## CHAPTER XXXIII

## FOR LADY JANE

There is no one thing on earth of such interest as the study of the laws of temperament, which impel, support, or entrap into folly and danger the being they rule. As a child, not old enough to give a definite name to the thing she watched and pondered on, in child fashion, Bettina Vanderpoel had thought much on this subject. As she had grown older, she had never been ignorant of the workings of her own temperament, and she had looked on for years at the laws which had wrought in her father's being--the laws of strength, executive capacity, and that pleasure in great schemes, which is roused less by a desire for gain than for a strongly-felt necessity for action, resulting in success. She mentally followed other people on their way, sometimes asking herself how far the individual was to be praised or blamed for his treading of the path he seemed to choose. And now there was given her the opportunity to study the workings of the nature of Nigel Anstruthers, which was a curious thing.

He was not an individual to be envied. Never was man more tormented by lack of power to control his special devil, at the right moment of time, and therefore, never was there one so inevitably his own frustration. This Betty saw after the passing of but a few days, and wondered how far he was conscious or unconscious of the thing. At times it appeared to her that he was in a state of unrest--that he was as a man wavering

between lines of action, swayed at one moment by one thought, at another by an idea quite different, and that he was harried because he could not hold his own with himself.

This was true. The ball at Dunholm Castle had been enlightening, and had wrought some changes in his points of view. Also other factors had influenced him. In the first place, the changed atmosphere of Stornham, the fitness and luxury of his surroundings, the new dignity given to his position by the altered aspect of things, rendered external amiability more easy. To ride about the country on a good horse, or drive in a smart phaeton, or suitable carriage, and to find that people who a year ago had passed him with the merest recognition, saluted him with polite intention, was, to a certain degree, stimulating to a vanity which had been long ill-fed. The power which produced these results should, of course, have been in his own hands--his money-making father-in-law should have seen that it was his affair to provide for that--but since he had not done so, it was rather entertaining that it should be, for the present, in the hands of this extraordinarily good-looking girl.

He had begun by merely thinking of her in this manner--as "this extraordinarily good-looking girl," and had not, for a moment, hesitated before the edifying idea of its not being impossible to arrange a lively flirtation with her. She was at an age when, in his opinion, girlhood was poised for flight with adventure, and his tastes had not led him in the direction of youth which was fastidious. His Riviera episode had left his vanity blistered and requiring some soothing application. His

life had worked evil with him, and he had fallen ill on the hands of a woman who had treated him as a shattered, useless thing whose day was done and with whom strength and bloom could not be burdened. He had kept his illness a hidden secret, on his return to Stornham, his one desire having been to forget--even to disbelieve in it, but dreams of its suggestion sometimes awakened him at night with shudders and cold sweat. He was hideously afraid of death and pain, and he had had monstrous pain--and while he had lain battling with it, upon his bed in the villa on the Mediterranean, he had been able to hear, in the garden outside, the low voices and laughter of the Spanish dancer and the healthy, strong young fool who was her new adorer.

When he had found himself face to face with Betty in the avenue, after the first leap of annoyance, which had suddenly died down into perversely interested curiosity, he could have laughed outright at the novelty and odd unexpectedness of the situation. The ill-mannered, impudently-staring, little New York beast had developed into THIS! Hang it! No man could guess what the embryo female creature might result in. His mere shakiness of physical condition added strength to her attraction. She was like a young goddess of health and life and fire; the very spring of her firm foot upon the moss beneath it was a stimulating thing to a man whose nerves sprung secret fears upon him. There were sparks between the sweep of her lashes, but she managed to carry herself with the air of being as cool as a cucumber, which gave spice to the effort to "upset" her. If she did not prove suitably

