

MRS. OLIPHANT



***OLD
MR. TREDGOLD***

Mrs. Oliphant

Old Mr. Tredgold

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



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CHAPTER I.

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THEY were not exactly of that conventional type which used to be common whenever two sisters had to be described—the one dark and the other fair, the one sunny and amiable, the other reserved and proud; the one gay, the other melancholy, or at least very serious by nature. They were not at all like Minna and Brenda in the “Pirate,” which used to be a contrast dear to the imagination. But yet there was a very distinct difference between them. Katherine was a little taller, a little bigger, a little darker, than Stella. She was three years older but was supposed to look ten. She was not so lively in her movements either of mind or person, and she was supposed to be slow. The one who was all light threw a shadow—which seems contradictory—on the other. They were the two daughters of an old gentleman who had been that mysterious being called a City man in his time. Not that there was anything at all mysterious about old Mr. Tredgold; his daughters and his daughters’ friends were fond of saying that he had come to London with the traditionary half-crown in his pocket; but this was, as in so many cases, fabulous, Mr. Tredgold having in fact come of a perfectly creditable Eastern Counties family, his father being a well-to-do linen draper in Ipswich, whose pride it was to have set forth all his boys comfortably, and done everything for them that a father could do. But perhaps it is easier to own to that half-crown and the myth of an origin sudden and commercially-romantic without antecedents, than to a respectable shop in a respectable town, with a number of

relatives installed in other shops, doing well and ready to claim the rights of relationship at inconvenient moments. I do not know at all how fortunes are made "in the City." If you dig coals out of the bowels of the earth, or manufacture anything, from cotton to ships, by which money is made, that is a process which comes within the comprehension of the most limited faculties; but making money in the City never seems to mean anything so simple. It means handing about money, or goods which other people have produced, to other third or fourth people, and then handing them back again even to the Scriptural limits of seventy times seven; which is why it appears so mysterious to the simple-minded.

But, indeed, if anybody had investigated the matter, Mr. Tredgold's progress had been quite easy to follow, at least in the results. He had gone from a house in Hampstead to a house in Kensington, and thence to Belgravia, changing also his summer residences from Herne Bay to Hastings, and thence to the wilds of Surrey, and then to the Isle of Wight, where, having retired from the cares of business, he now lived in one of those beautiful places, with one of the most beautiful prospects in the world before him, which so often fall to the lot of persons who care very little about beauty in any shape. The house stood on a cliff which was almost a little headland, standing out from the line of the downs between two of the little towns on the south side of that favoured island. The grounds were laid out quite regardless of expense, so much so that they were a show in the district, and tourists were admitted by the gardeners when the family was absent, to see such a collection of flowering shrubs and rare trees as was not to be found between that

point, let us say, and Mr. Hanbury's gardens at Mortola. The sunny platform of the cliff thus adorned to the very edge of the precipice was the most delightful mount of vision, from which you could look along the lovely coast at that spot not much inferior to the Riviera, with its line of sunny towns and villages lying along the course of the bay on one hand, and the darker cliffs clad with wood, amid all the picturesque broken ground of the Landslip on the other; and the dazzling sea, with the additional glory of passing ships giving it a continual interest, stretching out far into the distance, where it met the circle of the globe, and merged as all life does in the indefinite Heaven beyond—the Heaven, the Hades, the unknown—not always celestial, sometimes dark with storm or wild with wind, a vague and indeterminate distance from which the tempests and all their demons, as well as the angels, come, yet the only thing that gives even a wistful satisfaction to the eyes of those who sway with every movement of this swaying globe in the undiscovered depths of air and sky.

Very little attention, I am sorry to say, was paid to this beautiful landscape by the family who had secured it for their special delectation. The girls would take their visitors "to see the view," who cast a careless glance at it, and said, "How pretty!" and returned with pleasure to the tennis or croquet, or even tea of the moment. Mr. Tredgold, for his part, had chosen a room for himself on the sheltered side of the house, as was perhaps natural, and shivered at the thought of the view. There was always a wind that cut you to pieces, he said, on that side of the cliff; and, truth to tell, I believe there was, the proverbial softness of the climate of

the Isle of Wight being a fond delusion, for the most part, in the minds of its inhabitants. Katherine was the only one who lingered occasionally over the great panorama of the sea and coast; but I think it was when she felt herself a little “out of it,” as people say, when Stella was appropriating everything, and all the guests and all the lovers were circling round that little luminary, and the elder sister was not wanted anywhere—except to fill out tea perhaps, or look after the comforts of the others, which is a *rôle* that may suit a staid person of forty, but at twenty-three is not only melancholy but bewildering—it being always so difficult to see why another should have all the good things, and yourself all the crosses of life.

