at

the companion her husband had brought home to breakfast with him.

"Who is it?" she whispered.

"That I don't know,—I shall have to find out," he answered, a little nervously.

"Where is her bonnet?" asked Mrs. Lester; this was the first absence of conventionality she had noticed.

"You had better ask her," answered the Doctor.

But Mrs. Lester preferred leaving her guest in the parlor while she questioned her husband. She was somewhat disturbed when she found he had nothing more satisfactory to tell her.

"An insane girl! and what shall we do with her?" she asked.

"After breakfast I will make some inquiries about her," answered the Doctor.

"And leave her alone with us? that will never do! You must take her away directly,—at least to the Insane Asylum,—somewhere! What if she should grow wild while you were gone? She might kill us all! I will go in and tell her that she cannot stay here."

On returning to the parlor, she found Isabella looking dreamily out of the window. As Mrs. Lester approached, she turned.

"You will let me stay with you a little while, will you not?"

She spoke in a quiet tone, with an air somewhat commanding. It imposed upon nervous little Mrs. Lester. But she made a faint struggle.

"Perhaps you would rather go home," she said.

"I have no home now," said Isabella; "some time I may recover it; but my throne has been usurped."

Mrs. Lester looked round in alarm, to see if the Doctor were near.

"Perhaps you had better come in to breakfast," she suggested.

She was glad to place the Doctor between herself and their new guest.

Celia Lester, the only daughter, came down stairs. She had heard that her father had picked up a lost girl in the

road. As she came down in her clean morning dress, she expected to have to hold her skirts away from some little squalid object of charity. She started when she saw the elegant-looking young girl who sat at the table. There was something in her air and manner that seemed to make the breakfast equipage, and the furniture of the room about her, look a little mean and poor. Yet the Doctor was very well off, and Mrs. Lester fancied she had everything quite in style. Celia stole into her place, feeling small in the presence of the stranger.

After breakfast, when the Doctor had somewhat refreshed himself by its good cheer from his last night's fatigue, Isabella requested to speak with him.

"Let me stay with you a little while," she asked, beseechingly; "I will do everything for you that you desire. You shall teach me anything;—I know I can learn all that you will show me, all that Mrs. Lester will tell me."

"Perhaps so,—perhaps that will be best," answered the Doctor, "until your friends inquire for you; then I must send you back to them."

"Very well, very well," said Isabella, relieved. "But I must tell you they will not inquire for me. I see you will not believe my story. If you only would listen to me, I could tell it all to you."

"That is the only condition I can make with you," answered the Doctor, "that you will not tell your story,—that you will never even think of it yourself. I am a physician. I know that it is not good for you to dwell upon such things. Do not talk of them to me, nor to my wife or daughter. Never speak of your story to any one who comes here. It will be better for you."

"Better for me," said Isabella, dreamily, "that no one should know! Perhaps so. I am, in truth, captive to the White Prince; and if he should come and demand me,—I should be half afraid to try the risks of another game."

"Stop, stop!" exclaimed the Doctor, "you are already forgetting the con-

dition. I shall be obliged to take you away to some retreat, unless you promise me" —

"Oh, I will promise you anything," interrupted Isabella; "and you will see that I can keep my promise."

Meanwhile Mrs. Lester and Celia had been holding a consultation.

"I think she must be some one in disguise," suggested Celia.

Celia was one of the most unromantic of persons. Both she and her mother had passed their lives in an unvarying routine of duties. Neither of them had ever found time from their sewing even to read. Celia had her books of history laid out, that she meant to take up when she should get through her work; but it seemed hopeless that this time would ever come. It had never come to Mrs. Lester, and she was now fifty years old. Celia had never read any novels. She had tried to read them, but never was interested in them. So she had a vague idea of what romance was, conceiving of it only as something quite different from her every-day life. For this reason the unnatural event that was taking place this very day was gradually appearing to her something possible and natural. Because she knew there was such a thing as romance, and that it was something quite beyond her comprehension, she was the more willing to receive this event quietly from finding it incomprehensible.

"We can let her stay here to-day, at least," said Mrs. Lester. "We will keep John at work in the front door-yard, in case we should want him. And I will set Mrs. Anderson's boy to weeding in the border; we can call him, if we should want to send for help."

She was quite ashamed of herself, when she had uttered these words, and Isabella walked into the room, so composed, so refined in her manners.

"The Doctor says I may stay here a little while, if you will let me," said Isabella, as she took Mrs. Lester's hands.