amenable, there would be piquancy in getting the better of her--in stirring up unpleasant little things, which would make it easier for her to go away than remain on the spot--if one should end by choosing to get rid of her. But, for the moment, he had no desire to get rid of her. He wanted to see what she intended to do--to see the thing out, in fact. It amused him to hear that Mount Dunstan was on her track. There exists for persons of a certain type a pleasure full-fed by the mere sense of having "got even" with an opponent. Throughout his life he had made a point of "getting even" with those who had irritatingly crossed his path, or much disliked him. The working out of small or large plans to achieve this end had formed one of his most agreeable recreations. He had long owed Mount Dunstan a debt, which he had always meant to pay. He had not intended to forget the episode of the nice little village girl with whom Tenham and himself had been getting along so enormously well, when the raging young ass had found them out, and made an absurdly exaggerated scene, even going so far as threatening to smash the pair of them, marching off to the father and mother, and setting the vicar on, and then scratching together--God knows how--money enough to pack the lot off to America, where they had since done well. Why should a man forgive another who had made him look like a schoolboy and a fool? So, to find Mount Dunstan rushing down a steep hill into this thing, was edifying. You cannot take much out of a man if you never encounter him. If you meet him, you are provided by Heaven with opportunities. You can find out what he feels most sharply, and what he will suffer most by being deprived of. His impression was that there was a good deal to be

got out of Mount Dunstan. He was an obstinate, haughty devil, and just the fellow to conceal with a fury of pride a score of tender places in his hide.

At the ball he had seen that the girl's effect had been of a kind which even money and good looks uncombined with another thing might not have produced. And she had the other thing--whatsoever it might be. He observed the way in which the Dunholms met and greeted her, he marked the glance of the royal personage, and his manner, when after her presentation he conversed with and detained her, he saw the turning of heads and exchange of remarks as she moved through the rooms. Most especially, he took in the bearing of the very grand old ladies, led by Lady Alanby of Dole. Barriers had thrown themselves down, these portentous, rigorous old pussycats admired her, even liked her.

"Upon my word," he said to himself. "She has a way with her, you know. She is a combination of Ethel Newcome and Becky Sharp. But she is more level-headed than either of them, There's a touch of Trix Esmond, too."

The sense of the success which followed her, and the gradually-growing excitement of looking on at her light whirls of dance, the carnation of her cheek, and the laughter and pleasure she drew about her, had affected him in a way by which he was secretly a little exhilarated. He was conscious of a rash desire to force his way through these laughing, vaunting young idiots, juggle or snatch their dances away from them, and seize on the girl himself. He had not for so long a time been impelled

by such agreeable folly that he had sometimes felt the stab of the thought that he was past it. That it should rise in him again made him feel young. There was nothing which so irritated him against Mount Dunstan as his own rebelling recognition of the man's youth, the strength of his fine body, his high-held head and clear eye.

These things and others it was which swayed him, as was plain to Betty in the time which followed, to many changes of mood.

"Are you sorry for a man who is ill and depressed," he asked one day, "or do you despise him?"

"I am sorry."

"Then be sorry for me."

He had come out of the house to her as she sat on the lawn, under a broad, level-branched tree, and had thrown himself upon a rug with his hands clasped behind his head.

"Are you ill?"

"When I was on the Riviera I had a fall." He lied simply. "I strained some muscle or other, and it has left me rather lame. Sometimes I have a good deal of pain."

"I am very sorry," said Betty. "Very."

A woman who can be made sorry it is rarely impossible to manage. To dwell with pathetic patience on your grievances, if she is weak and unintelligent, to deplore, with honest regret, your faults and blunders, if she is strong, are not bad ideas.

He looked at her reflectively.

"Yes, you are capable of being sorry," he decided. For a few moments of silence his eyes rested upon the view spread before him. To give the expression of dignified reflection was not a bad idea either.

"Do you know," he said at length, "that you produce an extraordinary effect upon me, Betty?"

She was occupying herself by adding a few stitches to one of Rosy's ancient strips of embroidery, and as she answered, she laid it flat upon her knee to consider its effect.

"Good or bad?" she inquired, with delicate abstraction.

He turned his face towards her again--this time quickly.

"Both," he answered. "Both."

His tone held the flash of a heat which he felt should have startled her slightly. But apparently it did not.

"I do not like 'both,'" with composed lightness. "If you had said that you felt yourself develop angelic qualities when you were near me, I should feel flattered, and swell with pride. But 'both' leaves me unsatisfied. It interferes with the happy little conceit that one is an all-pervading, beneficent power. One likes to contemplate a large picture of one's self--not plain, but coloured--as a wholesale reformer."

"I see. Thank you," stiffly and flushing. "You do not believe me."

