Chapter Seven

When Miss Emily Fox-Seton was preparing for the extraordinary change in her life which transformed her from a very poor, hardworking woman into one of the richest marchionesses in England, Lord Walderhurst's cousin, Lady Maria Bayne, was extremely good to her. She gave her advice, and though advice is a cheap present as far as the giver is concerned, there are occasions when it may be a very valuable one to the recipient. Lady Maria's was valuable to Emily Fox-Seton, who had but one difficulty, which was to adjust herself to the marvellous fortune which had befallen her.

There was a certain thing Emily found herself continually saying. It used to break from her lips when she was alone in her room, when she was on her way to her dressmaker's, and in spite of herself, sometimes when she was with her whilom patroness.

"I can't believe it is true! I can't believe it!"

"I don't wonder, my dear girl," Lady Maria answered the second time she heard it. "But what circumstances demand of you is that you should learn to."

"Yes," said Emily, "I know I must. But it seems like a dream. Sometimes," passing her hand over her forehead with a little laugh, "I

feel as if I should suddenly find myself wakened in the room in Mortimer Street by Jane Cupp bringing in my morning tea. And I can see the wallpaper and the Turkey-red cotton curtains. One of them was an inch or so too short. I never could afford to buy the new bit, though I always intended to."

"How much was the stuff a yard?" Lady Maria inquired.

"Sevenpence."

"How many yards did you need?"

"Two. It would have cost one and twopence, you see. And I really could get on without it."

Lady Maria put up her lorgnette and looked at her protégée with an interest which bordered on affection, it was so enjoyable to her epicurean old mind.

"I didn't suspect it was as bad as that, Emily," she said. "I should never have dreamed it. You managed to do yourself with such astonishing decency. You were actually nice--always."

"I was very much poorer than anyone knew," said Emily. "People don't like one's troubles. And when one is earning one's living as I was, one must be agreeable, you know. It would never do to seem tiresome."

"There's cleverness in realising that fact," said Lady Maria. "You were always the most cheerful creature. That was one of the reasons Walderhurst admired you."

The future marchioness blushed all over. Lady Maria saw even her neck itself blush, and it amused her ladyship greatly. She was intensely edified by the fact that Emily could be made to blush by the mere mention of her mature fiancé's name.

"She's in such a state of mind about the man that she's delightful," was the old woman's internal reflection; "I believe she's in love with him, as if she was a nurse-maid and he was a butcher's boy."

"You see," Emily went on in her nice, confiding way (one of the most surprising privileges of her new position was that it made it possible for her to confide in old Lady Maria), "it was not only the living from day to day that made one anxious, it was the Future!" (Lady Maria knew that the word began in this case with a capital letter.) "No one knows what the Future is to poor women. One knows that one must get older, and one may not keep well, and if one could not be active and in good spirits, if one could not run about on errands, and things fell off, what could one do? It takes hard work, Lady Maria, to keep up even the tiniest nice little room and the plainest presentable wardrobe, if one isn't clever. If I had been clever it would have been quite different, I dare say. I have been so frightened sometimes in the middle of the

night, when I wakened and thought about living to be sixty-five, that I have lain and shaken all over. You see," her blush had so far disappeared that she looked for the moment pale at the memory, "I had nobody--nobody."

"And now you are going to be the Marchioness of Walderhurst," remarked Lady Maria.

Emily's hands, which rested on her knee, wrung themselves together.

"That is what it seems impossible to believe," she said, "or to be grateful enough for to--to--" and she blushed all over again.

"Say 'James'," put in Lady Maria, with a sinful if amiable sense of comedy; "you will have to get accustomed to thinking of him as 'James' sometimes, at all events."

But Emily did not say "James." There was something interesting in the innocent fineness of her feeling for Lord Walderhurst. In the midst of her bewildered awe and pleasure at the material splendours looming up in her horizon, her soul was filled with a tenderness as exquisite as the religion of a child. It was a combination of intense gratitude and the guileless passion of a hitherto wholly unawakened woman--a woman who had not hoped for love or allowed her thoughts to dwell upon it, and who therefore had no clear understanding of its full meaning. She could not

have explained her feeling if she had tried, and she did not dream of trying. If a person less inarticulate than herself had translated it to her she would have been amazed and abashed. So would Lord Walderhurst have been amazed, so would Lady Maria; but her ladyship's amazement would have expressed itself after its first opening of the eyes, with a faint elderly chuckle.

When Miss Fox-Seton had returned to town she had returned with Lady Maria to South Audley Street. The Mortimer Street episode was closed, as was the Cupps' house. Mrs. Cupp and Jane had gone to Chichester, Jane leaving behind her a letter the really meritorious neatness of which was blotted by two or three distinct tears. Jane respectfully expressed her affectionate rapture at the wondrous news which "Modern Society" had revealed to her before Miss Fox-Seton herself had time to do so.