"We will try to make you comfortable," replied Mrs. Lester.

"He says you will teach me many things,—I think he said, how to sew."

"How to sew! Was it possible she did not know how to sew?" Celia thought to herself; "How many servants she must have had, never to have learned how to sew, herself!"

And this occupation was directly provided, while the Doctor set forth on his day's duties, and at the same time to inquire about the strange apparition of the young girl. He was so convinced that there was a vein of insanity about her, that he was very sure that questioning her only excited her the more. Just as he had parted from her, some compunction seized her, and she followed him to the door.

"There is my father," said she.

"Your father! where shall I find him?" asked the Doctor.

"Oh, he could not help me," she replied; "it is a long time since he has been able to direct affairs. He has scarcely been conscious of my presence, and will hardly feel my absence, his mind is so weak."

"But where can I find him?" persisted the Doctor.

"He did not come out," said Isabella; "the White Queen would not allow it, indeed."

"Stop, stop!" exclaimed the Doctor, "we are on forbidden ground."

He drove away.

"So there is insanity in the family," he thought to himself. "I am quite interested in this case. A new form of monomania! I should be quite sorry to lose sight of it. I shall be loath to give her up to her friends."

But he was not yet put to that test. No one could give him any light with regard to the strange girl. He went first to the Willows, and found there so much confusion that he could hardly persuade any one to listen to his questions. Mrs. Fogerty's brother, the geologist, had been riding that morning, and had fallen from his horse and broken his leg. The Doctor arrived just in time to be of service in setting it. Then he must

linger some time to see that the old gentleman was comfortable, so that he was obliged to stay nearly the whole morning. He was much amused at the state of disturbance in which he left the family. The whole house was in confusion, looking after some lost chessmen.

"There was nothing," said Mrs. Fogerty, apologetically, "that would soothe her brother so much as a game of chess. That, perhaps, might keep him quiet. He would be willing to play chess with Mr. Fogerty by the day together. It was so strange! they had a game the night before, and now some of the pieces could not be found. Her brother had lost the game, and to-day he was so eager to take his revenge!"

"How absurd!" thought the Doctor; "what trifling things people interest themselves in! Here is this old man more disturbed at losing his game of chess than he is at breaking his leg! It is different in my profession, where one deals with life and death. Here is this young girl's fate in my hands, and they talk to me of the loss of a few paltry chessmen!"

The "foreign people" at the cottage knew nothing of Isabella. No one had seen her the night before, or at any time. Dr. Lester even drove ten miles to Dr. Giles's Retreat for the Insane, to see if it were possible that a patient could have wandered away from there. Dr. Giles was deeply interested in the account Dr. Lester gave. He would very gladly take such a person under his care.

"No," said Dr. Lester, "I will wait awhile. I am interested in the young girl. It is not possible but that I shall in time find out from her, by chance, perhaps, who her friends are, and where she came from. She must have wandered away in some delirium of fever,—but it is very strange, for she appears perfectly calm now. Yet I hardly know in what state I shall find her."

He returned to find her very quiet and calm, learning from his wife and daughter how to sew. She seemed deeply interested in this new occupation, and

had given all her time and thought to it. Celia and her mother privately confided to the Doctor their admiration of their strange guest. Her ways were so graceful and beautiful! all that she said seemed so new and singular! The Doctor, before he went away, had exhorted Mrs. Lester and Celia to ask her no questions about her former life, and everything had gone on very smoothly. And everything went on as smoothly for some weeks. Isabella seemed willing to be as silent as the Doctor, upon all exciting subjects. She appeared to be quite taken up with her sewing, much to Mrs. Lester's delight.

"She will turn out quite as good a seamstress as Celia," said she to the Doctor. "She sews steadily all the time, and nothing seems to please her so much as to finish a piece of work. She will be able to do much more than her own sewing, and may prove quite a help to us."

"I shall be very glad," said the Doctor, "if anything can be a help, to prevent you and Celia from working yourselves to death. I shall be glad if you can ever have done with that eternal sewing. It is time that Celia should do something about cultivating her mind."

"Celia's mind is so well regulated," interrupted Mrs. Lester.

"We won't discuss that," continued the Doctor,— "we never come to an agreement there. I was going on to say that I am becoming so interested in Isabella, that I feel towards her as if she were my own. If she is of help to the family, that is very well,—it is the best thing for her to be able to make herself of use. But I don't care to make any profit to ourselves out of her help. Somehow I begin to think of her as belonging to us. Certainly she belongs to nobody else. Let us treat her as our own child. We have but one, yet God has given us means enough to care for many more. I confess I should find it hard to give Isabella up to any one else. I like to find her when I come home,—it is pleasant to look at her."