Her effect upon him was such that, for the moment, he found himself choosing to believe that he was in earnest. His desire to impress her with his mood had actually led to this result. She ought to have been rather moved--a little fluttered, perhaps, at hearing that she disturbed his equilibrium.

"You set yourself against me, as a child, Betty," he said. "And you set yourself against me now. You will not give me fair play. You might give me fair play." He dropped his voice at the last sentence, and knew it was well done. A touch of hopelessness is not often lost on a woman.

"What would you consider fair play?" she inquired.

"It would be fair to listen to me without prejudice--to let me explain how it has happened that I have appeared to you a--a blackguard--I have no doubt you would call it--and a fool." He threw out his hand in an impatient gesture--impatient of himself--his fate--the tricks of bad fortune which it implied had made of him a more erring mortal than he would have been if left to himself, and treated decently.

"Do not put it so strongly," with conservative politeness.

"I don't refuse to admit that I am handicapped by a devil of a temperament. That is an inherited thing."

"Ah!" said Betty. "One of the temperaments one reads about--for which no one is to be blamed but one's deceased relatives. After all, that is comparatively easy to deal with. One can just go on doing what one wants to do--and then condemn one's grandparents severely."

A repellent quality in her--which had also the trick of transforming itself into an exasperating attraction--was that she deprived him of the luxury he had been most tenacious of throughout his existence. If the injustice of fate has failed to bestow upon a man fortune, good looks or brilliance, his exercise of the power to disturb, to enrage those who dare not resent, to wound and take the nonsense out of those about him, will, at all events, preclude the possibility of his being passed over as a factor not to be considered. If to charm and bestow gives the sense of power, to thwart and humiliate may be found not wholly unsatisfying.

But in her case the inadequacy of the usual methods had forced itself upon him. It was as if the dart being aimed at her, she caught it in her hand in its flight, broke off its point and threw it lightly aside without comment. Most women cannot resist the temptation to answer a speech containing a sting or a reproach. It was part of her abnormality that she could let such things go by in a detached silence, which did not express even the germ of comment or opinion upon them. This, he said, was the result of her beastly sense of security, which, in its turn, was the result of the atmosphere of wealth she had breathed since her birth. There had been no obstacle which could not be removed for her, no law of limitation had laid its rein on her neck. She had not been taught by her existence the importance of propitiating opinion. Under such conditions, how was fear to be learned? She had not learned it. But for the devil in the blue between her lashes, he realised that he should have broken loose long ago.

"I suppose I deserved that for making a stupid appeal to sympathy," he remarked. "I will not do it again."

If she had been the woman who can be gently goaded into reply, she would have made answer to this. But she allowed the observation to pass, giving it free flight into space, where it lost itself after the annoying manner of its kind.

"Have you any objection to telling me why you decided to come to England

this year?" he inquired, with a casual air, after the pause which she did not fill in.

The bluntness of the question did not seem to disturb her. She was not sorry, in fact, that he had asked it. She let her work lie upon her knee, and leaned back in her low garden chair, her hands resting upon its wicker arms. She turned on him a clear unprejudiced gaze.

"I came to see Rosy. I have always been very fond of her. I did not believe that she had forgotten how much we had loved her, or how much she had loved us. I knew that if I could see her again I should understand why she had seemed to forget us."

"And when you saw her, you, of course, decided that I had behaved, to quote my own words--like a blackguard and a fool."

"It is, of course, very rude to say you have behaved like a fool, but--if you'll excuse my saying so--that is what has impressed me very much. Don't you know," with a moderation, which singularly drove itself home, "that if you had been kind to her, and had made her happy, you could have had anything you wished for--without trouble?"

This was one of the unadorned facts which are like bullets. Disgustedly, he found himself veering towards an outlook which forced him to admit that there was probably truth in what she said, and he knew he heard more truth as she went on.

"She would have wanted only what you wanted, and she would not have asked much in return. She would not have asked as much as I should. What you did was not businesslike." She paused a moment to give thought to it. "You paid too high a price for the luxury of indulging the inherited temperament. Your luxury was not to control it. But it was a bad investment."

"The figure of speech is rather commercial," coldly.

