

APPENDIX

NAN : A SUMMER SCENE

THE London season being at its height, with all its turmoil and its witchery, can anyone spare a moment to notice a sad little face peeping out of the window of a railway cab just driving into Paddington Station ?

The cab draws up at a long line of cabs, and the footman outside jumps down to open the door.

Out steps Nan, bag and parasol in one hand, purse in the other ; and very grave indeed she looks as she solemnly inquires the fare, and marches into the station, followed by Thomas.

Can this shabby little creature be the butterfly who but yesterday fluttered and spread her wings among the gay crowds, gayest of all herself, full of busy idleness, bewildered enchantment, ecstasies of bliss and woe ? Ah ! poor child, her day was a short one and now it is over.

It is hard to pass the pleasure-loving stream and go against it.

To remember that a few hours before, she had felt herself—she, even she, child, sprite, insignificant drop in the bucket as she really was—to have been for the time transformed into a princess in fairyland, with all sorts of dreams, fancies, and possibilities hovering over her ; and then suddenly to wake and find herself shaken up into a little red-haired girl going away into a hack-cab.

Nan is dowdy, too, in her travelling costume. It is the

same in which she came up to town six weeks before, and very neat and becoming she thought it then ; but six weeks of fresh muslins, her new silk, and incessant smartness, have made the old grey seem dim.

And then the heat of this June day.

The finest and softest of white dresses abound in the park, and fans flutter, and parasols sway gracefully backwards and forwards. On her way to the station, Nan has passed carriage after carriage turning in thither, probably driving through, to return to the great rendezvous an hour later, when she will be many miles away.

Then when evening comes, she knows that her aunt and cousins will be preparing for that delightful party to which she, too, had been invited, and to which she might have so easily gone if only the Wyatts had fixed Friday instead of Thursday for her coming to them.

This visit to the Wyatts has been twice postponed already, and Aunt Eliza, smiling, but serious, thinks it will hardly do again.

Nan submits to her fate.

She thinks Mr Lefevre will be a little disappointed, and Captain Neville a little more still ; but I cannot say that she has anything beyond the smallest and most complacent of regrets for her forlorn partners.

She does not like leaving Queen's Gate, however. *That* is quite another thing.

This visit is the point towards which all her lines have converged for the last eight or ten months.

It was projected in the autumn ; and given up, taken back into favour, thrown out, and reconsidered at least half-a-dozen times before the great decision was arrived at.

For it is a long way from the stony hills of Westmoreland to the metropolis ; and country maids like Nan Church, whose life goes round and round as if it were turned by one

of those long-suffering horses in the old farmyards, think a great deal more of a single day's journey than some of our more delicate and fashionable young madams do of a voyage round the world.

What preparation it takes ! What forebodings on the part of Granny does it occasion ! What timid, exultant dreams on the part of Nan does it give rise to !

Hours and hours have the two spent together with only old Trueman as coadjutor, contriving that wonderful wardrobe. The fashion-book has worn itself to death in their service. The maids sit at their seams in the workroom unceasingly. And when the climax is at length attained, is it not seemly in their eyes, cunning in its devices, heroic in its concealments ? What though it might—it probably would—have made Worth shudder and sicken ?

Does Nan forget these days ? No, and she never will.

Many and many a time in the midst of her vortex they rise before her, and her heart gives a little tender ache for the foolish things, feeling as if somehow she does them a wrong in that they have grown to look odd and plain, and all but unwearable.

They are not needed, either.

Aunt Eliza gives her dresses and bonnets ; and the silk that Granny had fondly hoped might be made up by her cousin's maid is returned gorgeous from a West End dressmaker ; but for all that, the child's heart has never grown hard and cruel to the old things, and when the last day comes she bravely dons the sober grey with its plaintive tints, and betakes herself off in the cab, much the same little Nan Church to all intents as when she hugged and kissed dear Granny before all the carriages at Tebay Junction.

Ah well ! her great visit is over.

There only remains her fortnight at the Wyatts, and with this she would fain dispense.

It is years since she saw her cousins, and who can tell what sort of young maidens Edie and Detty may have blossomed into in the interval ?

The Honourable Edith and Henrietta Wyatt are not in town this season.

When their mourning for the old uncle who left Dick all his money was over, it was too late in the year, and Lady Wyatt has not been well. Lord Wyatt goes up and down ; Dick has been away since Christmas ; Walter at Christ Church is glad to have his " Long " at home, and Dolly at Eton has no voice in the matter.

Accordingly they are all at Wyatt Hall, and Nan wishes they were anywhere else.

To begin with, she is afraid of going. Aunt Eliza demands why ?

She is afraid of Lady Wyatt.

A more groundless fear never existed in the bosom of a Caffre.

She is afraid of Lord Wyatt.

More groundless still, and more idiotic.

She is afraid of the girls, of Dick, of Walter, of Dolly, who is up to her shoulder ; afraid of the house, afraid of the servants. This is what she would like to say, but dares not, to Aunt Eliza.

So she stops abruptly at her fear of Lord Wyatt.

Of her own uncle !

(Aunt Eliza is Nan's aunt on the other side, and is rather proud of having a niece who can call a peer of the realm her own uncle.)

Yes. He may be her uncle or not, but she is afraid of him.

To this she sticks so fast that Aunt Eliza deigns to expostulate.

Nan is foolish, unreasonable, unrelation-like, if there is

such a term, altogether fanciful and absurd. Come, she must not be silly ; but above all, silly or not, she must not *show* that she is.

Accordingly Nan goes off, doing her best to keep her quakings hidden.

She is dull, and sad, and very shy.

Queen's Gate had grown familiar, and the happiness she had felt there suddenly assumes gigantic proportions in the retrospect.

She cannot think of anything but the past, and as Thomas hands her her ticket, with his soft assurance that all is right, she is conscious of a faint melancholy disinclination to go anywhere but back with him. For is he not even now bound for the enchanted ground again ? Are not balls, fêtes, flower-shows still abundantly in store for him, and does not he look impatient to be off ?

The poor outcast will soon be deserted by her last friend. She sees the white stockings go farther and farther, and grow smaller and smaller, then suddenly go out like the distant speck of a lighthouse, and once more the shock of being only a little red-haired girl instead of a fairy princess, comes over Nan.

By this time she is seated in the dusky blue oven indicated to her as a first-class.

She looks daintily round upon the cushions. Dust everywhere, invincible, inevitable.

The little lady takes out a thick green veil, and proceeds to envelop herself in its folds. Granny had tied it round Nan's head when the parting came, for, "My dear," says the old lady, "it will keep you tidy."

Not for worlds would she hint, what she nevertheless believes to be the case, that there is not a skin like her darling's in Westmoreland.

Aunt Eliza and Laura Church, however, have not been

so reticent, and Nan has learnt to know that the green veil may have other uses than to keep her tidy.

She is anxious about her first appearance at the Wyatts.

Not very anxious, chiefly caring because of the impression it will produce at Queen's Gate.

Will any one meet her at the station? Hum! She changes her gloves.

Is her neck-tie smooth? Pulls out the bows.

Gets nervous. Begins to dread the arrival more than ever.

After an hour's unbroken monotonous travel, with only her own thoughts for company, the London life has grown dimmer, and Wyatt Hall stands out prominently before her mind's eye.

She has time to conjure up horror upon horror; to grow restless, excited, miserable; to exclaim a hundred times, "If it were but over!" yet to feel almost thankful for the respite, as she is still being hurried along. At length the train slackens speed. Nan wildly tears off the veil, gives her hat a lurch on one side, and a hair-pin falls into her lap.

She doubles up the veil, stuffs it into her pocket, whence a long green string protrudes, frantically settles the hat, bursts her glove, and has hard work to be sitting quite calm and composed when the train draws up.

Calmness and composure thrown away; no carriage, cart, or wheel-barrow belonging to the Wyatts is at the station.

Nan gets out unassisted, feeling severely that her days of princess-ship are over; and she has redeemed her box, and the train is off again ere anyone asks whither she is going?

Suddenly she is taken hold of, in the midst of a crowd of laughing voices.

Edie, Detty, Miss Blisset, and one or two children all together explaining, welcoming, apologising, sorry for their fault, and declaring it was not their fault, in a breath.

The little traveller is bewildered, and very meek.

A servant seizes her trunk, her shawl is drawn from her arm, and her bag is about to follow, but to this she clings.

“Now, you are ready,” says her eldest cousin. “It is so nice that you are really come at last, Nan. We thought you were going to put us off altogether.”