In the circumstances of these two girls there was not even that cheap way of relief which ends in blaming some one. Even Providence could not be blamed. Katherine, if you looked at her calmly, was quite as pretty as Stella; she had a great deal more in her; she was more faithful, more genuine and trustworthy; she played tennis as well or better; she had as good a voice and a better ear; in short, it was quite incomprehensible to any one why it was that Stella was the universal favourite and her sister was left in the shade. But so it was. Katherine made up the set with the worst players, or she was kept at the tea-table while the merriest game was going on. She had the reversion of Stella’s partners, who talked to her of her sister, of what a jolly girl, or what an incipient angel she was, according to their several modes of speech. The old ladies said that it was because Katherine was so unselfish; but I should not like to brand a girl for whom I have a great regard with that

conventional title. She was not, to her own consciousness, unselfish at all. She would have liked very much, if not to have the first place, at least to share it, to have a retinue of her own, and champions and admirers as well as Stella. She did not like the secondary position nor even consent to it with any willingness; and the consequence was that occasionally she retired and looked at the view with anything but happy feelings; so that the appreciation of Nature, and of their good fortune in having their lines thrown in such pleasant places, was very small and scant indeed in this family, which outsiders were sometimes disposed to envy for the beauty of their surroundings and for their wonderful view.

The house which occupied this beautiful situation was set well back in the grounds, so that it at least should not be contaminated by the view, and it was an odd fantastic house, though by no means uncomfortable when you got into the ways of it. A guest, unacquainted with these ways, which consisted of all the very last so-called improvements, might indeed spend a wretched day or night in his or her ignorance. I have indeed known one who, on a very warm evening, found herself in a chamber hermetically sealed to all appearance, with labels upon the windows bearing the words "Close" and "Open," but affording no information as to how to work or move the complicated machinery which achieved these operations; and when she turned to the bell for aid, there was a long cord depending by the wall, at which she tugged and tugged in vain, not knowing (for these were the early days of electrical appliances) that all she had to do was to touch the little ivory circle at the end

of the cord. The result was a night's imprisonment in what gradually became a sort of Black Hole of Calcutta, without air to breathe or means of appealing to the outside world. The Tredgolds themselves, however, I am happy to say, had the sense in their own rooms to have the windows free to open and shut according to the rules of Nature.

The whole place was very elaborately furnished, with an amount of gilding and ornament calculated to dazzle the beholder—inlaid cabinets, carved furniture, and rich hangings everywhere, not a door without a *portière*, not a window without the most elaborate sets of curtains. The girls had not been old enough to control this splendour when it was brought into being by an adroit upholsterer; and, indeed, they were scarcely old enough even yet to have escaped from the spell of the awe and admiration into which they had been trained. They felt the flimsiness of the fashionable mode inspired by Liberty in comparison with their solid and costly things, even should these be in worst taste, and, as in everything a sense of superiority is sweet, they did not attempt any innovations. But the room in which they sat together in the evening was at least the most simply decorated in the house. There was less gold, there were some smooth and simple tables on which the hand could rest without carrying away a sharp impression of carved foliage or arabesques. There were no china vases standing six feet high, and there was a good deal of litter about such as is indispensable to the happiness of girls. Mr. Tredgold had a huge easy-chair placed near to a tall lamp, and the evening paper, only a few hours later than if he had been in London, in his hands. He was a little old man with no

appearance to speak of—no features, no hair, and very little in the way of eyes. How he had managed to be the father of two vigorous young women nobody could understand; but vigorous young women are, however it has come about, one of the commonest productions of the age, a fashion like any other. Stella lay back in a deep chair near her father, and was at this moment, while he filled the air of the room with the crinkling of his paper as he folded back a leaf, lost in the utterance of a long yawn which opened her mouth to a preternatural size, and put her face, which was almost in a horizontal position thrown back and contemplating the ceiling, completely out of drawing, which was a pity, for it was a pretty face. Katherine showed no inclination to yawn—she was busy at a table doing something—something very useless and of the nature of trumpery I have no doubt; but it kept her from yawning at least.