"It is curious that most things are, as a rule. There is always the parallel of profit and loss whether one sees it or not. The profits are happiness and friendship--enjoyment of life and approbation. If the inherited temperament supplies one with all one wants of such things, it cannot be called a loss, of course."

"You think, however, that mine has not brought me much?"

"I do not know. It is you who know."

"Well," viciously, "there HAS been a sort of luxury in it in lashing out with one's heels, and smashing things--and in knowing that people prefer to keep clear."

She lifted her shoulders a little.

"Then perhaps it has paid."

"No," suddenly and fiercely, "damn it, it has not!"

And she actually made no reply to that.

"What do you mean to do?" he questioned as bluntly as before. He knew she would understand what he meant.

"Not much. To see that Rosy is not unhappy any more. We can prevent that. She was out of repair--as the house was. She is being rebuilt and decorated. She knows that she will be taken care of."

"I know her better than you do," with a laugh. "She will not go away. She is too frightened of the row it would make--of what I should say. I should have plenty to say. I can make her shake in her shoes."

Betty let her eyes rest full upon him, and he saw that she was softly summing him up--quite without prejudice, merely in interested speculation upon the workings of type.

"You are letting the inherited temperament run away with you at this moment," she reflected aloud--her quiet scrutiny almost abstracted. "It was foolish to say that."

He had known it was foolish two seconds after the words had left his lips. But a temper which has been allowed to leap hedges, unchecked throughout life, is in peril of forming a habit of taking them even at such times as a leap may land its owner in a ditch. This last was what her interested eyes were obviously saying. It suited him best at the moment to try to laugh.

"Don't look at me like that," he threw off. "As if you were calculating that two and two make four."

"No prejudice of mine can induce them to make five or six--or three and a half," she said. "No prejudice of mine--or of yours."

The two and two she was calculating with were the likelihoods and unlikelihoods of the inherited temperament, and the practical powers she could absolutely count on if difficulty arose with regard to Rosy.

He guessed at this, and began to make calculations himself.

But there was no further conversation for them, as they were obliged to rise to their feet to receive visitors. Lady Alanby of Dole and Sir Thomas, her grandson, were being brought out of the house to them by Rosalie.

He went forward to meet them--his manner that of the graceful host. Lady

Alanby, having been welcomed by him, and led to the most comfortable, tree-shaded chair, found his bearing so elegantly chastened that she gazed at him with private curiosity. To her far-seeing and highly experienced old mind it seemed the bearing of a man who was "up to something." What special thing did he chance to be "up to"? His glance certainly lurked after Miss Vanderpoel oddly. Was he falling in unholy love with the girl, under his stupid little wife's very nose?

She could not, however, give her undivided attention to him, as she wished to keep her eye on her grandson and--outrageously enough fit happened that just as tea was brought out and Tommy was beginning to cheer up and quite come out a little under the spur of the activities of handing bread and butter and cress sandwiches, who should appear but the two Lithcom girls, escorted by their aunt, Mrs. Manners, with whom they lived. As they were orphans without money, if the Manners, who were rather well off, had not taken them in, they would have had to go to the workhouse, or into genteel amateur shops, as they were not clever enough for governesses.

Mary, with her turned-up nose, looked just about as usual, but Jane had a new frock on which was exactly the colour of the big, appealing eyes, with their trick of following people about. She looked a little pale and pathetic, which somehow gave her a specious air of being pretty, which she really was not at all. The swaying young thinness of those very slight girls whose soft summer muslins make them look like delicate bags tied in the middle with fluttering ribbons, has almost invariably

a foolish attraction for burly young men whose characters are chiefly marked by lack of forethought, and Lady Alanby saw Tommy's robust young body give a sort of jerk as the party of three was brought across the grass. After it he pulled himself together hastily, and looked stiff and pink, shaking hands as if his elbow joint was out of order, being at once too loose and too rigid. He began to be clumsy with the bread and butter, and, ceasing his talk with Miss Vanderpoel, fell into silence. Why should he go on talking? he thought. Miss Vanderpoel was a cracking handsome girl, but she was too clever for him, and he had to think of all sorts of new things to say when he talked to her. And--well, a fellow could never imagine himself stretched out on the grass, puffing happily away at a pipe, with a girl like that sitting near him, smiling--the hot turf smelling almost like hay, the hot blue sky curving overhead, and both the girl and himself perfectly happy--chock full of joy--though neither of them were saying anything at all. You could imagine it with some girls--you DID imagine it when you wakened early on a summer morning, and lay in luxurious stillness listening to the birds singing like mad.