“People never keep country engagements,” cheerfully suggests the bright-eyed Detty, on her other side. “And you must have hated leaving town just now. But, you know, we did want to see you again so very much.”

Nan tries to murmur some reply, but she is guiltily conscious that the desire has not been reciprocal.

How kind they are, these unknown relations! How foolish of her to have minded putting on the old grey dress, when they are in brown holland, and wear the most ancient of garden gloves!

Yet how nice they look! Edith, a slim, gracious maiden, not a hair of whose little orderly head is turned the wrong way; Detty, frizzle-pated, sparkling. Both so kind, gentle, and full of soft, lively prattle, that she cannot choose but be at her ease with them.

They ask if she is fond of riding? She may be, but it is an undeveloped affection.

Driving? Also latent.

How charming! Edith will drive her, Detty will teach her to ride.

They will have matches at croquet and archery.

They will be on the river from morning till night. Nan begins to laugh and look forward, scarcely crediting her own good fortune. No one could be stiff in such good fellowship.

“You must try not to find us dull,” says Edith. “Some people are coming here to-morrow, and Dick comes to-night. Then by-and-by there is going to be a ball at one of our neighbours’. I am so glad you will come in for the ball, Nan.”

This is said as they are alighting, and Nan is doing her best not to show anew her quakings at the notion of a formal entry.

In a moment they are dispelled ; Detty is at her side, saying, “Come to the school-room first, dear, and have tea. Mother is in her room ; you need not see her till dinner-time. Miss Blisset gives us tea in the school-room just now.”

Miss Blisset, the rosy, jolly soul of good-nature, whose daily excitement it is to preside at this entertainment, politely begs Miss Church will take off her things first, if she feels inclined. Is Miss Church tired ?

Dirty is more properly the word, and Nan owns she is dirty, but will have her tea first.

So she sits down, and drinking the hot liquid after her drive and her journey, gets a red nose, and is conscious that she is looking her worst.

“I thought Nan had been pretty,” begins Edith, when the toilet separation had taken place ; “but I don’t know that she is. She looked so pretty at first.”

“She has a good figure at any rate.”

“I like her.”

“So do I.”

“Edie, do you think she will have a dress for the ball ?”

“Oh yes, of course, dozens.”

“Not if she has exhausted them all, you know.”

“Well, if she has, there is plenty of time to get another, or an old one could be refreshed. That was why I mentioned it, and I will take care to say more about it to-night.”

“Edie, I suppose we must be in white to-night.”

“Why to-night? The blue batistes will do very well.”

“You know Dick likes white, and he does not care for blue.”

“Oh, Dick! Yes, I suppose we must. I wonder if Dick will be good to Nan.”

“He will never notice her.”

Nan comes down to the drawing-room a different creature. The red nose has disappeared, and a pair of shell-pink cheeks have come in its stead.

Edith looks at her cousin in wonder. Lady Wyatt makes the kindest and most unmeaning of speeches. Lord Wyatt follows suit, and then to Nan's amazement she discovers that the room is full of people.

The girls had let her infer that they were alone. They had spoken of people who were coming the next day, but had never mentioned any being with them at the time. Then who is this old gentleman in the corner, and his counterpart on the rug? Who is that on the sofa? Who followed her into the room?

Detty laughs at Nan, for these sort of people are always there. “We did not think of telling you,” she says. “We forgot them. We call ourselves alone to-night.”

From which Nan infers that there are two ideas of solitude.

After dinner the cousins go out of doors, and grow confidential walking up and down the gravel paths.

Nan knows she has on her embroidered slippers, and would fain keep on the grass, but feels rather ashamed of thinking of such a thing, for there is something about the Wyatts, simply attired as they are, that shows they have never in their lives thought about economy.

Edith, in her thin kid shoes, is at this moment walking sedately along a pebbly path, discoursing upon coming guests.

“First, Nan, there is Dick’s friend, Lord Hefton. He is younger than Dick, but they were at Christ Church together. He is the most good-natured man, and never in time for anything. *Everybody* likes him. Then there are the Bushes. Sir John is just Sir John; there is nothing about him the least different from every other Sir John in England. Lady Bushe is rather nice. She is very tall and thin, and you think at first that she is going to be a dreadfully precise person, and of all people in the world, she is the very least. She does just what Augusta tells her. Oh; I wonder how you will like Augusta?”

“Who is Augusta? Their daughter?”

“No; niece. She is a very fine lady now. She does not often condescend to come and see us; but she has overdone herself in London, and they are coming for ten days to recruit. We used to know them intimately, and always called her ‘Gus’; but now she does not like that. She says Augusta is a heavenly name.”

Nan laughs.

“But, you know, in many ways she is very nice, and she is really very pretty, and she dresses beautifully.”

“But you don’t care for her, Edie?”

“Yes, I do—in a way. She is always very kind to us, and gives us the most lovely presents. Look, this locket I am wearing she gave me on my last birthday. She is always sending Detty and me things she has worked, or little sketches of places hereabouts—and she does draw beautifully—and she sings too. I daresay you will like her immensely.”

“And who are the others?”

“Mr Dallie is one, and Dick’s friend, Mr Burnand.”

The faintest possible change in Edith’s voice makes Nan wait for more.

“Mr Dallie is delightful.”

“Oh!”

“He will do whatever you tell him, and you can order him about just as you like. And he makes bouquets, and gets up charades, and games, and anything you want done. And he helps you so with dull people, if it is a wet day. He is always in request wherever he goes, for he can do everything.”

“And Mr Burnand?”

“Oh, he? He can’t do anything. He is a *great* friend of Dick’s.”

“Is Dick coming with him?”

“No; Mr Burnand comes to-morrow—Dick will be here to-night.”

“Oho! it’s Mr Burnand, is it?” swiftly concludes the shrewd little cousin. “I wonder if I should be asked to be a bridesmaid!”

Unconscious Edith steps serenely on, and Detty comes to call them indoors.

Music is wanted, and accordingly music, such as it is, is given; and then the sisters conduct their visitor to a delightful solitude opening out of the gallery, where, if inclined, they are at liberty to take refuge from the drawing-room society.

“And so we come here whenever they get too humdrum,” whispers naughty Detty; “and whenever we have our own friends, they like it too. Mr Burnand always comes, doesn’t he, Edith?”

Edie and Detty are getting charmed with their cousin; it seems as if they had really known her for years, and only needed bringing together to reveal all that past knowledge.

Time passes. “I wonder when Dick will be here,” observes Edith, for the twentieth time.

“Perhaps he has gone off somewhere else, as he did last time,” suggests her sister.

“Of course he will come, Detty, when he has asked Mr Burnand.”

Detty smiles, Nan laughs outright.

“Oh,” cried the poor thing, in dire confusion; “how nice this recess is !”

Very nice, but not in the least laughable ; and Edith’s cheeks burn.

“How long is it since Dick was here last, Edith ?”

This from Detty, in a good-natured attempt to turn off the awkwardness.

“Why, does he not *live* here ?” demanded their cousin.

Oh, dear no. It appears that Dick is very seldom there. He is in France, Italy, Germany, India, Hongkong, anywhere and everywhere but at home. However, he is older now, and papa thinks he is settling down.

Oh, he is a great deal older than they are—he is over thirty. Isn’t it a dreadful age ? He hardly seems like their brother at all.

It is clear to Nan that they are greatly in awe of Dick. She has suggested, do they ever go about the world with him ? They are quite amused. How could they ? He does not want them ; he would not know what to do with them. Oh yes, he is as kind as he can be, only he seems so much older.

Nan will not like Dick, she feels sure. Why is he coming home just when she is here ? She wishes he would keep away. He must be something quite different from soft, spooney William Church, who was always so polite, escorting them all from place to place, and taking as much interest in his mother’s parties as she did herself.

She did not very much care for William, but his kindness won her gratitude.

As for this Dick, she is afraid of him, and knows he will despise her.

The sisters, too, defer to his opinion quite absurdly.

Dick's likings, Dick's aversions, Dick's friends, and Dick's fancies, are the main topic of their conversation.

They are glad that her dress is white. Dick likes white.

How pretty her locket is! Dick likes pearls.

Bother Dick!

It is getting late now, and the carriage has been gone to the station over an hour.

Out comes Lord Wyatt, and looks from the window.

"Dick ought to be here."

Five minutes pass. Out toddles Lady Wyatt.

"Dick ought to be here."

Up comes the butler.

"Mr Wyatt should be here, my lord."

"Here he is!" cries my lord, and rushes to the hall door.

Nan rises involuntarily.

"Oh, he will come to us," observes Edith, drawing up her long neck, and looking quite shy.