"I am afraid, miss," she ended her epistle, "that I am not experienced enough to serve a lady in a grand position, but hoping it is not a liberty to ask it, if at any time your own maid should be wanting a young woman to work under her, I should be grateful to be remembered. Perhaps having learned your ways, and being a good needlewoman and fond of it, might be a little recommendation for me."

"I should like to take Jane for my maid," Emily had said to Lady Maria. "Do you think I might make her do?"

"She would probably be worth half a dozen French minxes who would amuse
themselves by getting up intrigues with your footmen," was Lady Maria's astute observation. "I would pay an extra ten pounds a year myself for slavish affection, if it was to be obtained at agency offices. Send her to a French hairdresser to take a course of lessons, and she will be worth anything. To turn you out perfectly will be her life's ambition."

To Jane Cupp's rapture the next post brought her the following letter:--

DEAR JANE,--It is just like you to write such a nice letter to me, and I can assure you I appreciated all your good wishes very much. I feel that I have been most fortunate, and am, of course, very happy. I have spoken to Lady Maria Bayne about you, and she thinks that you might make me a useful maid if I gave you the advantage of a course of lessons in hairdressing. I myself know that you would be faithful and interested and that I could not have a more trustworthy young woman. If your mother is willing to spare you, I will engage you. The wages would be thirty-five pounds a year (and beer, of course) to begin with, and an increase later as you became more accustomed to your duties. I am glad to hear that your mother is so well and comfortable. Remember me to her kindly.

Yours truly,

EMILY FOX-SETON

Jane Cupp trembled and turned pale with joy as she read her letter.

"Oh, mother!" she said, breathless with happiness. "And to think she is almost a marchioness this very minute. I wonder if I shall go with her to Oswyth Castle first, or to Mowbray, or to Hurst?"

"My word!" said Mrs. Cupp, "you are in luck, Jane, being as you'd rather be a lady's maid than live private in Chichester. You needn't go out to service, you know. Your uncle's always ready to provide for you."

"I know he is," answered Jane, a little nervous lest obstacles might be put in the way of her achieving her long-cherished ambition. "And it's kind of him, and I'm sure I'm grateful. But--though I wouldn't hurt his feelings by mentioning it--it is more independent to be earning your own living, and there's more life, you see, in waiting on a titled lady and dressing her for drawing-rooms and parties and races and things, and travelling about with her to the grand places she lives in and visits. Why, mother, I've heard tell that the society in the servants' halls is almost like high life. Butlers and footmen and maids to high people has seen so much of the world and get such manners. Do you remember how quiet and elegant Susan Hill was that was maid to Lady Cosbourne? And she'd been to Greece and to India. If Miss Fox-Seton likes travel and his lordship likes it, I may be taken to all sorts of wonderful places. Just think!"

She gave Mrs. Cupp a little clutch in her excitement. She had always lived in the basement kitchen of a house in Mortimer Street and had never had reason to hope she might leave it. And now!

"You're right, Jane!" her mother said, shaking her head. "There's a great deal in it, particular when you're young. There's a great deal in it."

When the engagement of the Marquis of Walderhurst had been announced, to the consternation of many, Lady Maria had been in her element. She was really fine at times in her attitude towards the indiscreetly or tactlessly inquiring. Her management of Lady Malfry in particular had been a delightful thing. On hearing of her niece's engagement, Lady Malfry had naturally awakened to a proper and well-behaved if belated interest in her. She did not fling herself upon her breast after the manner of worldly aunts in ancient comedies in which Cinderella attains fortune. She wrote a letter of congratulation, after which she called at South Audley Street, and with not too great obviousness placed herself and her house at the disposal of such female relatives as required protection during the period of their preparation for becoming marchionesses. She herself could not have explained exactly how it was that, without being put through any particular process, she understood, before her call was half over, that Emily's intention was to remain with Lady Maria Bayne and that Lady Maria's intention was to keep her. The scene between the three was far too subtle to be of the least use upon

the stage, but it was a good scene, nevertheless. Its expression was chiefly, perhaps, a matter of inclusion and exclusion, and may also have been largely telepathic; but after it was over, Lady Maria chuckled several times softly to herself, like an elderly bird of much humour, and Lady Malfry went home feeling exceedingly cross.

She was in so perturbed a humour that she dropped her eyelids and looked rather coldly down the bridge of her nose when her stupidly cheery little elderly husband said to her,--

"Well, Geraldine?"

"I beg pardon," she replied. "I don't quite understand."

"Of course you do. How about Emily Fox-Seton?"

"She seems very well, and of course she is well satisfied. It would not be possible for her to be otherwise. Lady Maria Bayne has taken her up."

"She is Walderhurst's cousin. Well, well! It will be an immense position for the girl."

"Immense," granted Lady Malfry, with a little flush. A certain tone in her voice conveyed that discussion was terminated. Sir George knew that her niece was not coming to them and that the immense position would include themselves but slightly.