Lady Jane was a nicely-behaved girl, and she tried to keep her following blue eyes fixed on the grass, or on Lady Anstruthers, or Miss Vanderpoel, but there was something like a string, which sometimes pulled them in another direction, and once when this had happened--quite against her will--she was terrified to find Lady Alanby's glass lifted and fixed upon her.

As Lady Alanby's opinion of Mrs. Manners was but a poor one, and as Mrs. Manners was stricken dumb by her combined dislike and awe of Lady Alanby, a slight stiffness might have settled upon the gathering if Betty had not made an effort. She applied herself to Lady Alanby and Mrs. Manners at once, and ended by making them talk to each other. When they left the tea table under the trees to look at the gardens, she walked between them, playing upon the primeval horticultural passions which dominate the existence of all respectable and normal country ladies, until the gulf between them was temporarily bridged. This being achieved, she adroitly passed them over to Lady Anstruthers, who, Nigel observed with some curiosity, accepted the casual responsibility without manifest discomfiture.

To the aching Tommy the manner in which, a few minutes later, he found himself standing alone with Jane Lithcom in a path of clipped laurels was almost bewilderingly simple. At the end of the laurel walk was a pretty peep of the country, and Miss Vanderpoel had brought him to see it. Nigel Anstruthers had been loitering behind with Jane and Mary. As Miss Vanderpoel turned with him into the path, she stooped and picked a blossom from a clump of speedwell growing at the foot of a bit of wall.

"Lady Jane's eyes are just the colour of this flower," she said.

"Yes, they are," he answered, glancing down at the lovely little blue thing as she held it in her hand. And then, with a thump of the heart, "Most people do not think she is pretty, but I--" quite desperately--"I

DO." His mood had become rash.

"So do I," Betty Vanderpoel answered.

Then the others joined them, and Miss Vanderpoel paused to talk a little--and when they went on she was with Mary and Nigel Anstruthers, and he was with Jane, walking slowly, and somehow the others melted away, turning in a perfectly natural manner into a side path. Their own slow pace became slower. In fact, in a few moments, they were standing quite still between the green walls. Jane turned a little aside, and picked off some small leaves, nervously. He saw the muslin on her chest lift quiveringly.

"Oh, little Jane!" he said in a big, shaky whisper. The following eyes incontinently brimmed over. Some shining drops fell on the softness of the blue muslin.

"Oh, Tommy," giving up, "it's no use--talking at all."

"You mustn't think--you mustn't think--ANYTHING," he falteringly commanded, drawing nearer, because it was impossible not to do it.

What he really meant, though he did not know how decorously to say it, was that she must not think that he could be moved by any tall beauty, towards the splendour of whose possessions his revered grandmother might be driving him.

"I am not thinking anything," cried Jane in answer. "But she is everything, and I am nothing. Just look at her--and then look at me, Tommy."

"I'll look at you as long as you'll let me," gulped Tommy, and he was boy enough and man enough to put a hand on each of her shoulders, and drown his longing in her brimming eyes.

. . . . .

Mary and Miss Vanderpoel were talking with a curious intimacy, in another part of the garden, where they were together alone, Sir Nigel having been reattached to Lady Alanby.

"You have known Sir Thomas a long time?" Betty had just said.

"Since we were children. Jane reminded me at the Dunholms' ball that she had played cricket with him when she was eight."

"They have always liked each other?" Miss Vanderpoel suggested.

Mary looked up at her, and the meeting of their eyes was frank to revelation. But for the clear girlish liking for herself she saw in Betty Vanderpoel's, Mary would have known her next speech to be of imbecile bluntness. She had heard that Americans often had a queer,

delightful understanding of unconventional things. This splendid girl was understanding her.

"Oh! You SEE!" she broke out. "You left them together on purpose!"