"And I, too, love her," said Mrs. Les-

ter. "I like to see her as she sits quietly at her work."

So Isabella went on learning what it was to be one of the family, and becoming, as Mrs. Lester remarked, a very experienced seamstress. She seldom said anything as she sat at her work, but seemed quite occupied with her sewing; while Mrs. Lester and Celia kept up a stream of conversation, seldom addressing Isabella, as, indeed, they had few topics in common.

One day, Celia and Isabella were sitting together.

"Have you always sewed?" asked Isabella.

"Oh, yes," answered Celia,—"since I was quite a child."

"And do you remember when you were a child?" asked Isabella, laying down her work.

"Oh, yes, indeed," said Celia; "I used to make all my doll's dresses myself."

"Your doll's dresses!" repeated Isabella.

"Oh, yes," replied Celia,—"*I was not ashamed to play with dolls in that way.*"

"I should like to see some dolls," said Isabella.

"I will show you my large doll," said Celia; "I have always kept it, because I fitted it out with such a nice set of clothes. And I keep it for children to play with."

She brought her doll, and Isabella handled it and looked at it with curiosity.

"So you dressed this, and played with it," said Isabella, inquiringly, "and moved it about as one would move a piece at chess?"

Celia started at this word "chess." It was one of the forbidden words. But Isabella went on:—

"Suppose this doll should suddenly have begun to speak, to move, and walk round, would not you have liked it?"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Celia. "What! a wooden thing speak and move! It would have frightened me very much."

"Why should it not speak, if it has a mouth, and walk, if it has feet?" asked Isabella.

"What foolish questions you ask!" exclaimed Celia, "of course it has not life."

"Oh, life,—that is it!" said Isabella. "Well, what is life?"

"Life! why it is what makes us live," answered Celia. "Of course you know what life is."

"No, I don't know," said Isabella, "but I have been thinking about it lately, while I have been sewing,—what it is."

"But you should not think, you should talk more, Isabella," said Celia. "Mamma and I talk while we are at work, but you are always very silent."

"But you think sometimes?" asked Isabella.

"Not about such things," replied Celia. "I have to think about my work."

"But your father thinks, I suppose, when he comes home and sits in his study alone?"

"Oh, he reads when he goes into his study,—he reads books and studies them," said Celia.

"Do you know how to read?" asked Isabella.

"Do I know how to read!" cried Celia, angrily.

"Forgive me," said Isabella, quickly, "but I never saw you reading. I thought perhaps—women are so different here!"

She did not finish her sentence, for she saw Celia was really angry. Yet she had no idea of hurting her feelings. She had tried to accommodate herself to her new circumstances. She had observed a great deal, and had never been in the habit of asking questions. Celia was disturbed at having it supposed that she did not know how to read; therefore it must be a very important thing to know how to read, and she determined she must learn. She applied to the Doctor. He was astonished at her entire ignorance, but he was very glad to help her. Isabella gave herself up to her reading, as she had done before to her sewing. The Doctor was now the gainer. All the time he was away, Isabella sat in his study, poring over her books; when

he returned, she had a famous lesson to recite to him. Then he began to tell her of books that he was interested in. He made Celia come in, for a history class. It was such a pleasure to him to find Isabella interested in what he could tell her of history!

"All this really happened," said Isabella to Celia once,—“these people really lived!”

"Yes, but they died," responded Celia, in an indifferent tone,—“and ever so long ago, too!”

"But did they die," asked Isabella, "if we can talk about them, and imagine how they looked? They live for us as much as they did then."

"That I can't understand," said Celia. "My uncle saw Napoleon when he was in Europe, long ago. But I never saw Napoleon. He is dead and gone to me, just as much as Alexander the Great."

"Well, who does live, if Alexander the Great, if Napoleon, and Columbus do not live?" asked Isabella, impatiently.

"Why, papa and mamma live," answered Celia, "and you" —

"And the butcher," interrupted Isabella, "because he brings you meat to eat; and Mr. Spool, because he keeps the thread store. Thank you for putting me in, too! Once" —

"Once!" answered Celia, in a dignified tone, "I suppose once you lived in a grander circle, and it appears to you we have nobody better than Mr. Spool and the butcher."