Emily was established temporarily at South Audley Street with Jane Cupp as her maid. She was to be married from Lady Maria's lean old arms, so to speak. Her ladyship derived her usual epicurean enjoyment from the whole thing,--from too obviously thwarted mothers and daughters; from Walderhurst, who received congratulations with a civilly inexpressive countenance which usually baffled the observer; from Emily, who was overwhelmed by her emotions, and who was of a candour in action such as might have appealed to any heart not adapted by the flintiness of its nature to the macadamising of roads.

If she had not been of the most unpretentious nice breeding and unaffected taste, Emily might have been ingenuously funny in her process of transformation.

"I keep forgetting that I can afford things," she said to Lady Maria. "Yesterday I walked such a long way to match a piece of silk, and when I was tired I got into a penny bus. I did not remember until it was too late that I ought to have called a hansom. Do you think," a shade anxiously, "that Lord Walderhurst would mind?"

"Just for the present, perhaps, it would be as well that I should see that you shop in the carriage," her ladyship answered with a small grin. "When you are a marchioness you may make penny buses a feature of the distinguished insouciance of your character if you like. I shouldn't myself, because they jolt and stop to pick up people, but you can, with

originality and distinction, if it amuses you."

"It doesn't," said Emily. "I hate them. I have longed to be able to take hansoms. Oh! how I have longed--when I was tired."

The legacy left her by old Mrs. Maytham had been realised and deposited as a solid sum in a bank. Since she need no longer hoard the income of twenty pounds a year, it was safe to draw upon her capital for her present needs. The fact made her feel comfortable. She could make her preparations for the change in her life with a decent independence. She would have been definitely unhappy if she had been obliged to accept favours at this juncture. She felt as if she could scarcely have borne it. It seemed as if everything conspired to make her comfortable as well as blissfully happy in these days.

Lord Walderhurst found an interest in watching her and her methods. He was a man who, in certain respects, knew himself very well and had few illusions respecting his own character. He had always been rather given to matter-of-fact analysis of his own emotions; and at Mallowe he had once or twice asked himself if it was not disagreeably possible that the first moderate glow of his St. Martin's summer might die away and leave him feeling slightly fatigued and embarrassed by the new aspect of his previously regular and entirely self-absorbed existence. You might think that you would like to marry a woman and then you might realise that there were objections--that even the woman herself, with all her desirable qualities, might be an objection in the end, that any woman

might be an objection; in fact, that it required an effort to reconcile oneself to the fact of a woman's being continually about. Of course the arriving at such a conclusion, after one had committed oneself, would be annoying. Walderhurst had, in fact, only reflected upon this possible aspect of affairs before he had driven over the heath to pick Emily up. Afterwards he had, in some remote portion of his mentality, vaguely awaited developments.

When he saw Emily day by day at South Audley Street, he found he continued to like her. He was not clever enough to analyse her; he could only watch her, and he always looked on at her with curiosity and a novel sensation rather like pleasure. She wakened up at sight of him, when he called, in a way that was attractive even to an unimaginative man. Her eyes seemed to warm, and she often looked flushed and softly appealing. He began to note vaguely that her dresses were better, and oftener changed, than they had been at Mallowe. A more observant man might have been touched by the suggestion that she was unfolding petal by petal like a flower, and that each carefully chosen costume was a new petal. He did not in the least suspect the reverent eagerness of her care of herself as an object hoping to render itself worthy of his qualities and tastes.

His qualities and tastes were of no exalted importance in themselves, but they seemed so to Emily. It is that which by one chance or another so commends itself to a creature as to incite it to the emotion called love, which is really of importance, and which, not speaking in figures,

holds the power of life and death. Personality sometimes achieves this, circumstances always aid it; but in all cases the result is the same and sways the world it exists in--during its existence. Emily Fox-Seton had fallen deeply and touchingly in love with this particular prosaic, well-behaved nobleman, and her whole feminine being was absorbed in her adoration of him. Her tender fancy described him by adjectives such as no other human being would have assented to. She felt that he had condescended to her with a generosity which justified worship. This was not true, but it was true for her. As a consequence of this she thought out and purchased her wardrobe with a solemnity of purpose such as might well have been part of a religious ceremonial. When she consulted fashion plates and Lady Maria, or when she ordered a gown at her ladyship's dressmaker's, she had always before her mind, not herself, but the Marchioness of Walderhurst--a Marchioness of Walderhurst whom the Marquis would approve of and be pleased with. She did not expect from him what Sir Bruce Norman gave to Lady Agatha.

Agatha and her lover were of a different world. She saw them occasionally, not often, because the simple selfishness of young love so absorbed them that they could scarcely realise the existence of other persons than themselves. They were to be married, and to depart for fairyland as soon as possible. Both were fond of travel, and when they took ship together their intention was to girdle the world at leisure, if they felt so inclined. They could do anything they chose, and were so blissfully sufficient for each other that there was no reason why they should not follow their every errant fancy.