“Well, my pet,” Mr. Tredgold said, putting his hand on the arm of Stella’s chair, “very tired, eh—tired of having nothing to do, and sitting with your old father one night?”

“Oh, I’ve got plenty to do,” said Stella, getting over the yawn, and smiling blandly upon the world; “and, as for one night I sit with you for ever, you ungrateful old dad.”

“What is in the wind now? What’s the next entertainment? You never mean to be quiet for two days together?” the old gentleman said.

“It is not our fault,” said Katherine. “The Courtnays have gone away, the Allens are going, and Lady Jane has not yet come back.”

“I declare,” cried Stella, “it’s humiliating that we should have to depend on anybody for company, whether they are

summer people or winter people. What is Lady Jane to us? We are as good as any of them. It is you who give in directly, Kate, and think there is nothing to be done. I'll have a picnic to-morrow, if it was only the people from the hotel; they are better than nobody, and so pleased to be asked. I shan't spend another evening alone with papa."

Papa was not displeased by this sally. He laughed and chuckled in his throat, and crinkled his newspaper more than ever. "What a little hussy!" he cried. "Did you ever know such a little hussy, Kate?"

Kate did not pay any attention at all to papa. She went on with her gum and scissors and her trumpery, which was intended for a bazaar somewhere. "The question is, Do you know the hotel people?" she said. "You would not think a picnic of five or six much fun."

"Oh, five or six!" cried the other with a toss of her head; and she sprang up from her chair with an activity as great as her former listlessness, and rushed to a very fine ormolu table all rose colour and gold, at which she sat down, dashing off as many notes. "The Setons at the hotel will bring as many as that; they have officers and all kinds of people about," she cried, flinging the words across her shoulder as she wrote.

"But we scarcely know them, Stella; and Mrs. Seton I don't like," said Katherine, with her gum-brush arrested in her hand.

"Papa, am I to ask the people I want, or is Kate to dictate in everything?" cried Stella, putting up another note.

"Let the child have her way, Katie, my dear; you know she has always had her way all her life."

Katherine's countenance was perhaps not so amiable as Stella's, who was radiant with fun and expectation and contradiction. "I think I may sometimes have my way too," she said. "They are not nice people; they may bring any kind of man, there is always a crowd of men about *her*. Papa, I think we are much safer, two girls like us, and you never going out with us, if we keep to people we know; that was always to be the condition when you consented that Stella should send our invitations without consulting you."

"Yes, yes, my dear," said the old gentleman, turning to his elder daughter, "that is quite true, quite true;" then he caught Stella's eye, and added tremulously: "You must certainly have two or three people you know."

"And what do you call Miss Mildmay?" cried Stella, "and Mrs. Shanks?—aren't they people we know?"

"Oh, if she is asking them—the most excellent people and knowing everybody—I think—don't you think, Katie?—that might do?"

"Of course it will do," cried Stella gaily. "And old Shanks and old Mildmay are such fun; they always fight—and they hate all the people in the hotels; and only think of their two old faces when they see Mrs. Seton and all her men! It will be the best party we have had this whole year."

Katherine's ineffectual remonstrances were drowned in the tinkling as of a cracked bottle of Mr. Tredgold's laugh. He liked to hear the old ladies called old cats and set to fight and spit at each other. It gave him an agreeable sense of contrast with his own happy conditions; petted and appealed to by the triumphant youth which belonged to him, and of which he was so proud. The inferiority of the

“old things” was pleasant to the old man, who was older than they. The cackle of his laugh swept every objection away. And then I think Katherine would have liked to steal away outside and look at the view, and console herself with the sight of the Sliplin lights and all the twinkling villages along the coast; which, it will be seen, was no disinterested devotion to Nature, but only a result of the sensation of being out of it, and not having, which Stella had, her own way.