Isabella was silent, and thought of her "circle," her former circle. The circle here was large enough, the circumference not very great, but there were as many points in it as in a larger one. There were pleasant, motherly Mrs. Gibbs, and her agreeable daughters,—the Gresham boys, just in college,—the Misses Tarletan, fresh from a New York boarding-school,—Mr. Lovell, the young minister,—and the old Misses Pendleton, that made raspberry-jam,—together with Celia's particular friends, Anna and Selina Mountfort, who had a great deal of talk-

ing with Celia in private, but not a word to say to anybody in the parlor. All these, with many others in the background, had been speculating upon the riddle that Isabella presented,—“Who was she? and where did she come from?”

Nobody found any satisfactory answer. Neither Celia nor her mother would disclose anything. It is a great convenience in keeping a secret, not to know what it is. One can't easily tell what one does not know.

"The Doctor really has a treasure in his wife and daughter," said Mrs. Gibbs, "they keep his secrets so well! Neither of them will lisp a word about this handsome Isabella."

"I have no doubt she is the daughter of an Italian refugee," said one of the Misses Tarletan. "We saw a number of Italian refugees in New York."

This opinion became prevalent in the neighborhood. That Dr. Lester should be willing to take charge of an unknown girl did not astonish those who knew of his many charitable deeds. It was not more than he had done for his cousin's child, who had no especial claim upon him. He had adopted Lawrence Egerton, educated him, sent him to college, and was giving him every advantage in his study of the law. In the end Lawrence would probably marry Celia and the pretty property that the Doctor would leave behind for his daughter.

"She is one of my patients," the Doctor would say, to any one who asked him about her.

The tale that she was the daughter of an Italian refugee became more rife after Isabella had begun to study Italian. She liked to have the musical Italian words linger on her tongue. She quoted Italian poetry, read Italian history. In conversation, she generally talked of the present, rarely of the past or of the future. She listened with wonder to those who had a talent for reminiscence. How rich their past must be, that they should be willing to dwell in it! Her

own she thought very meagre. If she wanted to live in the past, it must be in the past of great men, not in that of her own little self. So she read of great painters and great artists, and because she read of them she talked of them. Other people, in referring to by-gone events, would say, "When I was in Trenton last summer,"—"In Cuba the spring that we were there"; but Isabella would say, "When Raphael died, or when Dante lived." Everybody liked to talk with her,—laughed with her at her enthusiasm. There was something inspiring, too, in this enthusiasm; it compelled attention, as her air and manner always attracted notice. By her side, the style and elegance of the Misses Tarletan faded out; here was a moon that quite extinguished the light of their little tapers. She became the centre of admiration; the young girls admired her, as they are prone to admire some one particular star. She never courted attention, but it was always given.

"Isabella attracts everybody," said Celia to her mother. "Even the old Mr. Spencers, who have never been touched by woman before, follow her, and act just as she wills."

Little Celia, who had been quite a belle hitherto, sunk into the shade by the side of the brilliant Isabella. Yet she followed willingly in the sunny wake that Isabella left behind. She expanded somewhat, herself, for she was quite ashamed to know nothing of all that Isabella talked about so earnestly. The sewing gave place to a little reading, to Mrs. Lester's horror. The Mountforts and the Gibbises met with Isabella and Celia to read and study, and went into town with them to lectures and to concerts.

A winter passed away and another summer came. Still Isabella was at Dr. Lester's; and with the lapse of time the harder did it become for the Doctor to question her of her past history,—the more, too, was she herself weaned from it.

The young people had been walking in the garden one evening.

"Let me sit by you here in the porch," said Lawrence Egerton to Celia,—*"I want rest, for body and spirit. I am always in a battle-field when I am talking with Isabella. I must either fight with her or against her. She insists on my fighting all the time. I have to keep my weapons bright, ready for use, every moment. She will lead me, too, in conversation, sends me here, orders me there. I feel like a poor knight in chess, under the sway of a queen"*—

"I don't know anything about chess," said Celia, curtly.

"It is a comfort to have you a little ignorant," said Lawrence. "Please stay in bliss awhile. It is repose, it is refreshment. Isabella drags one into the company of her heroes, and then one feels completely ashamed not to be on more familiar terms with them all. Her Mazzinis, her Tanereds, heroes false and true,—it makes no difference to her,—put one into a whirl between history and story. What a row she would make in Italy, if she went back there!"

"What could we do without her?" said Celia; "it was so quiet and commonplace before she came!"