The lines which had been increasing in Lady Claraway's face had disappeared, and left her blooming with the beauty her daughters had reproduced. This delightful marriage had smoothed away every difficulty. Sir Bruce was the "most charming fellow in England." That fact acted as a charm in itself, it seemed. It was not necessary to go into details as to the mollifying of tradespeople and rearranging of the entire aspect of life at Curzon Street. When Agatha and Emily Fox-Seton met in town for the first time--it was in the drawing room at South Audley Street--they clasped each other's hands with an exchange of entirely new looks.

"You look so--so well, Miss Fox-Seton," said Agatha, with actual tenderness.

If she had not been afraid of seeming a little rudely effusive she would have said "handsome" instead of "well," for Emily was sweetly blooming.

"Happiness is becoming to you," she added. "May I say how glad I am?"

"Thank you, thank you!" Emily answered. "Everything in the world seems changed, doesn't it?"

"Yes, everything."

They stood and gazed into each other's eyes a few seconds, and then

loosed hands with a little laugh and sat down to talk.

It was, in fact, Lady Agatha who talked most, because Emily Fox-Seton led her on and aided her to delicate expansion by her delight in all that in these days made up her existence of pure bliss. It was as if an old-time fairy story were being enacted before Emily's eyes. Agatha without doubt had grown lovelier, she thought; she seemed even fairer, more willowy, the forget-me-not eyes were of a happier blue, as forget-me-nots growing by clear water-sides are bluer than those grown in a mere garden. She appeared, perhaps, even a little taller, and her small head had, if such a thing were possible, a prettier flower-like poise. This, at least, Emily thought, and found her own happiness added to by her belief in her fancy. She felt that nothing was to be wondered at when she heard Agatha speak of Sir Bruce. She could not utter his name or refer to any act of his without a sound in her voice which had its parallel in the light floating haze of blush on her cheeks. In her intercourse with the world in general she would have been able to preserve her customary sweet composure, but Emily Fox-Seton was not the world. She represented a something which was so primitively of the emotions that one's heart spoke and listened to her. Agatha was conscious that Miss Fox-Seton had seen at Mallowe--she could never quite understand how it had seemed so naturally to happen--a phase of her feelings which no one else had seen before. Bruce had seen it since, but only Bruce. There had actually been a sort of confidence between them--a confidence which had been like intimacy, though neither of them had been effusive.

"Mamma is so happy," the girl said. "It is quite wonderful. And Alix and Hilda and Millicent and Eve--oh! it makes such a difference to them. I shall be able," with a blush which expressed a world of relieved affection, "to give them so much pleasure. Any girl who marries happily and--and well--can alter everything for her sisters, if she remembers. You see, I shall have reason to remember. I know things from experience. And Bruce is so kind, and gay, and proud of their prettiness. Just imagine their excitement at all being bridesmaids! Bruce says we shall be like a garden of spring flowers. I am so glad," her eyes suddenly quite heavenly in their joyful relief, "that he is young!"

The next second the heavenly relieved look died away. The exclamation had been involuntary. It had sprung from her memory of the days when she had dutifully accepted, as her portion, the possibility of being smiled upon by Walderhurst, who was two years older than her father, and her swift realisation of this fact troubled her. It was indelicate to have referred to the mental image even ever so vaguely.

But Emily Fox-Seton was glad too that Sir Bruce was young, that they were all young, and that happiness had come before they had had time to tire of waiting for it. She was so happy herself that she questioned nothing.

"Yes. It is nice," she answered, and glowed with honest sympathy. "You will want to do the same things. It is so agreeable when people who are

married like to do the same things. Perhaps you will want to go out a great deal and to travel, and you could not enjoy it if Sir Bruce did not."

She was not reflecting in the least upon domestic circles whose male heads are capable of making themselves extremely nasty under stress of invitations it bores them to accept, and the inclination of wives and daughters to desire acceptance. She was not contemplating with any premonitory regrets a future in which, when Walderhurst did not wish to go out to dinner or disdained a ball, she should stay at home. Far from it. She simply rejoiced with Lady Agatha, who was twenty-two marrying twenty-eight.

"You are not like me," she explained further. "I have had to work so hard and contrive so closely that everything will be a pleasure to me. Just to know that I never need starve to death or go into the workhouse is such a relief that--"

"Oh!" exclaimed Lady Agatha, quickly and involuntarily laying a hand on hers, startled by the fact that she spoke as if referring to a wholly matter-of-fact possibility.

Emily smiled, realising her feeling.

"Perhaps I ought not to have said that. I forgot. But such things are possible when one is too old to work and has nothing to depend on. You

could scarcely understand. When one is very poor one is frightened, because occasionally one cannot help thinking of it."

"But now--now! Oh! how different!" exclaimed Agatha, with heartfelt earnestness.

"Yes. Now I need never be afraid. It makes me so grateful to--Lord Walderhurst."