"Yes, I did." And there was a comprehension so deep in her look that Mary knew it was deeper than her own, and somehow founded on some subtler feeling than her own. "When two people want so much--care so much to be together," Miss Vanderpoel added quite slowly--even as if the words rather forced themselves from her, "it seems as if the whole world ought to help them--everything in the world--the very wind, and rain, and sun, and stars--oh, things have no RIGHT to keep them apart."

Mary stared at her, moved and fascinated. She scarcely knew that she caught at her hand.

"I have never been in the state that Jane is," she poured forth. "And I can't understand how she can be such a fool, but--but we care about each other more than most girls do--perhaps because we have had no people. And it's the kind of thing there is no use talking against, it seems. It's killing the youngness in her. If it ends miserably, it will be as if she had had an illness, and got up from it a faded, done-for spinster with a stretch of hideous years to live. Her blue eyes will look like boiled gooseberries, because she will have cried all the colour out of them. Oh! You UNDERSTAND! I see you do."

Before she had finished both Miss Vanderpoel's hands were holding hers.

"I do! I do," she said. And she did, as a year ago she had not known she could. "Is it Lady Alanby?" she ventured.

"Yes. Tommy will be helplessly poor if she does not leave him her money. And she won't if he makes her angry. She is very determined. She will leave it to an awful cousin if she gets in a rage. And Tommy is not clever. He could never earn his living. Neither could Jane. They could NEVER marry. You CAN'T defy relatives, and marry on nothing, unless you are a character in a book."

"Has she liked Lady Jane in the past?" Miss Vanderpoel asked, as if she was, mentally, rapidly going over the ground, that she might quite comprehend everything.

"Yes. She used to make rather a pet of her. She didn't like me. She was taken by Jane's meek, attentive, obedient ways. Jane was born a sweet little affectionate worm. Lady Alanby can't hate her, even now. She just pushes her out of her path."

"Because?" said Betty Vanderpoel.

Mary prefaced her answer with a brief, half-embarrassed laugh.

"Because of YOU."

"Because she thinks----?"

"I don't see how she can believe he has much of a chance. I don't think she does--but she will never forgive him if he doesn't make a try at finding out whether he has one or not."

"It is very businesslike," Betty made observation.

Mary laughed.

"We talk of American business outlook," she said, "but very few of us English people are dreamy idealists. We are of a coolness and a daring--when we are dealing with questions of this sort. I don't think you can know the thing you have brought here. You descend on a dull country place, with your money and your looks, and you simply STAY and amuse yourself by doing extraordinary things, as if there was no London waiting for you. Everyone knows this won't last. Next season you will be presented, and have a huge success. You will be whirled about in a vortex, and people will sit on the edge, and cast big strong lines, baited with the most glittering things they can get together. You won't be able to get away. Lady Alanby knows there would be no chance for Tommy then. It would be too idiotic to expect it. He must make his try now."

Their eyes met again, and Miss Vanderpoel looked neither shocked nor

angry, but an odd small shadow swept across her face. Mary, of course, did not know that she was thinking of the thing she had realised so often--that it was not easy to detach one's self from the fact that one was Reuben S. Vanderpoel's daughter. As a result of it here one was indecently and unwillingly disturbing the lives of innocent, unassuming lovers.

"And so long as Sir Thomas has not tried--and found out--Lady Jane will be made unhappy?"

"If he were to let you escape without trying, he would not be forgiven. His grandmother has had her own way all her life."

"But suppose after I went away someone else came?"

Mary shook her head.

"People like you don't HAPPEN in one neighbourhood twice in a lifetime. I am twenty-six and you are the first I have seen."

"And he will only be safe if?"

Mary Lithcom nodded.

"Yes--IF," she answered. "It's silly--and frightful--but it is true."

Miss Vanderpoel looked down on the grass a few moments, and then seemed to arrive at a decision.

"He likes you? You can make him understand things?" she inquired.

"Yes."

"Then go and tell him that if he will come here and ask me a direct question, I will give him a direct answer--which will satisfy Lady Alanby."

Lady Mary caught her breath.

"Do you know, you are the most wonderful girl I ever saw!" she exclaimed. "But if you only knew what I feel about Janie!" And tears rushed into her eyes.