“Well, you needn’t come unless you like,” cried Stella with defiance, as they parted at the door between their respective rooms, a door which Katherine, I confess, shut with some energy on this particular evening, though it generally stood open night and day.

“I don’t think I will,” Katherine cried in her impatience; but she thought better of this before day.

CHAPTER II.

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STELLA had always been the spoilt child of the Tredgold family. Her little selfishnesses and passions of desire to have her own way, and everything she might happen to want, had been so amusing that nobody had chidden or thought for a moment (as everybody thought with Katherine) of the bad effect upon her character and temper of having all these passions satisfied and getting everything she stormed or cried for. Aunt after aunt had passed in shadow, as it were, across the highly lighted circle of Mr. Tredgold's home life, all of them breaking down at last in the impossibility of keeping pace with Stella, or satisfying her impetuous little spirit; and governess after governess in the same way had performed a sort of processional march through the house. Stella's perpetual flow of mockery and mimicry had all the time kept her father in endless amusement. The mockery was not very clever, but he was easily pleased and thought it capital fun. There was so much inhumanity in his constitution, though he was a kind man in his way and very indulgent to those who belonged to him, that he had no objection to see his own old sister (though a good creature) outrageously mimicked in all her peculiarities, much less the sisters of his late wife. Little Stella, while still under the age of sixteen, had driven off all these ladies and kept her father in constant amusement. "The little hussy!" he said, "the little vixen!" and chuckled and laughed till it was feared he might choke some time, being afflicted with bronchitis, in those convulsions of delight. Katherine, who was the

champion of the aunts, and wept as one after the other departed, amused him greatly too. "She is an old maid born!" he said, "and she sticks up for her kind, but Stella will have her pick, and marry a prince, and take off the old cats as long as she lives."

"But if she lives," said a severe governess who for some time kept the household in awe, "she will become old too, and probably be an old cat in the opinion of those that come after her."

"No fear," cried the foolish old man—"no fear." In his opinion Stella would never be anything but pretty and young, and radiant with fun and fascination.

And since the period when the girls "came out" there had been nothing but a whirl of gaiety in the house. They did not come out in the legitimate way, by being presented to Her Majesty and thus placed on the roll of society in the usual meaning of the word, but only by appearing at the first important ball in the locality, and giving it so to be understood that they were prepared to accept any invitations that might come in their way. They had come out together, Stella being much too masterful and impatient to permit any such step on Katherine's part without her, so that Katherine had been more than nineteen while Stella was not much over sixteen when this important step took place. Three years had passed since that time. Stella was twenty, and beginning to feel like a rather *blasé* woman of the world; while Katherine at twenty-three was supposed to be stepping back to that obscurity which her father had prophesied for her, not far off from the region of the old cats to which she was supposed to belong. Curiously enough, no

prince had come out of the unknown for the brighter sister. The only suitor that had appeared had been for Katherine, and had been almost laughed out of countenance, poor man, before he took his dismissal, which was, indeed, rather given by the household in general than by the person chiefly concerned. He was an Indian civilian on his way back to some blazing station on the Plains, which was reason enough why he should be repulsed by the family; but probably the annoying thought that it was Katherine he wanted and not her sister had still more to do with it.

"It was a good thing at least that he had not the audacity to ask for you, my pet," Mr. Tredgold said.

"For me!" said Stella, with a little shriek of horror, "I should very soon have given him his answer." And Katherine, too, gave him his answer, but in a dazed and bewildered way. She was not at all in love with him, but it did glance across her mind that to be the first person with some one, to have a house of her own in which she should be supreme, and a man by her side who thought there was nobody like her—— But, then, was it possible that any man should really think that? or that any house could ever have this strange fascination of home which held her fast she could not tell how or why? She acquiesced accordingly in Mr. Stanford's dismissal. But when she went out to look at the view in her moments of discouragement her mind was apt to return to him, to wonder sometimes what he was doing, where he was, or if he had found some one to be his companion, and of whom he could think that there was nobody like her in the world?