Her neck grew pink as she said it, just as Lady Maria had seen it grow pink on previous occasions. Moderate as the words were, they expressed ardour.

Lord Walderhurst came in half an hour later and found her standing smiling by the window.

"You look particularly well, Emily. It's that white frock, I suppose. You ought to wear a good deal of white," he said.

"I will," Emily answered. He observed that she wore the nice flush and the soft appealing look, as well as the white frock. "I wish--"

Here she stopped, feeling a little foolish.

"What do you wish?"

"I wish I could do more to please you than wear white--or black--when you like."

He gazed at her, always through the single eyeglass. Even the vaguest approach to emotion or sentiment invariably made him feel stiff and shy. Realising this, he did not quite understand why he rather liked it in the case of Emily Fox-Seton, though he only liked it remotely and felt his own inaptness a shade absurd.

"Wear yellow or pink occasionally," he said with a brief, awkward laugh.

What large, honest eyes the creature had, like a fine retriever's or those of some nice animal one saw in the Zoo!

"I will wear anything you like," she said, the nice eyes meeting his, not the least stupidly, he reflected, though women who were affectionate often looked stupid. "I will do anything you like; you don't know what you have done for me, Lord Walderhurst."

They moved a trifle nearer to each other, this inarticulate pair. He dropped his eyeglass and patted her shoulder.

"Say 'Walderhurst' or 'James'--or--or 'my dear,'" he said. "We are going to be married, you know." And he found himself going to the length of kissing her cheek with some warmth.

"I sometimes wish," she said feelingly, "that it was the fashion to say 'my lord' as Lady Castlewood used to do in 'Esmond.' I always thought it nice."

"Women are not so respectful to their husbands in these days," he answered, with his short laugh. "And men are not so dignified."

"Lord Castlewood was not very dignified, was he?"

He chuckled a little.

"No. But his rank was, in the reign of Queen Anne. These are democratic days. I'll call you 'my lady' if you like."

"Oh! No--no!" with fervour, "I wasn't thinking of anything like that."

"I know you were not," he reassured her. "You are not that kind of woman."

"Oh! how could I be?"

"You couldn't," good-naturedly. "That's why I like you."

Then he began to tell her his reason for calling at this particular hour. He came to prepare her for a visit from the Osborns, who had actually just returned from India. Captain Osborn had chosen, or chance

had chosen for him, this particular time for a long leave. As soon as she heard the name of Osborn, Emily's heart beat a little quickly. She had naturally learned a good deal of detail from Lady Maria since her engagement. Alec Osborn was the man who, since Lord Walderhurst's becoming a widower, had lived in the gradually strengthening belief that the chances were that it would be his enormous luck to inherit the title and estates of the present Marquis of Walderhurst. He was not a very near relation, but he was the next of kin. He was a young man and a strong one, and Walderhurst was fifty-four and could not be called robust. His medical man did not consider him a particularly good life, though he was not often ill.

"He's not the kind of chap who lives to be a hundred and fifty. I'll say that for him," Alec Osborn had said at mess after dinner had made him careless of speech, and he had grinned not too pleasantly when he uttered the words. "The only thing that would completely wipe my eye isn't as likely to happen to him as to most men. He's unsentimental and level headed, and doesn't like marriage. You can imagine how he's chivied by women. A fellow in his position couldn't be let alone. But he doesn't like marriage, and he's a man who knows jolly well what he likes and what he doesn't. The only child died, and if he doesn't marry again, I'm in a safe place. Good Lord! the difference it would make!" and his grin extended itself.

It was three months after this that the Marquis of Walderhurst followed Emily Fox-Seton out upon the heath, and finding her sitting footsore and

depressed in spirit beside the basket of Lady Maria's fish, asked her to marry him.

When the news reached him, Alec Osborn went and shut himself up in his quarters and blasphemed until his face was purple and big drops of sweat ran down it. It was black bad luck--it was black bad luck, and it called for black curses. What the articles of furniture in the room in the bungalow heard was rather awful, but Captain Osborn did not feel that it did justice to the occasion.

When her husband strode by her to his apartment, Mrs. Osborn did not attempt to follow him. She had only been married two years, but she knew his face too well; and she also knew too well all the meaning of the fury contained in the words he flung at her as he hurled himself past her.

"Walderhurst is going to be married!" Mrs. Osborn ran into her own room and sat down clutching at her hair as she dropped her face in her little dark hands. She was an Anglo-Indian girl who had never been home, and had not had much luck in life at any time, and her worst luck had been in being handed over by her people to this particular man, chiefly because he was the next of kin to Lord Walderhurst. She was a curious, passionate creature, and had been in love with him in her way. Her family had been poor and barely decently disreputable. She had lived on the outskirts of things, full of intense girlish vanity and yearnings for social recognition, poorly dressed, passed over and snubbed by

people she aspired to know socially, seeing other girls with less beauty and temperament enjoying flirtations with smart young officers, biting her tongue out with envy and bitterness of thwarted spirit. So when Captain Osborn cast an eye on her and actually began a sentimental episode, her relief and excitement at finding herself counting as other girls did wrought itself up into a passion. Her people were prompt and sharp enough to manage the rest, and Osborn was married before he knew exactly whither he was tending. He was not pleased with himself when he wakened to face facts. He could only console himself for having been cleverly led and driven into doing the thing he did not want to do, by the facts that the girl was interesting and clever and had a good deal of odd un-English beauty.