Detty glances at herself in the mirror, and tucks in a stray lock of hair.

Voices are heard in the anteroom, and steps drawing nearer.

Lady Wyatt rustles forward and clasps to her bosom a breadth of smoked shooting-cloth, exclaiming, "My dearest Dick!"

"I'm wet, mother; take care."

Dick is cool, but kind.

"Wet, my dear boy? So you are. How did you get wet in the carriage?"

"I came outside. There has been a shower."

Then Dick comes up to the girls, who are demurely kissed by him, and finally he says to his cousin, "How do you do?" in a polite, quiet voice.

Nan is surprised, pleased, and disappointed all at once.

This is no hero, to be sure ; no elegant, accomplished, travelled, soul-charming youth, such as she had been led to expect ; but, on the other hand, there is nothing of the sneering, despising, haw-haw deity about her cousin.

“ So this is Dick,” she reflects. “ What an ugly fellow ! ”

Dick’s hair is a coarse, rusty black, cut close to his head. He has a red, rough skin, a burnt neck, no particular eyes, and a nose that has run off the rails altogether.

But, on the other hand, he has a good, set, determined mouth, and the sweetest smile ever seen.

When Mr Burnand comes, Nan sees a really handsome man, but they have not been two days in the house before she discovers that she likes ugly faces best.

What is there about Dick that makes people like him ?

He seldom comes near his sisters, who are stiff and stupid in his presence, and adore him from afar.

Yet when he does come—ah, well, it is the old thing over again with our poor little Nan.

Edith drives her in the pony-carriage ; but the thoughts of both are elsewhere. She and Detty play croquet, and Detty wins every game.

Then there is this Augusta.

Miss Bushe is, as Edith said, a very fine lady, but Nan declines to be put down by her, for all that ; and what is more, Augusta in her secret heart is jealous of the bright, popular, merry-hearted girl.

All Nan’s regrets, and remembrances of Queen’s Gate, are blotted out now.

The present week, day, hour, is everything. Laura Church’s letter, with the long accounts of gaieties for which Nan had begged, and which it had really cost an effort of good-nature to write—that very letter lies half-read in her drawer. Some day she will wade through it—not now.

Dick was talking to her when the post came in, and the letter drove him away, you see. She has a spite against it.

Not a word, look, nor outward sign of mischief done, does the tough little creature give. Disgraced she may be in her own eyes, but it is something to know that she is unsuspected. Her secret is her own. Hide it, cover it up, bury it well, little girl ; other hearts than yours have done the like in their day.

Dick is not behaving well, however. It is not for nothing that those grey, wistful eyes watch the empty chairs at the breakfast or the luncheon-table.

Several times he has gone over to sit beside her, whether intentionally or not she cannot guess ; but they talk together all the time, and she is quite at her ease with him.

This says nothing, of course ; but Dick has no need to follow the girls out afterwards, and walk up and down with his cousin, till he makes her late for their drive, and draws forth a remark on it from Augusta Bushe.

And then that delightful long Sunday evening when he sat with them all in the recess talking over old times, and retailing childish stories, which Edith and Detty had forgotten. He is by Nan's side, so perhaps that is why he speaks principally to her. Next morning he goes away to the other end of the breakfast-table, and never utters a word.

To his own friends he is devoted. They go about together all day long, four neutral-tinted figures.

Now and then little Lord Hefton condescends to lie on the croquet-ground in the heat of the day, and Pax Burnand contrives to slip in to the schoolroom tea afterwards ; but Dick, if he comes at all, takes his cup standing, and then goes off, perchance to romp with his little sisters.

He does this one day at least, and it is on the only day that Nan had been let off. She is very good to the little ones, who torment her sadly, and all unconsciously.

For who so good as Nan at all their games, and who can tell them wild and wonderful tales like hers? That very morning she had spent an hour in blowing paper ladies across the table for Flo. Dick had come in, and for a few seconds she fondly hoped he meant to stay; but he only looked, laughed, and lounged out again.

Then what follows the very same evening?

He comes out to Nan, who is sitting lonely and forlorn in the recess, brings his photograph book, and shows her the whole collection.

Nan finds them charming, and Dick is pleased to explain to such an enthusiastic listener. He has some more upstairs, and goes in search of them.

While he is away, Augusta comes out.

Of course, Miss Bushe would like to see the beautiful photographs. Mr Wyatt accordingly hands her the book they have just gone through, and proceeds to show Nan the new ones.

This is too much, and not at all what the intruder bargained for.

She looks at two, and flounces back into the drawing-room.

It gets too dark to see, so Dick promises to keep the rest for to-morrow. He and Nan are talking together, with one lying on her lap.

By-and-by the drawing-room door opens, and a shower of people emerge. They are going out of doors to get cool. "But we shan't interrupt you," observes a voice, whose sweet accents cover a sting. Miss Bushe always speaks most mellifluously when she has something disagreeable to say.

She passes on with the rest in search of shawls, and Nan rises to follow.

"You don't need one," says Dick; "come out this way";

and he opens a side door, and Nan finds herself walking off alone with him.

They only went along the river path, you know, and came back by the cedars ; they had no idea where the others had gone, how should they have ?

It is too bad of Dick.

All that night the child thinks or dreams of him. She cannot forget the look he gave her for "Good-night," nor help wondering if it meant anything like Edith's audible murmur, "How pretty Nan looks to-night !"

Tossing up and down, over and over, in the short, light, midsummer night that follows, these words ding-dong in her ears.

She does not wonder at the sisters now, for what Dick thinks is still more to her than to them.

Recklessly she puts on her best dresses, anxiously she stares in the glass.

Nothing much to boast of, the morning after that dusky ramble. Large bright eyes, and cheeks burning with a feverish flush,—these are what she sees, but what of that ? They cannot betray her ; and very, very quietly the slight, graceful figure glides in, and very, very circumspect is Nan in her questions and answers that morning.

It is one of the hottest days in the year, and she is in white, with a rose in her bosom.

Dick looks at it, walks over, and sits down beside her.

It is so hot that the expedition to the ruins has been nearly given up, and would have been so, without doubt, if the Dents had not agreed to be there.

The Dents will drive, the Wyatts will row up the river.

Nan held her breath while the discussion was being held, she was so fearful lest Lady Wyatt should carry her point.

Lady Wyatt thinks the girls will tire themselves out, and that the picnic is a foolish affair.

But Nan thinks otherwise ; and accordingly the extravagant little creature goes in her white frock, and gets it all dirty and trodden upon, and does not care in the least—or rather rejoices in her ruins—since Dick takes out his own breast-pin and fastens up the folds himself.

A fine hole that pin will make, but she is reckless.

It is a happy day.

Dick is lazy and refuses to row ; so little Lord Hefton and the amphibiously accomplished Dallie, assisted by one of the nondescripts, and a gardener's lad, do the work.

Dick steers and lies back, asking Nan to hold her parasol over his sunburned face. The sun, he says, is in his eyes.

Nan allows him all she can, but is a little anxious about freckles herself. Miss Bushe volunteers the shelter of her large sunshade.

“No, thanks,” says Dick ; “this will do.”

Pax Burnand has gone off in the small boat with the eldest Miss Wyatt ; and from the schoolroom window Miss Blisset watched their departure, communing with herself as to all it would lead to. Edith fills her thoughts ; she has no eyes for Nan—and well for Nan that she has not.

In the big boat they are very merry.

Augusta favours them with her celebrated river song, to which Mr Dallie throws in a neat second.

It sounds charming on the water, as music always does, and Miss Bushe is much applauded. At the close she addresses her neighbour, politely, “Don't you sing at all, Miss Church ?”

Nan starts, and blushes furiously. Where have her thoughts been wandering ? Dick looks at her, and smiles. He has got into a way of looking at Nan and smiling lately. Perhaps he is beginning to like her ?

“Pray, Miss Bushe, give us another,” implores little

Hefton. "That last one was so awfully jolly!" *N.B.*—He takes the opportunity of letting his oar dip impotently in the water in exact time with the rest.

Dallie continues to sing and row lustily.

He is determined not to seem as if, when singing, he is unable to row, or when rowing, he cannot sing. Little Hefton, behind his back, is grinning from ear to ear; while Dick pulls the strings, and keeps the boat even, conniving at his iniquity without a twinge of conscience.

When they land, Dallie is rather puffed; but, true to himself, he is the first to jump ashore, and has a hand for every lady and a caution for every pretty one.

"Don't get out yet, Nan," says Dick. "I'll take you across there for those forget-me-nots while they are getting luncheon."