"That is the trouble," replied Lawrence, "Isabella won't let anything remain commonplace. She pulls everything out of its place,—makes a hero or heroine out of a piece of clay. I don't want to be in heroics all the time. Even Homer's heroes ate their suppers comfortably. I think it was a mistake in your father, bringing her here. Let her stay in her sphere queening it, and leave us poor mortals to our bread and butter."

"You know you don't think so," expostulated Celia; "you worship her shoe-tie, the hem of her garment."

"But I don't want to," said Lawrence,—"it is a compulsory worship. I had rather be quiet."

"Lazy Lawrence!" cried Celia, "it is better for you. You would be the first to miss Isabella. You would find us quite flat without her brilliancy, and would be hunting after some other excitement."

"Perhaps so," said Lawrence. "But here she comes to goad us on again. Queen Isabella, when do the bull-fights begin?"

"I wish I were Queen Isabella!" she exclaimed. "Have you read the last accounts from Spain? I was reading them to the Doctor to-day. Nobody knows what to do there. Only think what an opportunity for the Queen to show herself a queen! Why will not she make of herself such a queen as the great Isabella of Castile was?"

"I can't say," answered Lawrence.

"Queens rule in chess," said Horace Gresham. "I always wondered that the king was made such a poor character there. He is not only ruled by his cabinet, bishops, and knights, but his queen is by far the more warlike character."

"Whoever plays the game rules,—you or Mr. Egerton," said Isabella, bitterly; "it is not the poor queen. She must yield to the power of the moving hand. I suppose it is so with us women. We see a great aim before us, but have not the power."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Lawrence, "it is just the reverse. With some women,—for I won't be personal,—the aim, as you call it, is very small,—a poor amusement, another dress, a larger house"—

"You may stop," interrupted Isabella, "for you don't believe this. At least, keep some of your flings for the women that deserve them; Celia and I don't accept them."

"Then we'll talk of the last aim we were discussing,—the ride to-morrow."

The next winter was passed by Mrs. Lester, her daughter, and Isabella in Cuba. Lawrence Egerton accompanied them thither, and the Doctor hoped to go for them in the spring. They went on Mrs. Lester's account. She had worn herself out with her household labors,—very uselessly, the Doctor thought,—so he determined to send her away from them. Isabella and Celia were very happy all this winter and spring. With Isabella Spanish took the

place of Italian studies. She liked talking in Spanish. They made some friends among the residents, as well as among the strangers, particularly the Americans. Of these last, they enjoyed most the society of Mrs. Blanchard and her son, Otho, who were at the same hotel with them.

The opera, too, was a new delight to Isabella, and even Celia was excited by it.

"It is a little too absurd, to see the dying scene of Romeo and Juliet sung out in an opera!" remarked Lawrence Egerton, one morning; "all the music of the spheres could not have made that scene, last night, otherwise than supremely ridiculous."

"I am glad you did not sit by us, then," replied Celia; "Isabella and I were crying."

"I dare say," said Lawrence. "I should be afraid to take you to see a tragedy well acted. You would both be in hysterics before the killing was over."

"I should be really afraid," said Celia, "to see Romeo and Juliet finely performed. It would be too sad."

"It would be much better to end it up comfortably," said Lawrence. "Why should not Juliet marry her Romeo in peace?"

"It would be impossible!" exclaimed Isabella,— "impossible to bring together two such hostile families! Of course the result must be a tragedy."

"In romances," answered Lawrence, "that may be necessary; but not in real life."

"Why not in real life?" asked Isabella. "When two thunder-clouds meet, there must be an explosion."

"But we don't have such hostile families arrayed against each other now-a-days," said Lawrence. "The Bianchi and the Neri have died out; unless the feud lives between the whites and the blacks of the present day."

"Are you sure that it has died out everywhere?" asked Isabella.

"Certainly not," said Otho Blanchard; "my mother, Bianca Bianco, inherits her

name from a long line of ancestry, and with it come its hatreds as well as its loves."

"You speak like an Italian or Spaniard," said Lawrence. "We are cold-blooded Yankees, and in our slow veins such passions do die out. I should have taken you for an American from your name."

"It is our name Americanized; we have made Americans of ourselves, and the Bianchi have become the Blanchards."

"The romance of the family, then," persisted Lawrence, "must needs become Americanized too. If you were to meet with a lovely young lady of the enemy's race, I think you would be willing to bury your sword in the sheath for her sake."

"I hope I should not forget the honor of my family," said Otho. "I certainly never could, as long as my mother lives; her feelings on the subject are stronger even than mine."