It was a beauty so un-English that it would perhaps appear to its greatest advantage in the contrasts afforded by life in England. She was so dark, of heavy hair and drooping-lidded eyes and fine grained skin, and so sinuous of lithe, slim body, that among native beauties she seemed not to be sufficiently separated by marks of race. She had tumbled up from childhood among native servants, who were almost her sole companions, and who had taught her curious things. She knew their stories and songs, and believed in more of their occult beliefs than any but herself knew.

She knew things which made her interesting to Alec Osborn, who had a bullet head and a cruel lower jaw, despite a degree of the ordinary good looks. The fact that his chances were good for becoming Marquis of

Walderhurst and taking her home to a life of English luxury and splendour was a thing she never forgot. It haunted her in her sleep. She had often dreamed of Oswyth Castle and of standing amidst great people on the broad lawns her husband had described feelingly during tropical days when they had sat together panting for breath. When there had been mention made of the remote, awful possibility that Walderhurst might surrender to the siege laid to him, she had turned sick at the thought. It made her clench her hands until the nails almost pressed into the skin of her palms. She could not bear it. She had made Osborn burst into a big, harsh laugh one day when she had hinted to him that there were occult things to be done which might prevent ill luck. He had laughed first and scowled afterwards, cynically saying that she might as well be working them up.

He had not come out to India followed by regrets and affection. He had been a black sheep at home, and had rather been hustled away than otherwise. If he had been a more admirable kind of fellow, Walderhurst would certainly have made him an allowance; but his manner of life had been such as the Marquis had no patience with in men of any class, and especially abhorred in men whom the accident of birth connected with good names. He had not been lavish in his demonstrations of interest in the bullet-headed young man. Osborn's personableness was not of a kind attractive to the unbiassed male observer. Men saw his cruel young jowl and low forehead, and noticed that his eyes were small. He had a good, swaggering military figure to which uniform was becoming, and a kind of animal good looks which would deteriorate early. His colour would fix

and deepen with the aid of steady daily drinking, and his features would coarsen and blur, until by the time he was forty the young jowl would have grown heavy and would end by being his most prominent feature.

While he had remained in England, Walderhurst had seen him occasionally, and had only remarked and heard unpleasant things of him,--a tendency to selfish bad manners, reckless living, and low flirtation. He once saw him on the top of a bus with his arm round the waist of an awful, giggling shop-girl kind of person, who was adorned with tremendous feathers and a thick fringe coming unfrizzled with the heat and sticking out here and there in straight locks on her moist forehead. Osborn thought that the arm business had been cleverly managed with such furtiveness that no one could see it, but Walderhurst was driving solemnly by in his respectable barouche, and he found himself gazing through his monocle directly at his relative, and seeing, from the street below, the point at which the young man's arm lost itself under the profusely beaded short cape. A dull flush rose to his countenance, and he turned away without showing any sign of recognition; but he was annoyed and disgusted, because this particular kind of blatantly vulgar bad taste was the sort of thing he loathed. It was the sort of thing which made duchesses of women who did alluring "turns" at music halls or sang suggestive songs in comic opera, and transformed into the chatelaines of ancient castles young persons who had presided at the ribbon counter. He saw as little as possible of his heir presumptive after this, and if the truth were told, Captain Alec Osborn was something of a factor in the affair of Miss Emily Fox-Seton. If

Walderhurst's infant son had lived, or if Osborn had been a refined, even if dull, fellow, there are ten chances to one his lordship would have chosen no second marchioness.

Captain Osborn's life in India had not ended in his making no further debts. He was not a man to put the brake on in the matter of self-indulgence. He got into debt so long as a shred of credit remained to him, and afterwards he tried to add to his resources by cards and betting at races. He made and lost by turn, and was in a desperate state when he got his leave. He applied for it because he had conceived the idea that his going home as a married man might be a good thing for him. Hester, it seemed not at all improbable, might accomplish something with Walderhurst. If she talked to him in her interesting semi-Oriental way, and was fervid and picturesque in her storytelling, he might be attracted by her. She had her charm, and when she lifted the heavy lids of her long black eyes and fixed her gaze upon her hearer as she talked about the inner side of native life, of which she knew such curious, intimate things, people always listened, even in India, where the thing was not so much of a novelty, and in England she might be a sort of sensation.