In the meantime, however, on the morning which followed the evening already recorded, Katherine had too much to do in the way of providing for the picnic to have much time to think. Stella had darted into her room half-dressed with a number of notes in her hand to tell her that everybody was coming. "Mrs. Seton brings six including her husband and herself—that makes four fresh new men besides little Seton, whom you can talk to if you like, Kate; and there's three from the Rectory, and five from the Villa, and old Mildmay and Shanks to do propriety for papa's sake."

"I wish you would not speak of them in that way by their names. It does not take much trouble to say Miss Mildmay and Mrs. Shanks."

"I'll say the old cats, if you like," Stella said with a laugh, "that's shorter still. Do stir up a little, and be quick and let us have a good lunch."

"How am I to get cold chickens at an hour's notice?" said Katherine. "You seem to think they are all ready roasted in the poultry yard, and can be put in the hampers straight off. I don't know what Mrs. Pearson will say."

"She will only say what she has said a hundred times; but it always comes right all the same," cried Stella, retreating into her own room to complete her toilette. And this was so true that Kate finished hers also in comparative calm. She was the housekeeper *de jure*, and interviewed Mrs. Pearson every morning with the profoundest gravity as if everything depended upon her; but at bottom Katherine knew very well that it was Mrs. Pearson who was the housekeeper *de facto*,

and that she, like everyone else, managed somehow that Miss Stella should have her way.

“You know it’s just impossible,” said that authority a few minutes later. “Start at twelve and tell me at nine to provide for nearly twenty people! Where am I to get the chickens, not to speak of ham and cold beef and all the rest? Do ye think the chickens in the yard are roasted already?” cried the indignant housekeeper, using Katherine’s own argument, “and that I have only to set them out in the air to cool?”

“You see I did not know yesterday,” said the young mistress apologetically; “it was a sudden thought of Miss Stella’s last night.”

“She *is* a one for sudden thoughts!” cried Pearson, half-indignant, half-admiring; and after a little more protestation that it was impossible she began to arrange how it could be done. It was indeed so usual an experience that the protests were stereotyped, so to speak. Everything on the Cliff was sudden—even Katherine had acquired the habit, and preferred an impromptu to any careful preparation of events. “Then if anything is wrong we can say there was so very little time to do it in,” she said with an instinct of recklessness foreign to her nature. But Mrs. Pearson was wise and prudent and knew her business, so that it was very seldom anything went wrong.

On ordinary occasions every one knows how rare it is to have a thoroughly fine day for the most carefully arranged picnic. The association of rain with these festivities is traditional. There is nothing that has so bad an effect upon the most settled weather. Clouds blow up upon the sky and

rain pours down at the very suggestion. But that strange Deity which we call Providence, and speak of in the neuter gender, is never more apparently capricious than in this respect. A picnic which is thoroughly undesirable, which has nothing in its favour, which brings people together who ought to be kept apart, and involves mischief of every kind, is free from all the usual mischances. That day dawned more brightly even than other days. It shone even cloudless, the glass rising, the wind dropping as if for the special enjoyment of some favourite of Heaven. It was already October, but quite warm, as warm as June, the colour of autumn adding only a charm the more, and neither chill nor cloud to dull the atmosphere. The sea shone like diamonds but more brilliant, curve upon curve of light following each other with every glittering facet in movement. The white cliff at the further point of the bay shone with a dazzling whiteness beyond comparison with anything else in sky or earth.

At twelve o'clock the sun overhead was like a benediction, not too hot as in July and August, just perfect everybody said; and the carriages and the horses with their shiny coats, and the gay guests in every tint of colour, with convivial smiles and pleasant faces, made the drive as gay as Rotten Row when Mr. Tredgold came forth to welcome and speed forth his guests. This was his own comparison often used, though the good man had never known much of Rotten Row. He stood in the porch, which had a rustical air though the house was so far from being rustical, and surveyed all these dazzling people with pride. Though he had been used for years now to such gay assemblages, he

had never ceased to feel a great pride in them as though of “an honour unto which he was not born.” To see his girls holding out hospitality to all the grand folks was an unceasing satisfaction. He liked to see them at the head of everything, dispensing bounties. The objectionable lady who had brought so many men in her train did not come near Mr. Tredgold, but bowed to him from a safe distance, from his own waggonette in which she had placed herself.