So he takes her over among the little creeks and islets which crowd the opposite bank; and the Dents, who have been on the spot for some time, and are busily making preparations, are a little disgusted at the coolness of Mr Wyatt.

It had been alleged that Dick had come down for their ball on the morrow—that ball of which Edith had told her cousin.

Dick is not a ball-going man, and the Dents had taken it as a compliment.

Who is that with him in the boat? And is she coming to the ball?

Yes, Edith assures them of that. Their cousin has the offer of an escort back to Westmoreland on Friday, but she is to be at the ball.

Miss Dent would as soon that the escort had been for Thursday. The two voices on the river sound pleasantly together.

Are they never coming back?

Luncheon is waiting, and Dallie volunteers to roar a summons, putting his hands together as a trumpet.

He does it once, twice, thrice, thinking he never had such difficulty in making people hear in his life. They are at no distance to speak of, yet he has to use the whole power of his lungs before they give any sign of attention whatever.

A happy thought strikes little Hefton.

Just as Nan is stepping off the ledge into the boat, a large stone splashes into the water a couple of yards from her.

“Oh, I say!” ejaculates Hefton, catching his breath, “that was *rather* a close shave!”

Nan is easily startled. She loses her balance, and would infallibly fall into the water if Dick had not hold of her hand.

He hauls her ungracefully into the boat, and then turns upon his friend, black with wrath.

Nan says not a word, but looks pale, and as Dick catches sight of her face, he stops short in his scolding, and bends over her. “You were not frightened, Nan?”

“Oh, no.”

“It was one of that Hefton’s baby tricks. He is the greatest fool!” explains Dick, who in his heart loves Hefton a thousand times more than Pax Burnand, Dallie, or any one of his other mates, whatever his sisters may say.

“Awfully sorry!”—in a violent halloo from the other side.

“Ought to be,”—low growl in the boat.

Hefton is at the landing-place to help Nan out. He had no need to be there, considers the oarsman, and accordingly Dick turns the boat up the stream, and keeps him marching by the side for a couple of hundred yards. Nan’s blue forget-me-nots drip on her white frock, and she knows it is bunched up behind with Dick’s breast-pin in a most inelegant fashion, but she is quite happy.

At luncheon she sits a little in the background,

Dick is obliged to take the host's part, and unwillingly exerts himself so far as to order Dallie hither and thither, to wonder at Burnand, and scoff at Hefton. Dallie flies round the circle, proud and glad to be the universal slave. Not a single thing will he touch till all have fared sumptuously, and no one thinks of offering him a seat.

Little Hefton sits down upon a tray of glasses, and Dick's grave face explodes in a huge laugh.

There is a great drawing of corks, and changing of plates, and clatter and fuss, and no one notices that two or three of the party are very quiet.

"We hardly expected to see you at our ball, Richard," says old Mrs Dent, shining with good-nature and champagne. "We feel honoured."

Dick hands her cake.

"You never were a dancer, we know," says she.

Nan's face falls. Not dance with Dick! Then she might just as well be back in Westmoreland—at any rate, be as well away from the ball.

Dick tacitly acquiesces.

"You don't want dancers, Mrs Dent."

"We shall be glad to see you, at all events."

"Thanks."

"We have been in such trouble about the tent," Miss Dent privately informs the girls. "It gave way twice, and we did not dare to let mamma know. If any of you are nervous people, you had better not go into it."

None of them are nervous, but nevertheless there is an inquiry as to where the dancing is to be?

"In the saloon. We thought it best, you know, in case of accidents. Supper will be in the tent, now; and we have got mamma to let it be open at eleven, as it will be such a charming place for people to go out and in, and get cool in between the dances. Papa has had lights hung in the

shrubbery, so you can meander there as much as you like, my dear." This aside to Edith.

"Mr Wyatt," says Augusta, softly, "*would* you mind giving me out my shawl? I think the grass *may* be a little damp."

The ground is as hard as a flint; but what then? One must have some excuse.

Dick spreads the shawl.

"And now sit down for a minute yourself, and tell me about your mother," suggests Mrs Dent good-naturedly, fanning herself. "Here, between Miss Bushe and me. We will take care of you."

Dick sits down.

What is to be done next? He hates this sort of thing. He has no idea of what is expected of him. So follows a quarter of an hour's dreary conversation, questions and answers.

Little Hefton has lit his cigar and moved off. Dick looks, longs, and bolts after him.

Burnand, Dallie, and young Dent entertain the girls, and Nan's blue forget-me-nots fade and droop in her lap.

Young Dent attaches himself to the second Miss Wyatt—for he is still at Oxford, and must have somebody. He has a great deal to say about Walter, and is very full of cricket and Scotland, whither he is going to read and fish in the autumn.

He assures them all repeatedly that Walter will be down for the ball—an interesting fact, no doubt, but easily apprehended. Walter loves balls as much as his brother hates them.

There are fellows coming with him, too, Edwin says, and he describes the fellows at some length, evidently feeling that the ball has been got up specially for their edification.

Edith is very gushing, and is sure that everybody will enjoy themselves immensely. Detty thinks Edwin Dent

improved, and responds merrily to his rattle ; but poor Augusta and Georgie Dent, both rather forlorn and cross, have only each other to fall back upon when the brisk Dallie has departed to overlook arrangements.

Augusta admires the other young lady's costume ; and what is Georgie going to wear at the ball ?

“ Pink.”

“ Oh, pink ! Anything else ? ”

“ Well, half-a-dozen shades, but still all pink.”

“ And you look so well in pink ! ” cries Miss Bushe.

“ *You* do, at all events, dear. What do you wear ? ”

“ Really, I hardly know. I have several pretty things. Elise sent me a lovely combination last week ; but it is almost too fine for me, with my simple tastes. I can't bear to be over-dressed.”

“ Oh, do wear it—there's a good girl. I don't believe it is a bit too fine. Make yourself as charming as you can ; I like to see people look nice.”

Then Miss Dent draws closer. “ Who is that girl with the Wyatts ? ”

“ Hush ! Take care ! A cousin.”

“ On which side ? ”

“ Mother—Lord Wyatt's sister.”

“ Oh ! ”

A pause.

“ Does she often come here ? I never met her before.”

“ No. This is her first appearance.” (Lower) “ A nasty little thing ! ”

Uproarious mirth from Edwin and Detty.

They have got foxgloves and are cracking them for each other, telling their fortunes.

Pax Burnand goes over to Edith with a stalk, but nobody thinks of telling Nan's, though she is sitting silent, with her heart aching to know it.

At length the day grows cooler, and the recreants return. Georgie Dent and Augusta are not quite such friends as before.

There are anxious thoughts in the breasts of several about the manner of their return home ; for the Dents have brought their barouche, and as their homeward road passes Wyatt Hall, it is agreed that the two parties shall intermingle, and some who drove before will return in the boat.

Who, then, are to fill their places ?

The elders are already seating themselves within the ample, comfortable, front seat, Mrs Dent taking more than her share, Lady Bushe less.

Sir John offers the opposite side all round, and finally gets in himself.

A small Dent is sadly forced in beside him. The poor child had come in the dickey behind with Edwin, but no such luck is in store for her going back.

Edwin is off to the river, and two of the Wyatt satellites have filled the dickey.

No, one has dismounted again, preferring the seat beside the coachman ; for there is more room there, and he is fat.

There is still a seat to dispose of.

“Any of you like to drive?” It is Dick who is speaking.

A wretched silence.

“Perhaps Miss Church——” It is Augusta Bushe who looks round with the proposal.

Nan’s grey eyes flash.

Yes, she will go. She steps hurriedly forward.

Oh, dear ! How she had been looking forward to that homeward row all through the long afternoon !

“You don’t like it,” says Dick.

“Oh, I don’t mind. I can go very well.”

“There is no need. All right, Parker. There’s lots of room in the boat.”

“Oh, we are not all going in that one boat!” screams Miss Georgie.

“Dear me! I should have driven if I had thought no one else wished it,” announces Augusta.

“You don’t mean to say that you are going to pack us all into that one boat!”—from one of the old gentlemen.

“What a lark!”—from Edwin.

Nan forms a swift resolution.

“I am going to walk,” she says. “It is only four miles by the lanes, and I have often walked farther than that at home.”

Everybody stares.

“A good idea,” says Dick. “Some of us can walk, at any rate. Come along, Eddy.”

But Eddy positively declines to come along. He is not out on a holiday for that. His flirtation with Detty is in full tide, and he has no idea of having it cut short in this way.

Besides, the fuller the boat, the better the fun. They will be hours getting home.