Osborn managed to convey to her gradually, by a process of his own, a great deal of what he wanted her to do. During the months before the matter of the leave was quite decided, he dropped a word here and there which carried a good deal of suggestion to a mind used to seizing on

passing intimations. The woman who had been Hester's Ayah when she was a

child had become her maid. She was a woman with a wide, silent acquaintance with her own people. She was seldom seen talking to anyone and seldom seemed to leave the house, but she always knew everything. Her mistress was aware that if at any time she chose to ask her a question about the secret side of things concerning black or white peoples, she would receive information to be relied upon. She felt that she could have heard from her many things concerning her husband's past, present, and future, and that the matter of the probable succession was fully comprehended by her.

When she called her into the room after recovering outwardly from her hour of desperation, she saw that the woman was already aware of the blow that had fallen upon the household. What they said to each other need not be recorded here, but there was more in the conversation than the mere words uttered, and it was one of several talks held before Mrs. Osborn sailed for England with her husband.

"He may be led into taking into consideration the fact that he has cut the ground from under a fellow's feet and left him dangling in the air," said Osborn to his wife. "Best thing will be to make friends with the woman, hang her!"

"Yes, Alec, yes," Hester Osborn answered, just a little feverishly. "We must make friends with her. They say she is a good sort and was

frightfully poor herself."

"She won't be poor now, hang her!" remarked Captain Osborn with added fervour. "I should like to break her neck! I wonder if she rides?"

"I'm sure she has not been well enough off to do anything like that."

"Good idea to begin to teach her." And he laughed as he turned on his heel and began to walk the deck with a fellow passenger.

It was these people Lord Walderhurst had come to prepare her for.

"Maria has told you about them, I know," he said. "I dare say she has been definite enough to explain that I consider Osborn altogether undesirable. Under the veneer of his knowledge of decent customs he is a cad. I am obliged to behave civilly to the man, but I dislike him. If he had been born in a low class of life, he would have been a criminal."

"Oh!" Emily exclaimed.

"Any number of people would be criminals if circumstances did not interfere. It depends a good deal on the shape of one's skull."

"Oh!" exclaimed Emily again, "do you think so?"

She believed that people who were bad were bad from preference, though

she did not at all understand the preference. She had accepted from her childhood everything she had ever heard said in a pulpit. That Walderhurst should propound ideas such as ministers of the Church of England might regard as heretical startled her, but he could have said nothing startling enough to shake her affectionate allegiance.

"Yes, I do," he answered. "Osborn's skull is quite the wrong shape."

But when, a short time after, Captain Osborn brought the skull in question into the room, covered in the usual manner with neatly brushed, close-cropped hair, Emily thought it a very nice shape indeed. Perhaps a trifle hard and round-looking and low of forehead, but not shelving or bulging as the heads of murderers in illustrated papers generally did. She owned to herself that she did not see what Lord Walderhurst evidently saw, but then she did not expect of herself an intelligence profound enough to follow his superior mental flights.

Captain Osborn was well groomed and well mannered, and his demeanour towards herself was all that the most conventional could have demanded. When she reflected that she herself represented in a way the possible destruction of his hopes of magnificent fortune, she felt almost tenderly towards him, and thought his easy politeness wonderful. Mrs. Osborn, too! How interesting and how beautiful in an odd way Mrs. Osborn was! Every movement of her exceeding slimness was curiously graceful. Emily remembered having read novels whose heroines were described as "undulating." Mrs. Osborn was undulating. Her long, drooping, and dense

black eyes were quite unlike other girls' eyes. Emily had never seen anything like them. And she had such a lonely, slow, shy way of lifting them to look at people. She was obliged to look up at tall Emily. She seemed a schoolgirl as she stood near her. Emily was the kind of mistaken creature whose conscience, awakening to unnecessary remorses, causes its owner at once to assume all the burdens which Fate has laid upon the shoulders of others. She began to feel like a criminal herself, irrespective of the shape of her skull. Her own inordinate happiness and fortune had robbed this unoffending young couple. She wished that it had not been so, and vaguely reproached herself without reasoning the matter out to a conclusion. At all events, she was remorsefully sympathetic in her mental attitude towards Mrs. Osborn, and being sure that she was frightened of her husband's august relative, felt nervous herself because Lord Walderhurst bore himself with undated courtesy and kept his monocle fixed in his eye throughout the interview. If he had let it drop and allowed it to dangle in an unbiassed manner from its cord, Emily would have felt more comfortable, because she was sure his demeanour would have appeared a degree more encouraging to the Osborns.

"Are you glad to be in England again?" she asked Mrs. Osborn.

"I never was here before," answered the young woman. "I have never been anywhere but in India."

In the course of the conversation she explained that she had not been a delicate child, and also conveyed that even if she had been one, her

people could not have afforded to send her home. Instinct revealed to Emily that she had not had many of the good things of life, and that she was not a creature of buoyant spirits. The fact that she had spent a good many hours of most of her young days in reflecting on her ill-luck had left its traces on her face, particularly in the depths of her slow-moving, black eyes.