"I feel just the same thing about my sister," said Miss Vanderpoel. "I think Rosy and Lady Jane are rather alike."

. . . . .

When Tommy tramped across the grass towards her he was turning red and white by turns, and looking somewhat like a young man who was being marched up to a cannon's mouth. It struck him that it was an American kind of thing he was called upon to do, and he was not an American, but

British from the top of his closely-cropped head to the rather thick soles of his boots. He was, in truth, overwhelmed by his sense of his inadequacy to the demands of the brilliantly conceived, but unheard-of situation. Joy and terror swept over his being in waves.

The tall, proud, wood-nymph look of her as she stood under a tree, waiting for him, would have struck his courage dead on the spot and caused him to turn and flee in anguish, if she had not made a little move towards him, with a heavenly, every-day humanness in her eyes. The way she managed it was an amazing thing. He could never have managed it at all himself.

She came forward and gave him her hand, and really it was HER hand which
held his own comparatively steady.

"It is for Lady Jane," she said. "That prevents it from being ridiculous or improper. It is for Lady Jane. Her eyes," with a soft-touched laugh, "are the colour of the blue speedwell I showed you. It is the colour of babies' eyes. And hers look as theirs do--as if they asked everybody not to hurt them."

He actually fell upon his knee, and bending his head over her hand, kissed it half a dozen times with adoration. Good Lord, how she SAW and KNEW!

"If Jane were not Jane, and you were not YOU," the words rushed from him, "it would be the most outrageous--the most impudent thing a man ever had the cheek to do."

"But it is not." She did not draw her hand away, and oh, the girlish kindness of her smiling, supporting look. "You came to ask me if----"

"If you would marry me, Miss Vanderpoel," his head bending over her hand again. "I beg your pardon, I beg your pardon. Oh Lord, I do.'

"I thank you for the compliment you pay me," she answered. "I like you very much, Sir Thomas--and I like you just now more than ever--but I could not marry you. I should not make you happy, and I should not be happy myself. The truth is----" thinking a moment, "each of us really belongs to a different kind of person. And each of knows the fact."

"God bless you," he said. "I think you know everything in the world a woman can know--and remain an angel."

It was an outburst of eloquence, and she took it in the prettiest way--with the prettiest laugh, which had in it no touch of mockery or disbelief in him.

"What I have said is quite final--if Lady Alanby should inquire," she said--adding rather quickly, "Someone is coming."

It pleased her to see that he did not hurry to his feet clumsily, but even stood upright, with a shade of boyish dignity, and did not release her hand before he had bent his head low over it again.

Sir Nigel was bringing with him Lady Alanby, Mrs. Manners, and his wife, and when Betty met his eyes, she knew at once that he had not made his way to this particular garden without intention. He had discovered that she was with Tommy, and it had entertained him to break in upon them.

"I did not intend to interrupt Sir Thomas at his devotions," he remarked to her after dinner. "Accept my apologies."

"It did not matter in the least, thank you," said Betty.

. . . . .

"I am glad to be able to say, Thomas, that you did not look an entire fool when you got up from your knees, as we came into the rose garden." Thus Lady Alanby, as their carriage turned out of Stornham village.

"I'm glad myself," Tommy answered.

"What were you doing there? Even if you were asking her to marry you, it was not necessary to go that far. We are not in the seventeenth century."

Then Tommy flushed.

"I did not intend to do it. I could not help it. She was so--so nice about everything. That girl is an angel. I told her so."

"Very right and proper spirit to approach her in," answered the old woman, watching him keenly. "Was she angel enough to say she would marry you?"

Tommy, for some occult reason, had the courage to stare back into his grandmother's eyes, quite as if he were a man, and not a hobbledehoy, expecting to be bullied.

"She does not want me," he answered. "And I knew she wouldn't. Why should she? I did what you ordered me to do, and she answered me as I knew she would. She might have snubbed me, but she has such a way with her--such a way of saying things and understanding, that--that--well, I found myself on one knee, kissing her hand--as if I was being presented at court."

Old Lady Alanby looked out on the passing landscape.

"Well, you did your best," she summed the matter up at last, "if you went down on your knees involuntarily. If you had done it on purpose, it would have been unpardonable."