"I cannot imagine the possibility of such feelings dying out," said Isabella. "I cannot imagine such different elements amalgamating. It would be like fire and water uniting. Then there would be no longer any contest; the game of life would be over."

"Why will you make out life to be a battle always?" exclaimed Lawrence; "won't you allow us any peace? I do not find such contests all the time,—never, except when I am fighting with you."

"I had rather fight with you than against you," said Isabella, laughing. "But when one is not striving, one is sleeping."

"That reminds me that it is time for our siesta," said Lawrence; "so we need not fight any longer."

Afterwards Isabella and Celia were talking of their new friend Otho.

"He does not seem to me like a Spaniard," said Celia, "his complexion is so light; then, too, his name sounds German."

"But his passions are quick," replied

Isabella. "How he colored up when he spoke of the honor of his family!"

"I wonder that you like him," said Celia; "when he is with his mother, he hardly ventures to say his soul is his own."

"I don't like his mother," said Isabella; "her manner is too imperious and unrefined, it appears to me. No wonder that Otho is ill at ease in her presence. It is evident that her way of talking is not agreeable to him. He is afraid that she will commit herself in some way."

"But he never stands up for himself," answered Celia; "he always yields to her. Now I should not think you would like that."

"He yields because she is his mother," said Isabella; "and it would not be becoming to contradict her."

"He yields to you, too," said Celia; "how happens that?"

"I hope he does not yield to me more than is becoming," answered Isabella, laughing; "perhaps that is why I like him. After all, I don't care to be always sparring, as I am with Lawrence Egerton. With Otho I find that I agree wonderfully in many things. Neither of us yields to the other, neither of us is obliged to convince the other."

"Now I should think you would find that stupid," said Celia. "What becomes of this desire of yours never to rest, always to be struggling after something?"

"We might strive together, we might struggle together," responded Isabella.

She said this musingly, not in answer to Celia, but to her own thoughts,—as she looked away, out from everything that surrounded her. The passion for ruling had always been uppermost in her mind; suddenly there dawned upon her the pleasure of being ruled. She became conscious of the pleasure of conquering all things for the sake of giving all to another. A new sense of peace stole upon her mind. Before, she had felt herself alone, even in the midst of the kindness of the home that had been given her. She had never dared to think or to speak of the past, and as little

of the future. She had gladly flung herself into the details of every-day life. She had given her mind to the study of all that it required. She loved the Doctor, because he was always leading her on to fresh fields, always exciting her to a new knowledge. She loved him, too, for himself, for his tenderness and kindness to her. With Mrs. Lester and Celia she felt herself on a different footing. They admired her, but they never came near her. She led them, and they were always behind her.

With Otho she experienced a new feeling. He seemed, very much as she did herself, out of place in the world just around him. He was a foreigner,—was not yet acclimated to the society about him. He was willing to talk of other things than every-day events. He did not talk of “things,” indeed, but he speculated, as though he lived a separate life from that of mere eating and drinking. He was not content with what seemed to every-day people possible, but was willing to believe that there were things not dreamed of in their philosophy.

“It is a satisfaction,” said Lawrence once to Celia, “that Isabella has found somebody who will go high enough into the clouds to suit her. Besides, it gives me a little repose.”

“And a secret jealousy at the same time; is it not so?” asked Celia. “He takes up too much of Isabella’s time to please you.”

“The reason he pleases her,” said Lawrence, “is because he is more womanly than manly, and she thinks women ought to rule the world. Now if the world were made up of such as he, it would be very easily ruled. Isabella loves power too well to like to see it in others. Look at her when she is with Mrs. Blanchard! It is a splendid sight to see them together!”

“How can you say so? I am always afraid of some outbreak.”

These families were, however, so much drawn together, that, when the Doctor came to summon his wife and daughter and Isabella home, Mrs. Blanchard was

anxious to accompany them to New England. She wondered if it were not possible to find a country-seat somewhere near the Lesters, that she could occupy for a time. The Doctor knew that the Willows was to be vacant this spring. The Fogertys were all going to Europe, and would be very willing to let their place.

So it was arranged after their return. The Fogertys left for Europe, and Mrs. Blanchard took possession of the Willows. It was a pleasant walking distance from the Lesters, but it was several weeks before Isabella made her first visit there. She was averse to going into the house, but, in company with Celia, Lawrence, and Otho, walked about the grounds. Presently they stopped near a pretty fountain that was playing in the midst of the garden.