They had come, it appeared, in the course of duty, to pay their respects to the woman who was to be their destruction. To have neglected to do so would have made them seem to assume an indiscreet attitude towards the marriage.

"They can't like it, of course," Lady Maria summed them up afterwards, "but they have made up their minds to lump it as respectably as possible."

"I am so sorry for them," said Emily.

"Of course you are. And you will probably show them all sorts of indiscreet kindnesses, but don't be too altruistic, my good Emily. The man is odious, and the girl looks like a native beauty. She rather frightens me."

"I don't think Captain Osborn is odious," Emily answered. "And she is pretty, you know. She is frightened of us, really."

Remembering days when she herself had been at a disadvantage with people who were fortunate enough to be of importance, and recalling what her secret tremor before them had been, Emily was very nice indeed to little Mrs. Osborn. She knew from experience things which would be of use to her--things about lodgings and things about shops. Osborn had taken lodgings in Duke Street, and Emily knew the quarter thoroughly. Walderhurst watched her being nice, through his fixed eyeglass, and he decided that she had really a very good manner. Its goodness consisted largely in its directness. While she never brought forth unnecessarily recollections of the days when she had done other people's shopping and had purchased for herself articles at sales marked 11-3/4d, she was interestingly free from any embarrassment in connection with the facts. Walderhurst, who had been much bored by himself and other people in time past, actually found that it gave a fillip to existence to look on at a woman who, having been one of the hardest worked of the genteel labouring classes, was adapting herself to the role of marchioness by the simplest of processes, and making a very nice figure at it too, in her entirely unbrilliant way. If she had been an immensely clever woman, there would have been nothing special in it. She was not clever at all, yet Walderhurst had seen her produce effects such as a clever woman might have laboured for and only attained by a stroke of genius. As, for instance, when she had met for the first time after her engagement, a certain particularly detestable woman of rank, to whom her relation to Walderhurst was peculiarly bitter. The Duchess of Merwold had counted the Marquis as her own, considering him fitted by nature to be the spouse of her eldest girl, a fine young woman with projecting teeth, who

had hung fire. She felt Emily Fox-Seton's incomprehensible success to be a piece of impudent presumption, and she had no reason to restrain the expression of her sentiments so long as she conveyed them by methods of inference and inclusion.

"You must let me congratulate you very warmly, Miss Fox-Seton," she said, pressing her hand with maternal patronage. "Your life has changed greatly since we last saw each other."

"Very greatly indeed," Emily flushed frankly in innocent gratitude as she answered. "You are very kind. Thank you, thank you."

"Yes, a great change." Walderhurst saw that her smile was feline and asked himself what the woman was going to say next. "The last time we met you called to ask me about the shopping you were to do for me. Do you remember? Stockings and gloves, I think."

Walderhurst observed that she expected Emily to turn red and show herself at a loss before the difficulties of the situation. He was on the point of cutting into the conversation and disposing of the matter himself when he realised that Emily was neither gaining colour nor losing it, but was looking honestly into her Grace's eyes with just a touch of ingenuous regret.

"It was stockings," she said. "There were some marked down to one and elevenpence halfpenny at Barratt's. They were really quite good for

the price. And you wanted four pairs. And when I got there they were all gone, and those at two and three were not the least bit better. I was so disappointed. It was too bad!"

Walderhurst fixed his monocle firmly to conceal the fact that he was verging upon a cynical grin. The woman was known to be the stingiest of small great persons in London, her economies were noted, and this incident was even better than many others society had already rejoiced over. The picture raised in the minds of the hearers of her Grace foiled in the purchase of stockings marked down to 1s. 11-1/2d. would be a source of rapture for some time to come. And Emily's face! The regretful kindness of it, the retrospective sympathy and candid feeling! It was incredibly good!

"And she did it quite by accident!" he repeated to himself in his inward glee. "She did it quite by accident! She's not clever enough to have done it on purpose. What a brilliantly witty creature she would be if she had invented it!"

As she had been able unreluctantly to recall her past upon this occasion, so she was able to draw for Mrs. Osborn's benefit from the experience it had afforded her. She wanted to make up to her, in such ways as she could, for the ill turn she had inadvertently done her. As she had at once ranged herself as an aid on the side of Lady Agatha, so she ranged herself entirely without obtrusiveness on the side of the Osborns.

"It's true that she's a good sort," Hester said when they went away. "Her days of being hard up are not far enough away to be forgotten. She hasn't any affectation, at any rate. It makes it easier to stand her."

"She looks like a strong woman," said Osborn. "Walderhurst got a good deal for his money. She'll make a strapping British matron."

Hester winced and a dusky red shot up in her cheek. "So she will," she sighed.

It was quite true, and the truer it was the worse for people who despairingly hung on and were foolish enough to hope against hope.