Dick argues with him, and sneers at him; but has to give it up, and try Hefton.

Hefton would come, but has hurt his foot. Would really like the walk, etc., etc., but clearly does not intend to take it.

Everyone knows that Hefton is the laziest little creature under the sun, so no one thinks of being angry with him.

Nan desperately appeals to the old gentleman who had expressed disapproval of their all being packed into one boat.

She feels as if, somehow or other, all this commotion is owing to some fault of hers. Augusta looks as if *she* thought so, certainly.

The old gentleman is quite a friend of Nan’s. He was one of those in the house when she came, and she has often

preferred talking with him to strangers ; sometimes she has even, innocently enough, made a cat's-paw of him. Surely he will stand her friend now. He is a retired colonel of the line, and, she thinks, ought to be able to march if he can do anything. Nan, you see, is not learned.

Will he walk with her ?

The colonel brightens up, and thinks he would rather like it.

Every one brightens, and Augusta looks almost gracious.

Dick puts the strings into Miss Dent's hands, who cheerfully accepts them. She presumes he will row.

But what is this ? They are off, and he is not in !

"Are you not coming ?" cries Hefton, with a rueful visage. He is in front of Dallie now, and has no chance of a holiday, unless Dick is there to take his oar.

"I am going to walk," says Dick.

The boat is off, and he walks after Nan and the colonel.

Nan and the colonel are out of sight of the river before they know that they have a follower.

Nan is too proud to look back. She pictures the party gaily floating off, Augusta, perchance, in *her* old place, Dick comfortable, indifferent, and thinking no more of her ? Why should she think of him ?

Accordingly she is laughing and talking merrily to the colonel, as long as the boat is in sight, and to all appearance they are making game of the weary trudge before them. There is no sign of flagging courage in either. Suddenly comes "Halloo !" from behind, the river party being well out of sight.

There is Dick, walking rather fast, but cool as ever.

The dear old colonel ! He instantly proposes waiting for him, while his little companion says not a word ; but her eyes are shining, and the walk has changed its whole aspect.

Dick comes up on her other side, while the colonel apologises for their hasty departure. "We had no idea you were coming, my dear fellow."

Dick takes the forget-me-nots out of his cousin's hand, and expresses approval of her conduct.

"It was a brave idea, Nan. After all, the walk will be far pleasanter. They are a noisy set."

"I like to see a young lady step out like that!" observes the colonel, energetically. "What is to become of our girls, I, for one, cannot imagine. They never do anything but drive, drive, drive, or dance, dance, dance; then when the ice comes they wonder how a single day's skating knocks them up. There's nothing like walking for health, happiness, and—beauty," says the old gentleman, with old-fashioned straightforwardness, and a glance at the colour in the fair maid's cheeks beside him.

Dick looks round too, and smiles, trying to catch her eye; but Nan gazes fixedly along the lane, and so he has to speak to her, ere she will turn her head.

"What do you think about it, Nan?"

"Oh, nothing. I—I don't know many girls," replies she. "Look, there they are! There they are, in the boat! How pretty it looks at that distance!"

"A great deal prettier in the distance than near at hand," observes the old gentleman, with cheerful malice,—and perhaps the others agree in their hearts.

What a delightful old gentleman he is, to be sure! He always does the very thing he is wanted to do, and never makes an ill-timed suggestion.

Dick sees honeysuckle in the hedges, and they wait whilst he tears it down. He finds a robin's nest. Nan must come up beside him, and have a look at it. Finally, he remembers that there are strawberries on a bank close by, and Nan must help to hunt for some.

The colonel thinks he will sit quietly on the stile till they return. There is no hurry. Oh, dear no! It is quite early.

In consequence the pair are away fully half-an-hour, and all the largest berries have been saved for him.

They will be late for dinner, of course.

One does not post along the roads in pleasant company; nor can people be expected to be home to a minute who go poking about banks for strawberries, and have to sit down and rest by the wayside every now and then.

Dick insists upon these rests. He is in high feather, and talks so much and so well that Nan wonders how she ever thought him silent.

The old gentleman listens and laughs good-humouredly. Very likely, innocent as he looks, he has a suspicion that he is playing gooseberry; there is no trusting these mild, absent people, they are often very wide awake indeed,—and if you happen to notice one of them plunged in the deepest abstraction, and happen at the same time to be desirous of saying or doing some of your own business unobserved, let me give you this hint—*Don't*.

But Dick and Nan are not thinking of this.

Dick sits at his cousin's feet and examines the hole he has made in her dress; for the folds have given way, and altogether it has come to a sad end.

Shall he fasten it up again? She thinks not. He informs her that it will need to go to the wash, with other general hints. Nan tells him pleasantly that he knows nothing about it.

Whither are all her fears of Dick flown? She finds herself talking to him as if she had known him all her life.

And he is listening to her, too, earnestly, and with a strange gravity upon his face, for she is telling them all about her life—her curious, simple life in the old manor-house among the hills.

Only her old grandmother with her ! And Granny is eighty-five. What then ? Yet Nan prattles on as sweetly and fearlessly as a child.

Dick does not care to move—is careless about dinner.

Thinks they have done eating enough for one day.

Is it not only now beginning to get bearable out of doors ?

This picnic was the maddest escapade that ever was, and they really can't be expected to cut short the only pleasant part of it.

Part of this is for his two acquiescing partners ; part, with more in the same strain, is issued at the head of the unoffending Detty, who, arrayed for the evening, crosses the hall as the trio trudge in.

Detty has said nothing to call forth such a tirade. She is gentle and smiling as ever, and only pauses to assure them that they may yet be in moderate time, as dinner has been postponed.

“ We were so late ourselves, and then we could not get the Dents off. Are you not very tired, Nan dear ? It was so good of you to think about it ; but I do hope the walk was not too much for you ? As for that Augusta, the way she went on coming home——” Drawing-room door opens. “ Be quick ! there's a good girl.” Exit Detty.

Nan comes down towards the middle of dinner, and finds herself far away from Dick.

The kind hostess calls down the table to reproach her for foolhardiness, while a special glass of wine is despatched immediately.

Every one asks if she is tired ?

She does not look tired, but sits very still ; talking to anyone but Dick is an effort. Her limbs ache, too—for after all, she has been on her feet one way and another for many hours, and the soft dining-room chair yields a delicious sense of repose.

She cannot go out with the others after dinner, yet dares not inhabit the recess by herself. So she takes a stool inside the great bow-window, which is open down to the ground, and by-and-by four black figures jump out of a far-off casement, and come along the terrace.

They are all lighting cigars.

Hefton proposes the shrubbery, but Dick has had enough walking, or says so, and seats himself on the steps just outside Nan's window-sill.

Happy, hoped-for moment!

He is not now in a talking vein, and neither is she.

Assured of her not disliking it, he puffs away, leaning his head against the stone mullion, and looking down on the little figure inside.

She rests her cheek on her hand, doing nothing, and Dick thinks her a perfect picture of repose.

Presently comes his mother's voice, making his picture start, and turn her head.

"Nan, my dear, are you inclined to give us a little music?"

"Don't go," says Dick.

"I cannot refuse."

"Get some of the others to-night, mother. Nan has had a tremendous walk."

"My *dear* child, I had *quite* forgotten. Of course you must not *think* of moving. Poor dear! can you not find a more comfortable chair? Come, lie down on this sofa. No one will notice. Poor thing!"

Nan moves irresolutely.

It is hard on her, but she must, unless she would have it thought—have it suspected—what she would not for worlds and worlds.

Dick saves her again.

"How can you sit stuffing in that hot room, mother? It ought to make you faint. Nan had much better stay

where she is. Don't you go, Nan. You'll hear the nightingales directly."

Nan never hears nightingales in the north. Perhaps her pleasure in them is a little enhanced by circumstances in the present instance, but it must be genuine ; for immediately the others come up, Detty accosts her with, "Oh, Nan, I am so glad you are here ! I was afraid you were missing the nightingales. If you *can* come down to the wood, you will see glow-worms too. They are just beginning to peep out. Don't come if you would rather not."

"Oh, yes, come," says Dick. Apparently he does not object to her moving now.

The others are all standing round upon the terrace, and Miss Bushe looks sarcastic.

"I suppose Miss Church is not tired *now*," says she. Softly as the words are spoken, Miss Church understands. Her conscience is not clear. She falters. "Perhaps to-morrow night."

"To-morrow night we shall all be dancing, my dear ; but never mind, you look far too comfortable to stir."

This from Detty. Nan says no more, afraid alike of friend and foe.