“I am not going to be led like a lamb to that old bore,” she said to her party, which swarmed about her and was ready to laugh at everything she said; and they were all much amused by the old man’s bow, and by the wave of his hand, with which he seemed to make his visitors free of his luxuries.

“The old bore thinks himself an old swell,” said someone else. “Tredgold and Silverstamp, money changers,” said another. “Not half so good—Tredgold and Wurst, sausage makers,” cried a third. They all laughed so much, being easily satisfied in the way of wit, that Stella, who was going to drive, came up flourishing her whip, to know what was the joke.

“Oh, only about a funny sign we saw on the way,” said Mrs. Seton, with a glance all round, quenching the laughter. The last thing that could have entered Stella’s mind was that these guests of hers, so effusive in their acceptance of her invitation, so pleased to be there, with everything supplied for their day’s pleasure, were making a jest of anything that belonged to her. She felt that she was conferring a favour upon them, giving them “a great treat,” which they had no right to expect.

“You must tell me about it on the way,” she said, beaming upon them with gracious looks, which was the best joke of all, they all thought, stifling their laughter.

Mr. Tredgold sent a great many wreathed smiles and gracious gestures to the waggonette which was full of such a distinguished company, and with Stella and her whip just ready to mount the driving-seat. They were new friends he was aware. The men were all fashionable, “a cut above” the Sliplin or even the smaller county people. The old gentleman loved to see his little Stella among them, with her little delightful swagger and air of being A 1 everywhere. I hope nobody will think me responsible for the words in which poor Mr. Tredgold’s vulgar little thoughts expressed themselves. He did not swagger like Stella, but loved to see her swaggering. He himself would have been almost obsequious to the fine folks. He had a remnant of uneasy consciousness that he had no natural right to all this splendour, which made him deeply delighted when people who had a right to it condescended to accept it from his hand. But he was proud too to know that Stella did not at all share this feeling, but thought herself A 1. So she was A 1; no one there was fit to hold a candle to her. So he thought, standing at his door waving his hands, and calling out congratulations on the fine day and injunctions to his guests to enjoy themselves.

“Don’t spare anything—neither the horses nor the champagne; there is plenty more where these came from,” he said.

Then the waggonette dashed off, leading the way; and Katherine followed in the landau with the clergyman’s family

from the Rectory, receiving more of Mr. Tredgold's smiles and salutations, but not so enthusiastic.

"Mind you make everybody comfortable, Kate," he cried. "Have you plenty of wraps and cushions? There's any number in the hall; and I hope your hampers are full of nice things and plenty of champagne—plenty of good champagne; that's what the ladies want to keep up their spirits. And don't be afraid of it. I have none but the best in my house."

The vehicle which came after the landau was something of the shandrydan order, with one humble horse and five people clustering upon it.

"Why didn't you have one of our carriages!" he cried. "There's a many in the stables that we never use. You had only to say the word, and the other waggonette would have been ready for you; far more comfortable than that old rattle-trap. And, bless us! here is the midge—the midge, I declare—with the two old—with two old friends; but, dear me, Mrs. Shanks, how much better you would have been in the brougham!"

"So I said," said one of the ladies; "but Ruth Mildmay would not hear of it. She is all for independence and our own trap, but I like comfort best."

"No," said Miss Mildmay. "Indebted to our good friend we'll always be for many a nice party, and good dinner and good wine as well; but my carriage must be my own, if it's only a hired one; that is my opinion, Mr. Tredgold, whatever any one may say."

"My dear good ladies," said Mr. Tredgold, "this is Liberty Hall; you may come as you please and do as you please;

only you know there's heaps of horses in my stables, and when my daughters go out I like everything about them to be nice—nice horses, nice carriages. And why should you pay for a shabby affair that anybody can hire, when you might have my brougham with all the last improvements? But ladies will have their little whims and fads, we all know that."

"Mr. Perkins," cried Miss Mildmay out of the window to the driver of the fly, "go on! We'll never make up to the others if you don't drive fast; and the midge is not very safe when it goes along a heavy road."

"As safe as a coach, and we're in very good time, Miss," said Mr. Perkins, waving his whip. Perkins felt himself to be of the party too, as indeed he was of most parties along the half circle of the bay.