“That is a pretty place for an Undine,” said Otho.

“The idea of an Undine makes me shiver,” said Lawrence. “Think what a cold-blooded, unearthly being she would be!”

“Not after she had a soul!” exclaimed Isabella.

“An Undine with a soul!” cried Lawrence. “I conceive of them as malicious spirits, who live and die as the bubbles of water rise and fall.”

“You talk as if there were such things as Undines,” said Celia. “I remember once trying to read the story of Undine, but I never could finish it.”

“It ends tragically,” remarked Otho.

“Of course all such stories must,” responded Lawrence; “of course it is impossible to bring the natural and the unnatural together.”

“That depends upon what you call the natural,” said Otho.

“We should differ, I suppose,” said Lawrence, “if we tried to explain what we each call the natural. I fancy your ‘real life’ is different from mine.”

“Pictures of real life,” said Isabella, “are sometimes pictures of horses and dogs, sometimes of children playing, sometimes of fruits of different seasons

heaped upon one dish, sometimes of watermelons cut open."

"That is hardly your picture of real life," said Lawrence, laughing,—“a watermelon cut open! I think you would rather choose the picture of the Water Fairies from the Düsseldorf Gallery.”

“Why not?” said Isabella. “The life we see must be very far from being the only life that is.”

“That is very true,” answered Lawrence; “but let the fairies live their life by themselves, while we live our life in our own way. Why should they come to disturb our peace, since we cannot comprehend them, and they certainly cannot comprehend us?”

“You do not think it well, then,” said Isabella, stopping in their walk, and looking down,—“you do not think it well that beings of different natures should mingle?”

“I do not see how they can,” replied Lawrence. “I am limited by my senses; I can perceive only what they show me. Even my imagination can picture to me only what my senses can paint.”

“Your senses!” cried Otho, contemptuously,—“it is very true, as you confess, you are limited by your senses. Is all this beauty around you created merely for you—and the other insects about us? I have no doubt it is filled with invisible life.”

“Do let us go in!” said Celia. “This talk, just at twilight, under the shade of this shrubbery, makes me shudder. I am not afraid of the fairies. I never could read fairy stories when I was a child; they were tiresome to me. But talking in this way makes one timid. There might be strollers or thieves under all these hedges.”

They went into the house, through the hall, and different apartments, till they reached the drawing-room. Isabella stood transfixed upon the threshold. It was all so familiar to her!—everything as she had known it before! Over the mantelpiece hung the picture of the scornful Spanish lady; a heavy bookcase stood in one corner; comfortable chairs

and couches were scattered round the room; beautiful landscapes against the wall seemed like windows cut into foreign scenery. There was an air of ease in the room, an old-fashioned sort of ease, such as the Fogertys must have loved.

“It is a pretty room, is it not?” said Lawrence. “You look at it as if it pleased you. How much more comfort there is about it than in the fashionable parlors of the day! It is solid, substantial comfort.”

“You look at it as if you had seen it before,” said Otho to Isabella. “Do you know the room impressed me in that way, too?”

“It is singular,” said Lawrence, “the feeling, that ‘all this has been before,’ that comes over one at times. I have heard it expressed by a great many people.”

“Have you, indeed, ever had this feeling?” asked Isabella.

“Certainly,” replied Lawrence; “I say to myself sometimes, ‘I have been through all this before!’ and I can almost go on to tell what is to come next,—it seems so much a part of my past experience.”

“It is strange it should be so with you,—and with you too,” she said, turning to Otho.

“Perhaps we are all more alike than we have thought,” said Otho.

Otho's mother appeared, and the conversation took another turn.

Isabella did not go to the Willows again, until all the Lester family were summoned there to a large party that Mrs. Blanchard gave. She called it a house-warming, although she had been in the house some time. It was a beautiful evening. A clear moonlight made it as brilliant outside on the lawn as the lights made the house within. There was a band of music stationed under the shrubbery, and those who chose could dance. Those who were more romantic wandered away down the shaded walks, and listened to the dripping of the fountain.

Lawrence and Isabella returned from a walk through the grounds, and stopped a moment on the terrace in front of the house. Just then a dark cloud appeared in the sky, threatening the moon. The wind, too, was rising, and made a motion among the leaves of the trees.

"Do you remember," asked Lawrence, "that child's story of the Fisherman and his Wife? how the fisherman went down to the sea-shore, and cried out,—

'O man of the sea,
Come listen to me!
For Alice, my wife,
The plague of my life,
Has sent me to beg a boon of thee!'