The girls sit down, and the two new-comers who have spared one day from town for the country gaiety are very lively.

They arrived a few hours ago, and find the rural atmosphere superlatively charming—for the day. Nevertheless they work hard in their endeavours to induce Edie and Detty Wyatt to quit it. There are still a few weeks of the season remaining, why should they not run up for that time ?

Miss Bushe combats the idea. Why *should* they ? For her part she is tired of the racket and flurry of London life, and finds a rational existence much more to her mind.

The Ladies Ann and Harriet stare. Such sentiments

from Augusta Bushe are something new. Of Edith they quite approve. Mr Burnand is undoubtedly a good *parti*. Miss Church is an elegant girl, and they rather admire her yellow-red hair.

Altogether it is refreshing to be among a new set of people, and a good night's rest is what they have not had since Easter.

Will Nan have a good night's rest ?

Dick took her to see the glow-worms after all ; and this was how he did it.

Augusta goes to sing, and the other young ladies are a little afraid of the night dews ; so Edith escorts them indoors, and suddenly Dick slips off his seat.

“Come, Detty, I'll take you and Nan down to the bridge now.”

Detty is charmed to be asked by her brother. Nan deliberates. Dick looks at her, and smiles in that way of his. She rises, and he draws her through the window. When Augusta has finished her song, she finds that her audience is sadly diminished.

Nan comes in with a flushed face and shining eyes. Glow-worms ? Oh yes, plenty. There is no dew fallen, and their feet are quite dry.

Lady Wyatt orders them all off to bed. Every dear girl is to sleep as long as she can, and be as fresh as possible for the ball.

The Ladies Ann and Harriet are faintly amused. Ball after ball they go to, as regularly as the nights come round, and such precautions are strange in their eyes.

Dick is talking of billiards ; Dallie has flown to light everybody's candle ; and Pax Burnand is making himself agreeable to Edith's papa.

Soon the house is quiet, and Nan could wish that the nightingales were quiet too.

She must sleep with open windows ; and through them the loud, melodious, juggling trill comes almost too continuously. Her blue forget-me-nots are in water on the washing-stand, a piece of honeysuckle crammed in beside them. It was this Dick gave her, when he said that about his afternoon's amusement which is not worth repeating.

The night grows hotter instead of cooler. A low growl is heard in the distance. A swift flash sweeps into the room.

Nan, in an agony of terror, rushes along the passage to be beside her cousins ; and the three huddle together in one bed, hiding their faces, and scarce uttering a syllable, while the thunderstorm rages overhead.

Presently comes their father's voice at the door—a ghostly sound. “Are you all right, girls?”

“Yes, papa.”

“Go in and see what your cousin is about, then : I cannot make her hear.”

Laughter from within. “She is here, papa. We are all here. Is it going off?”

“Going off? Oh dear, yes ! The last was fully ten miles distant. Good-night. Your mother wanted to be sure you were all safe and sound. I have been round the rooms.”

Their fears abated, grumbles begin. The grass will be wet for the next evening, wet for the ball. Detty was wakened from her first good sleep. Nan is sure she will not sleep all night.

A gentle patter succeeds the rush of rain on the window-panes, and Nan at length departs, shuts her own window, and congratulates herself that at all events those dreadful birds are silent at last. The room is cool, bed is comfortable, she says a little prayer, and slumbers off, waking to wonder how it had been possible for her to sleep so soundly and so long.

This day is Nan's last at Wyatt Hall. Queen's Gate has faded into the dimmest and most insipid of backgrounds, and the old life in Westmoreland is gone for ever. One way or other, all will be changed for her when she returns thither.

The cousins cease not to lament her going. Miss Bushe is very cold and disdainful, and sweeps past in her dainty millinery with the slightest possible "Good morning."

Augusta is looking very well in a fresh mauve muslin, while poor extravagant Nan has exhausted her last respectable dress, and is reduced to a shabby makeshift.

She heeds it not, but has her eyes on the floor, her ears in the doorway.

Dick is very late, and Burnand is absent too. It turns out that they went off to fish at six o'clock, and two hearts sink a little at this announcement. Girls don't understand this going to fish when things are coming to a crisis between them and their lovers. Edith sits by her cousin, and both are thinking the same thoughts.

They go out together on the terrace afterwards, and sit facing the river.

Detty and Lady Ann, Augusta and Lady Harriet, come out in pairs. Horses and pony-carts are ordered, and the morning is got through somehow.

At luncheon the delinquents appear. Dick comes at once to his cousin, shows her his trophies, and leans on the back of her chair talking about them; he is going to sit down beside her when his mother despatches him to carve—and Nan thinks evil of Lady Wyatt in her heart.

So on throughout the unsatisfactory day.

It is wasted—absolutely, irrevocably wasted. Days of this sort are everyone's experience. They are days of mistakes, blunders, stupidity.

What but a blunder was it on the part of good Lady

Wyatt to order the men out of the way, in order that her girls might be brisk and sprightly for the ball?—and what but stupidity was it on the part of the men to obey?

Nan begins to look forward almost wildly to the evening.

Carefully, anxiously, does she array herself before the mirror. Her dress is all it should be this time,—be-puffed, be-flounced, be-flowered in the most approved style, yet pure, simple, and fresh as the fair wearer herself.

Detty pronounces her perfect; hair, ornaments, everything.

Detty meanwhile is gazing at herself, as she is reflected by the great glass into a hand-glass, which she holds aloft with one arm.

“Detty, I’ve not got a single pair of clean gloves.”

“There is the box; take a dozen if you like. I always take care to have a clean pair in my pocket.”

“What size are they?”

No answer.

“These will do, thanks,” says Nan. “Does Dick——”

“A hair-pin, dear, don’t you see? A big, fat one. There! That! Thanks!”

“Do Dick and Walter——”

“Oh, look here, Nan! can you put this right? I felt sure there was something wrong; that woman never does do my hair as I like it. Shall I have to take down the whole side? Ah! that’s better. Thank you—yes, that will do. You see, Nan, I have to seize the moment when she goes out of the room.” Maid re-enters, and Nan never finds out what it was she came to discover about Dick and Walter.

Dick is reading in the drawing-room when the bevy of maidens rustle in. He looks up kindly, and Edith is emboldened to ask her brother if he likes their dresses—Burnand’s eyes having already told his opinion.

“Much about the usual thing, aren’t they, Edie?”

“Don't you think Nan's pretty?”

“Much about the same, isn't it, Nan?” says cruel Dick.

On this a goddess in clouds of azure gives Mr Wyatt an encouraging smile. “Balls and ball-dresses *are* so stupid!” sighs Miss Bushe sympathisingly.

Nan's ball begins well.

Her cousins are pleased with her, and proud of her. If she had been blind, halt, or maimed, Edie and Detty would still have done their duty conscientiously; but nevertheless they are fully able to distinguish and appreciate the difference between distributing the glances of a bright-eyed favourite among eager applicants, and inflicting the hand of a soured and sorrowful dummy upon men who can hardly be persuaded to take it.

So, first, Edith leads up a fair man, and then Detty a dark one, and a little of the old Queen's Gate feeling comes over Nan as she whirls away among the dancers.

There is no crowd. The long lofty rooms would hold nearly double the number assembled. The spring in the floor is delicious.

Nan's feet fly, and for the first half-hour she can think of nothing but the delight of dancing.

It is clear that Dick is not going to dance.

He is lounging in the doorway, in the midst of a bundle of black coats, little Hefton with him.

Pax Burnand is dancing again and again with Edith, and Mr Dallie is engaged to every girl in the room.

Nan's eyes begin to turn wistfully towards that doorway, but she has not much breathing-space, for she is in great request.

Must she accept every proposal? So she supposes, Aunt Eliza's teaching being that under no circumstances can a young lady refuse to dance, unless she intends sitting down all the evening.

This being the Queen's Gate creed, Nan acts up to it.

She remembers her cousin William's wrathful invectives when he had been once, as he termed it, "thrown over," and would be loth to tempt anyone to speak so of her.

Walter has danced twice with his cousin. He did not see Nan till she was in ball-attire, when he decided at once that she was pretty, but not equal by any means to Miss Bushe.

Walter is a neat youth, infinitely more of a lady's man than his brother. He thinks Dick is too much of a swell, but consoles himself with the bad make of his brother's boots.

True to Edwin's prognostications, the fellows have also arrived, and some of them ask to be introduced to Miss Church. The red-haired girl with her ivory-like skin is one of the belles of the room.

She is a good dancer, too, and indefatigable ; but paler and paler grow Nan's cheeks.