"Ah, I told you," cried Mr. Tredgold, with his chuckle, "you'd have been much better in the brougham." He went on chuckling after this last detachment had driven unsteadily away. A midge is not a graceful nor perhaps a very safe vehicle. It is like a section of an omnibus, a square box on wheels wanting proportions, and I think it is used only by elderly ladies at seaside places. As it jogged forth Mr. Tredgold chuckled more and more. Though he had been so lavish in his offers of the brougham, the old gentleman was not displeased to see his old neighbours roll and shamble along in that uncomfortable way. It served them right for rejecting the luxury he had provided. It served them still more right for being poor. And yet there was this advantage in their being poor, that it threw up the fact of his own wealth, like a bright object on a dark background.

He went back to his room after a while, casting a glance and a shiver at the garden blazing with sunshine and flowers which crowned the cliff. He knew there was always a little shrewd breeze blowing round the corner somewhere, and the view might be hanged for anything he cared. He went indoors to his room, where there was a nice little bit of fire. There was generally a little bit of fire somewhere wherever he was. It was much more concentrated than the sun, and could be controlled at his pleasure and suited him better. The sun shone when it pleased, but the fire burned when Mr. Tredgold pleased. He sat down and stretched himself out in his easy-chair and thought for a minute or two how excellent it was to have such a plenty of money, so many horses and carriages, and one of the nicest houses in the island—the very nicest he thought—and to give Stella everything she wanted. “She makes a fool of me,” he said to himself, chuckling. “If that little girl wanted the Koh-i-Noor, I’d be game to send off somebody careering over the earth to find out as good.” This was all for love of Stella and a little for glory of himself; and in this mood he took up his morning paper, which was his occupation for the day.

CHAPTER III.

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A PICNIC is a very doubtful pleasure to people out of their teens, or at least out of their twenties; and yet it remains a very popular amusement. The grass is often damp, and it is a very forced and uncomfortable position to sit with your plate on your knees and nothing within your reach which you may reasonably want in the course of the awkward meal. Mrs. Seton and the younger ladies, who were sedulously attended upon, did not perhaps feel this so much; but then smart young men, especially when themselves guests and attached to one particular party, do not wait upon "the old cats" as they do upon the ladies of the feast. Why Mrs. Shanks and Miss Mildmay should have continued to partake in these banquets, and spend their money on the midge to convey them there, I am unable so much as to guess, for they would certainly have been much more comfortable at home. But they did do so, in defiance of any persuasion. They were not entirely ignorant that they were considered old cats. The jibes which were current on the subject did not always fly over their heads. They knew more or less why they were asked, and how little any one cared for their presence. And yet they went to every entertainment of the kind to which they were asked with a steadiness worthy of a better cause. They were less considered even than usual in this company, which was chiefly made up of strangers. They had to scramble for the salad and help themselves to the ham. Cold chicken was supposed to be quite enough for them without any

accompaniment. The *pâté de foie gras* was quite exhausted before it came their length, and Miss Mildmay had to pluck at Mr. Seton's coat and call his attention half a dozen times before they got any champagne; and yet they were always ready to accept the most careless invitation, I cannot tell why. They talked chiefly to each other, and took their little walks together when the young ones dispersed or betook themselves to some foolish game. "Oh, here are the old cats!" they could almost hear the girls say, when the two ancient figures came in sight at the turn of the path; and Stella would turn round and walk off in the opposite direction without an attempt at concealment. But they did not take offence, and next time were always ready to come again.

That Mrs. Seton should have been ready to come was less wonderful, for though she was old enough to be a little afraid of her complexion, and was aware that damp was very bad for her neuralgia, it was indispensable for her to have something to do, and the heavy blank of a day without entertainment was dreadful to bear. And this was not for herself only but for her court, or her tail, or whatever it may be called—the retinue of young men whom she led about, and who had to be amused whatever happened. Think of the expenditure of energy that is necessary to amuse so many young active human creatures in a sitting-room in a hotel for a whole morning, before lunch comes to relieve the intolerable strain; or even in an afternoon before and after the blessed relief of tea! They sprawl about upon the chairs, they block up the windows, they gape for something to do, they expect to have funny things said to them and to be