The sea muttered and roared;—do you remember? There was always something impressive to me in the descriptions, in the old story, of the changes in the sea, and of the tempest that rose up, more and more fearful, as the fisherman's wife grew more ambitious and more and more grasping in her desires, each time that the fisherman went down to the sea-shore. I believe my first impression of the sea came from that. The coming on of a storm is always associated with it. I always fancy that it is bringing with it something beside the tempest,—that there is something ruinous behind it."

"That is more fanciful than you usually are," said Isabella; "but, alas! I cannot remember your story, for I never read it."

"That is where your education and Celia's was fearfully neglected," said Lawrence; "you were not brought up on fairy stories and Mother Goose. You have not needed the first, as Celia has; but Mother Goose would have given a tone to your way of thinking, that is certainly wanting."

A little while afterwards, Isabella stood upon the balcony steps leading from the drawing-room. Otho was with her. The threatening clouds had driven almost every one into the house. There was distant thunder and lightning; but through the cloud-rifts, now and

then, the moonlight streamed down. Isabella and Otho had been talking earnestly,—so earnestly, that they were quite unobservant of the coming storm, of the strange lurid light that hung around.

"It is strange that this should take place here!" said Isabella,—"that just here I should learn that you love me! Strange that my destiny should be completed in this spot!"

"And this spot has its strange associations with me," said Otho, "of which I must some time speak to you. But now I can think only of the present. Now, for the first time, do I feel what life is,—now that you have promised to be mine!"

Otho was interrupted by a sudden cry. He turned to find his mother standing behind him.

"You are here with Isabella! she has promised herself to you!" she exclaimed. "It is a fatality, a terrible fatality! Listen, Isabella! You are the Queen of the Red Chessmen; and he, Otho, is the King of the White Chessmen,—and I, their Queen. Can there be two queens? Can there be a marriage between two hostile families? Do you not see, if there were a marriage between the Reds and the Whites, there were no game? Look! I have found our old prison! The pieces would all be here,—but we, we are missing! Would you return to the imprisonment of this poor box,—to your old mimic life? No, my children, go back! Isabella, marry this Lawrence Egerton, who loves you. You will find what life is, then. Leave Otho, that he may find this same life also."

Isabella stood motionless.

"Otho, the White Prince! Alas! where is my hatred? But life without him! Even stagnation were better! I must needs be captive to the White Prince!"

She stretched out her hand to Otho. He seized it passionately. At this moment there was a grand crash of thunder. A gust of wind extinguished at

once all the lights in the drawing-room. The terrified guests hurried into the hall, into the other rooms.

"The lightning must have struck the house!" they exclaimed.

A heavy rain followed; then all was still. Everybody began to recover his spirits. The servants relighted the candles. The drawing-room was found untenanted. It was time to go; yet there was a constraint upon all the party, who were eager to find their hostess and bid her good-bye.

But the hostess could not be found! Isabella and Otho, too, were missing! The Doctor and Lawrence went everywhere, calling for them, seeking them in the house, in the grounds. They were nowhere to be found,—neither that night, nor the next day, nor ever afterwards!

The Doctor found in the balcony a box of chessmen fallen down. It was nearly filled; but the red queen, and the white king and queen, were lying at a little distance. In the box was the red king, his crown fallen from his head, himself broken in pieces. The Doctor took up the red queen, and carried it home.

"Are you crazy?" asked his wife. "What are you going to do with that red queen?"

But the Doctor placed the figure on his study-table, and often gazed at it wistfully.

Whenever, afterwards, as was often the case, any one suggested a new theory to account for the mysterious disappearance of Isabella and the Blanchards, the Doctor looked at the carved image on his table and was silent.

DAYBREAK.

A WIND came up out of the sea,
And said, "O mists, make room for me!"

It hailed the ships, and cried, "Sail on,
Ye mariners! the night is gone!"

And hurried landward far away,
Crying, "Awake! it is the day!"

It said unto the forest, "Shout!
Hang all your leafy banners out!"

It touched the wood-bird's folded wing,
And said, "O bird, awake and sing!"

And o'er the farms, "O chanticleer,
Your clarion blow! the day is near!"

It whispered to the fields of corn,
"Bow down, and hail the coming morn!"

It shouted through the belfry-tower,
"Awake, O bell! proclaim the hour!"

It crossed the churchyard with a sigh,
And said, "Not yet! in quiet lie!"