At last she really cannot go on.

Dick has just passed into the supper-room with Georgie Dent on his arm ; and as they went by, Eddy and she were in their way. Eddy, who has been forsaken of late by Miss Henrietta, has in consequence transferred his affections ; and just as Dick was behind, he was passionately imploring his partner to go out of doors with him.

Seeing the impression she makes on the fellows increases, perhaps originally suggested Edwin's ardour.

He sticks to her. He declares, vows, and protests with unflagging earnestness that she is engaged to him.

He inveigles her into confidential seats, and detains her nearly half-an-hour at supper.

Bewildered Nan is no match for him. She is only conscious of her secret, and will work herself to death to hide it.

So she talks, and simpers, and would give anything to be rid of her tormentor. But it was too much to have Dick

overhear Edwin's folly. There he was, pressed against them in the doorway, quietly guiding his lady's steps, whilst that stupid, tiresome boy—oh, how could he do it?

Nan owns at last that she is tired.

She seats herself resolutely within the dancing-room, and as close as she can to the doorway; Dick coming in or out must not only see her, but be close beside her. She will know at least how much of this is of his seeking, how much is accidental.

Presently Edith comes floating along, and stops, panting gently, but still with not a dishevelled hair on that small, smooth head.

"Is it not delightful, Nan?"

"Very."

"Why are you not dancing?"

"I am tired, thank you."

"Tired already! I could go on all night."

"I suppose I must not expect one, then?" says Burnand, courteously. He has asked Nan before, but she was engaged. By his look she knows she may refuse him again without offending; so she does, and he is quite satisfied.

Dick is standing by the mantel-piece, spinning a top. Round him the men flock, as usual. Everybody wants to try. Loud laughter. The top falls off the shelf, rolls away among the dancers, and down come a couple. It is Miss Bushe and Captain Hackstone, the biggest man in the room.

Augusta is greatly vexed; but Dick makes such abject apologies, and looks so vexed himself, as he really is, that she must perforce forgive him. Besides, she has taken note of Mr Wyatt's behaviour during the evening, and is quite relieved by it; she had really almost begun to think, absurd as the idea was, that he was taken with that forward, flirting little creature.

So, on the ball goes. Tum-tum-tum, the ceaseless tunes

succeed each other ; and with unwearied alacrity respond the swish, rustle, and whirl of flowing robes. Going on her rounds of civility, the kind hostess lights on Nan.

She recollects that this is a stranger, and thinks that she has exhausted her partners. She is alone at this time ; for Eddy, bemoaning his fate, has been compelled to leave her, to take part in what he terms a dreadful, abominable duty-dance. His going is an utterable relief ; but still Nan is conscious that she looks rather forlorn.

However, now is her only hope. She is free at last, and Dick *may* come, for he is close at hand, speaking to no one.

She has hardly patience to answer the old lady civilly, so feverishly eager is she for that mass of black satin and lace to move out of the way.

The music has stopped, and the dancers are parading. Mrs Dent is forced aside. Now, Dick—now !

He is looking at her. He has moved.

“Miss Church,” in Georgina Dent’s sweetest tones, “Captain Hackstone wishes to be introduced.”

Miss Church mechanically rises, forgets to plead fatigue, forgets that she has just refused Mr Burnand and persistently put down Eddy Dent, is conscious only of a pair of stern, grave eyes fixed upon her, and will not have Dick think she declines on his account. The moment has passed, and her hand is within Captain Hackstone’s arm.

Oh, unkind Georgina ! And unkinde, unkindest Dick !

So she waltzes with Captain Hackstone, and trails through a weary Lancers with old Sir John Bushe, who is under the impression all the time that it is a quadrille which has miscarried—and it is getting far into the morning, and the ball is nearly over.

The flowers in her bosom are not more wan and woe-begone than she.

“Why, Nan, I thought all your London dissipation would have carried you through one country ball!” cries Detty, looking as bright as a lark.

“Is the carriage come, Detty?”

“Papa and mamma went, you know, ages ago. The Bushes are just going now, and Edith with them. I rather think (laughing) that Mr Burnand is on the box. I asked particularly for you to stay, for I knew you could not be spared. We shall go as soon as the carriage comes back. We have only one out to go home in, you know. What is it to be, Edwin?”

“Sir Roger. I say, Miss Detty, you have quite forsaken me; let us have this together.”

One more chance for Nan.

Dick can go through Sir Roger, and perhaps he will, with her; at all events there will be one other quarter of an hour, in which, hope against hope, something *may* turn up.

She looks all around. No Dick.

“Oh, there will be enough without me,” to Walter.

“See if you cannot get someone else,” to a member of the fraternity of fellows.

Where is Dick? The dance has begun. The first person who comes forward is her cousin, and then Nan sees that he is heading the line with old Mrs Dent. She has gained nothing, and is the only person sitting down in the room.

The carriage is at the door ere they have done dancing, and Detty, radiant as ever, hurries her off to the cloak-room.

“Such fun, Nan! Why, it is broad daylight! I don’t want to go home at all. Walter, go and find Augusta. Oh, here she is with Dick! Mind you give us another ball soon, Eddy.”

“Do come back to-morrow night, and let us have it over again,” pleads Eddy, his head in at the carriage-

window. "I say, I wish you would. I'll come over and ask you."

"Are they both going outside?" inquires Detty, indicating her brothers.

"Here, Walter, you get in," suggests young Dent.

"Then where is Dallie?" inquires Walter.

"He sleeps here to-night, you know. Hefton went with the last lot, and so did that other one. I say, Walter, do stay and sleep on my sofa. Do, there's a good fellow."

Walter, however, is not tempted, and the carriage rolls off among the poppy-fields in the cool morning light.

Augusta and Detty prate without ceasing, while Walter keeps up a hum of bygone waltzes.

Augusta is much concerned that Miss Church did not seem to enjoy herself, she looked so exhausted that every one noticed it. It was a pity she stayed so late; she supposed she was not accustomed to balls.

Miss Blisset awakened out of her sleep by the third roll of wheels under her window, thinks how happy they all are, and almost wishes they would not talk about it, as she knows they will, the whole of that day and the next.

Hot soup follows the girls to their rooms. Detty, Nan and Augusta find Edith and Lady Ann still up, but Lady Ann is yawning, and takes her departure almost immediately. She and her sister have had their own friends at the ball, and been brought home by some of them. They protest that they have greatly enjoyed themselves, and are a thousand times more fatigued than they have been at any ball in town this season. One does dance so in the country, it is quite delightful.

Edith has had her soup, and there is no possible reason why she should not plait up her hair, and get into bed, but she prefers to sit dallying with her brushes, and looks as smiling and wideawake as possible.

“Well, madam,” says her sister, lovingly, “I presume *you* have enjoyed yourself?”

So it appears. Edith has enjoyed herself immensely, hopes that Augusta has, and Nan likewise?

Of course they have, both of them. Nan takes down her hair, drawing off the little gossamer web of a net, and making a pile of frizettes, flowers, and hair-pins on the table.

They take their soup, and Augusta moves off smiling and serene.

Nan waits a few minutes longer, to see if the sisters have anything to say, any sort of indirect consolation to administer.

They have not; no thought of her and Dick has ever entered their minds.

“Good-night, Edie.”

“Good-*morning*, Nan.”

“Do get into bed now,” says Detty, with authority. “Nan has to think of that horrid journey to-morrow. Nan, do go, there’s a dear. She won’t be quiet till you do, and you ought to think of yourself too,” adjures Miss Detty, with unprecedented prudence.

Yes, Nan has her journey, and she knows that her trunk has to be packed besides.

Little would she have cared for that, if—ah well! it is the last drop in her cup now.

She gathers up her fan, gloves, and flowers, and departs. Softly going along the gallery, her step makes no sound, and her fingers are on the door-handle of her own room.

Suddenly the opposite door opens—she looks round—there is Dick.

Not a sound in the great house save the ticking of the tall clock in the passage, loudly telling how the time wears on.

Dick is going to have a pipe. He has put on a rough smoking-coat, which contrasts oddly with his shining nether

garments, and is hurrying off to join his friends, when he thus comes face to face with his cousin.

He stands still.

She stands still.

Must she, must she open the door, and when she shuts it after her, close also her last glimpse of hope? Yes, if Dick makes no sign.

She opens the door. Dick steps up hurriedly.

“May I keep you for a minute?”

Her arm falls by her side.

“Come into the schoolroom.”

“Yes, wait a minute.”

Into her chamber she steps, flings down the rubbish on the bed, passes a comb through her tails of twisted hair, and goes after him.