made to laugh. What hard work for any woman whose whole faculty consists in a capacity for saying every folly that comes into her head with an audacity which is not accompanied by wit! "What a fool you do look, Algy, with your mouth open like a little chick in a nest! Do you expect me to pop a worm into it?" This speech made them all roar, but it was not in itself amusing, the reader will perceive. And to go on in that strain for hours is extremely fatiguing, more so than the hardest work. Many people wondered why she should take the trouble to have all these men about her, and to undertake the Herculean task of entertaining them, which was a mystery quite as great as the persistence of the elder ladies in going to feasts where they are called old cats and receive no attention. The lightest of social entertainments *donnent à penser* in this way. You would have thought that Mrs. Seton would have welcomed the moment of relief which ensued when the boys and girls ran off together in a sort of hide-and-seek among the tufted slopes. But when she found that she was actually left alone for a moment with only her husband to attend upon her, the lady was not pleased at all.

"Where have they all gone?" she cried. "What do they mean leaving me all alone? Where's Algy—and where's Sir Charles—and all of them?"

"There's nobody but me, I'm afraid, Lottie," said little Seton, who was strengthening himself with another glass of champagne; "they've all gone off with the young ones."

"The young ones!" Mrs. Seton cried, with a sort of suppressed shriek. The eldest of the Stanley girls was seated at a little distance, sedately employed in making a

drawing, and Mrs. Shanks and Miss Mildmay sat resting upon a pile of carriage cushions which they had collected together when the others went away. The old ladies were much occupied in seeing that Perkins, the driver of the midge, had his share with the other servants of the relics of the feast. And was she, the brilliant, the gay, the lovely Lottie, left with these *débris* of humanity, deserted by her kind? She rose up hastily and flourished her parasol with an energy which nearly broke the ivory stick. "Have you no spirit at all," she cried, "to let your wife be neglected like this?" Katherine was the one who met her in full career as she went down the winding slopes—Katherine enjoying herself very moderately with none of the stolen goods about her, in sole company of Evelyn Stanley and Gerrard, her brother. "Where are all my party?" cried Mrs. Seton. "They will never forgive me for deserting them. You stole a march upon me, Miss Tredgold." But certainly it was not Katherine who had stolen the march. At this moment Stella appeared out of the bushes, flushed with fun and laughter, her pretty hat pushed back upon her head, her pretty hair in a little confusion.

"Oh, come along, come along!" she cried, seizing Mrs. Seton by the arm, "here's such a beautiful place to hide in; they are all after us, full cry. Come, come, we must have you on our side." Thus, again, it was Stella that was on the amusing side where all the fun and the pleasure was. Evelyn Stanley cast wistful eyes after the pair.

"Oh, Katherine, do you mind me going, too? Hide-and-seek is such fun, and we can walk here every day."

"Do you want to go, too, Gerrard?" Katherine said.

“Not if I may walk with you,” said the youth, who was at the University and felt himself superior. He was only a year younger than she was, and he thought that a *grande passion* for a woman advanced in life was a fine thing for a young man. He had made up his mind to keep by Katherine’s side whatever happened. “I don’t care for that silly nonsense,” he said; “it’s very well for these military fellows that have not an idea in their heads. I always liked conversation best, and your conversation, dear Katherine ——”

“Why, I cannot talk a bit,” she said with a laugh.

It was on Gerrard’s lips to say, “But I can.” He had the grace, however, not to utter that sentiment. “There are some people whose silence is more eloquent than other people’s talk,” he said, which was a much prettier thing to say.

“Oh, why didn’t you come at first?” cried Stella in Mrs. Seton’s ear. “They all think you are with me, only that you’ve got some very cunning place to hide in: and here it is. I am sure they’ll never find us here.”

“I hope they will, though,” said the elder lady, speaking in tones that were not at all subdued. “You need not be so clever with your cunning places. Of course we want them to find us; there is no fun in it if they don’t.”

Stella stared a little with widely opened eyes at her experienced companion. She was still schoolgirl enough to rejoice in baffling the other side, and liked the fun simply as Evelyn Stanley did, who was only sixteen, and who came crowding in upon them whispering in her delight: “They’ve run down the other way, the whole lot of them like sheep;