Dick is standing by the window, with his knee on the ledge, his hands in his pockets, and his forehead pressed against the panes.

The clock says half-past four, and the birds are in full chorus outside.

Ghostly looks the schoolroom at this hour. There is Miss Blisset's work-basket gaping open on the table, and the book with which she solaced her lonely evening. There is the piano, whose voice never ceases by day, closed, silent. There is the back-board on which some little figure reclines perpetually, empty, and tilted up against the wall. The very maps and globes have an air of undisturbed repose, and the books, even the books nestle tranquilly together on the shelves.

All sense of weariness has left Nan now.

She comes up to Dick in her crumpled ball-dress, with her flowing fleece of hair, and shining ornaments, a strange vision in this grim, early light.

She is all in a tumult, but still she has an eye to see how nice *he* looks. One glance suffices to take him in from head

to foot ; no collar, the red, burnt neck showing against the white shirt, the rough coat and the sleek, black trousers ; Dick never looked to greater advantage, while she—but no matter, he turns round and draws his knee off the ledge.

Then he offers her a seat, which she mutely disregards, and there is a pause, during which they eye each other awkwardly.

How on earth is he to begin ? Nan has the best of it at the outset, and that is something. He has sought the interview, and speak he must, seeing that she is only there in compliance with his request. At last he makes the plunge.

“Nan, I want to ask you a question !”

“Yes ?”

“What made you go on so, to-night ?”

Go on so ! Go on how ? What does he mean ? What has she done ? After all, is there to be nothing but this ? Has she been dreaming of a love-tale, and is she to have nothing but a lecture ?

Mortifying, miserable thought ! Wretched Nan ! She strings herself up, and answers slowly and proudly, “I don’t know what you mean.”

“You don’t know ? Oh ! Perhaps I should not have spoken. I thought you might, that was all,” says Mr Wyatt, with freezing politeness. “I see I was mistaken.”

No answer.

“I need not detain you, then. Pray excuse me,” says Dick, with his best bow.

An answering bow, a quiver of the lip, she sweeps away.

The room is blocked somehow, or Nan does not see clearly, and her dress is caught in a garden chair. It rends—she tears it off ; it rends further but still holds on—she stoops her head, and Dick sees the tears running down her face.

In a moment he is by her side.

"I can't help it," sobs the poor child, struggling for breath and crimson with shame. "I am so—so tired. Let me go."

"You must not go yet," says Dick, in her ear. "Nan, don't you know that this is *everything* to me? I am no boy to be able to fall in and out of love every second day. Come here. Sit down. Dear," very softly, "you are not afraid of me?"

Afraid? No. But she is so ashamed, she is so weak, so helpless. Will she ever dare to look him in the face again?

Yet his arm is round her waist, and one of her little shoulders is pressed against his rough coat. She must master herself and explain if she can, or get away if she can't. Yet she can do nothing but cry. The anxieties, heart-sinkings, turning-points of that most miserable night have been too much for her at last.

Dick attacks, questions, pets and coaxes, but she is dumb.

"You sha'n't get away now, I will not let you," says he, quietly. "You must say something, or I shall have to say it for you. Speak, Nan."

She lifts her face to speak, and Dick clasps the little, lovely face to his bosom.

And what has it all been about then? Absolutely nothing.

He had spoken to her, and she had not heard, and she had danced though he had not asked her, or some such finely-drawn nonsense.

The right is on her side, and Nan knows it is, but she cannot claim it. There is a lump in her throat, so that she cannot utter a syllable.

And he looks at her, and a great sense of his love, and his triumph, and his happiness comes over him. Why, Dick, what a heart you have! What hidden wells lie there, unknown and undreamed of, simply because they have never been probed before!

Let them spring up fearlessly now, and unchecked ; the little north-country girl with the magic of her bright, loving, contented spirit has broken the spell. And she will be a happy woman, and you have won a treasure. God bless you both !

Six hours later, and breakfast is going slowly on. One by one the stragglers have dropped in : Miss Blisset has begun her daily round two hours ago ; and at last comes down Miss Nan Church, latest of all, looking as demure as if she had been teaching a Sunday class the night before, and had had a bowl of bread-and-milk for supper after it.

She takes the vacant seat, and finds it is directly opposite Dick.

He says " Good morning " in ceremonious accents, and then gives her a look over his coffee-cup that settles her for the time being.

Some one asks about her train as a carriage has to be ordered ; Lady Wyatt remembers to offer her maid, and the Ladies Ann and Harriet will be charmed if Miss Church will accept their escort for as far as they can travel together.

It is very perplexing.

Dick has laughed to scorn the idea of her going, and given his solemn assurance that he will make it all straight ; yet now he goes unconcernedly on with his cold salmon, and she even sees a smile in his eyes, when she has to make her vague, unsatisfactory answers.

No sooner, however, does the old colonel, still her constant friend, quit Nan's side than Dick rises, walks round the table, and seats himself in the vacant chair.

Can he have sent up that red rose she wears in her bosom ? Can he now, as he turns towards her, pretending to admire it, be speaking of something quite different, something known only to their two selves ?

So it is ; he is telling Nan not to mind, it will be all over in half-an-hour ; and then he asks her to go and wait in the drawing-room, while he tells the governor.

He is going now ; and accordingly, he quits the room ; and Miss Bushe again experiences a sensation of relief. Mr Wyatt is nothing to her, of course ; but she would be sorry to see him entangled in any absurd way. As Miss Church goes away in the afternoon, she has no objection to take her own departure also, especially as they will meet the Wyatts next week at Preddingtram, and then who can tell what may happen ?

Edith and Detty have so many departing guests to attend to that Nan is able to escape from them better than she could have hoped, and the drawing-room is empty at this hour.

She seizes her opportunity and steals in thither, taking refuge among the music-books.

Of course her music is mislaid, and she can affect to be hunting it out—but what a wretchedly uncomfortable half-hour it is ! Everybody going in and out troubles her ; and what if anyone should stay ! Oh ! why did Dick put her there ? And why is he so long in coming ?

Every minute is precious. She is shaking all over. And then the party of girls come along the terrace, and stroll off towards the garden—and at last he comes.

A whisper, a pause, something else, and she goes off with him like a tame dove.

Well, of course it is all right. No one who knows Lord and Lady Wyatt would doubt that. Nan escapes at last, with half the life kissed and pressed out of her, and finds the maid raging up and down in her bedroom, and stuffing all her best garments maliciously into the bottom of the trunk, in revenge for having been kept waiting.

Miss Church must excuse her, my lady sent her there

an hour ago, and she could not possibly tell what Miss Church would wish to have left out. She begs pardon, but there is so little time.

The woman is gently dismissed ; Miss Church does not travel that day.

Nan takes her hat, and goes down just as she is, for Dick is waiting.

Passing out at the garden door, they meet the whole troop of men and maidens point-blank, and for once in his life Dick *does* blush.

Edith steps forward. "Nan, dear, you have been looking for us? We went down the long path to get some strawberries. Are you going? Mind you keep to the right ; they are only ripe under the netting."

"All right—I'll take her," says Dick, in unmistakable accents, and no one dares to say a word.

They go off, away from the strawberry-bed, in view of the whole party, and then a smothered guffaw from little Hefton shows that the secret is out. He knows, of course.

Dick told him, the first thing in the morning, and it was he who took them all off to the garden, to leave the field clear for his friend.

"Well, Miss Wyatt?"

Edith looks as if she had seen a ghost.

"I really had no idea of that," whispers Lady Ann, charmingly interested. "You sly things, how well you have kept it to yourselves!"

Edith is not sure whether she has kept it or not, is unable to answer Lord Hefton, feels as if the ground were rising under her feet. Dick and Nan! Is it possible? Is it *possible*?

And when at last she lifts her eyes, it is to find two other eyes fastened upon them.

For Pax Burnand has caught fire ; and so, when Dick

and Nan come back—do not ask to know how soon that was—they find that another pair have mated likewise ; and poor Lord Wyatt never thinks of the day after a ball for the rest of his life, without a shudder.

Nobody responds to Eddy Dent's invitation, though the poor lad has ridden over in the heat of the day to give it.

They are far happier at home. When the last carriage with the Bushes in it rolls from the door, every one feels relieved. Augusta is so odd and tired. And does she always have a headache after a ball ?

At any rate they are all now of one heart and one mind.

After dinner they have strawberries-and-cream on the lawn. Nan has had her sleep out in the afternoon, and has written her letter, and the whole house knows about it. Dick lies at her feet, and the nightingales are singing in the wood below.