

course so as to avoid rocks and quicksands. A philosopher might begin to take the charge of education at a time when the vulgar think it is finished. Many persons are capable of instructing children in the ordinary method; there are few, very few, who are capable of forming men.

## VIOLET'S VALENTINE.

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### CHAPTER I.

It was Valentine's-day. The weather was singularly bright and fine. The sun shone gayly out, and the soft west wind played with countless long ringlets gilded by "Aqua Mira," or "Aura Coma," or exported from the shores of the Baltic or the banks of the Danube; and it sported, too, with Violet Green's long jetty curls, Nature's own gift.

Violet was a blue-eyed brunette, arch, piquante, and very pretty. She was in high spirits on this very Valentine's-day, for the post had brought her, among a number of gaudy valentines—some very expensive, and some very trumpery—one which delighted her much.

But before we describe the valentine in question, we must say who Violet was, where she lived, and under what circumstances she received this welcome tribute.

Valentine's-day, then, found Violet at Brighton. Brighton was full to an overflow of rich, gay, and fashionable people. It was the height of the season, and the house in which she lived with her father, her stepmother, and her half-sister, Almeria Ann, was one of the largest and handsomest on the Marine-parade.

Violet's father was a very wealthy stockbroker, of the name of Green. He had recently become more wealthy still, through the death of an uncle, a banker, of the name of Bubbell, who had left his whole fortune to his nephew, on condition that he added the name of Bubbell to his own, and became Mr. Green Bubbell.

Mrs. Green, a vulgar *parvenue*, and her daughter, Almeria Ann—a stuck-up, fast young lady, or "Girl of the Period"—were much annoyed at this rather ludicrous and pun-able addition to their name; but they loved money too well to sacrifice it for a name, and give up substance for sound. Violet, who dearly loved her father, saw that he was pleased, and tried to be so too.

Violet, as we have said, was a brunette, with the blackest hair, the bluest eyes, with jetty eyebrows and eyelashes, the sweetest face, and the prettiest little sylph-like form in the world. A clear carnation animated her soft brown skin, and the red of her lips was that of the berry of the mountain ash, while her teeth were unrivalled for their brilliancy and beauty.

Violet was three and twenty, Almeria Ann nineteen. She was like her mother, tall, and inclined to be very fat. Her hair was originally of rather a dull flaxen; but the "Girl of the Period" can turn any coloured hair to gold, or rather to brass, and Almeria Ann had succeeded, with the aid of "Aqua Mira," in making her abundant and rather coarse tresses look exactly like a quantity of brass wire.

This hair she wore combed off her forehead, and hanging loose down her back, surmounted by an enormous chignon to match.

She had dyed her light eyebrows and eyelashes jet black, painted her large cheeks and lips of the brightest rose and cerise, and set off these showy but artificial beauties by everything most exaggerated and absurd in hats and costumes of the period.

Mrs. Green Bubbell and Almeria Ann looked down on Violet, who had nothing fast or "loud" about her, but was just what English girls used to be before masculine tastes and manly sports, chignons, paint, hair-dyes, Hessian boots, walking-sticks, cigarettes, and costumes combined to form the "Girl of the Period."

The Green Bubbells were very early risers. Mrs. Green Bubbell and Almeria Ann generally rode on horseback before breakfast.

Violet was fond of riding; but they never asked her to accompany them, and she preferred going out in the afternoon with her father. She did not like riding to cover, and following the hounds, as her stepmother and half-sister did.

Violet was essentially feminine, and she shuddered at all the foxes' brushes which had been presented to Almeria, and of which that fast young lady was so proud.

Almeria and her mother had just come down, both of them in the most exaggerated equestrian attire, when the young lady, looking out from the bay-window, said—

"Yoicks! how the postman is cutting about! And, by Jove, at No. 9 he's delivered no end of valentines; so he has at No. 10! I do believe he's coming here, ma! Now, I'd bet a pony to a fiver he's got half a dozen valentines for Violet!"

"Why not for yourself, Almeria?" said Violet, turning a little pale, as the postman's knock resounded through the house—a knock that is answered by every young heart.

"Oh!" replied Almeria, "because valentines are so slow and spoony!"

"And so vulgar!" added Mrs. Green Bubbell; "they are banished from 'igh life now, and are abandoned to the *kennel*" (she meant the *canaille*.) "It wasn't so when I was a girl; then they were quite the rage, and no girl ever had so many as I had."

"Even now," said Violet, "there are very elegant valentines, and the day gives an opportunity and excuse for addressing a person whom you admire, but do not know."

The footman here came in, looking as grave as a judge, although, on a richly-embossed silver waiter, were about a dozen valentines.

Several of them were directed to Miss Violet Green Bubbell, and bore the London postmark; two were for Mrs. Green Bubbell; and one, with the Brighton mark, was directed "Miss Green Bubbell."

Now Violet, who had been from home on a visit, had only arrived at Brighton the day before, and knew nobody there; but Almeria had been to several balls and parties.

The valentine directed "Miss Green Bubbell" had a coronet on its seal. Almeria and her mother crimsoned. A sporting peer—Lord St. Leger—had paid her some attention.

"Although you are by rights Miss Green Bubbell, Willet," said madam, "being so much older than my Almy, yet, as you are a stranger in Brighton, and Almy has danced and 'unted several times with Lord St. Leger, I think there can be no doubt this valentine is meant for her."

"But," said Violet, with an arch smile, "would Lord St. Leger do anything that deserved the epithet, 'slow and spoony?'"

"No," said Almeria, taking the valentine from her mother's hand; "if he did it, it's the right sort of thing."

She opened it.

It was in a white card-board box, and its fragrance betrayed that it was fresh from Rimmel's; all the sweetest violets of spring seemed to have lent their fragrance to the paper.

It was one of Rimmel's *chefs d'œuvre*. A beautiful wreath of highly-scented, embossed violets surrounded a pair of miniature turtle-doves. A beautiful gold chain, of exquisite workmanship, was round their necks, and from their beaks hung a ring—a simple band of gold, with a beautiful violet, formed of a solid amethyst, and with a brilliant for its centre.

"Oh, 'ow 'ansome! 'Ow helegant of my lord! Put the chain on, Halmeriar, houtside your 'abit, and put the ring on your finger. My lord will put another there soon."

"Hang it, 'mar!" said Almeria, "I can't get it on any of my fingers—not even the little one! And, by Jove!" she added, examining it more closely, "I don't think it's for me after all, for inside the ring I see engraved 'For Violet.' Well, it's more in her style than mine; so take it, Violet! And, ma, let's see what's made your valentines, and then for a canter on the downs!"

Mrs. Green Bubbell was in a very ill humour by this time, and her valentines did not improve her temper. One was a vulgar caricature of a very fat woman in a riding-habit, with top boots and a bell-crowned hat. Beneath was written—

"Set a beggar on horseback, and surely you know,  
That straight to Old Nick that bold beggar will go."

Now no one knew exactly what Mrs. Green Bubbell had been. Some said an orange girl, some that she had sold lucifers, while some vowed that she had been a *bonâ fide* beggar.

The other valentine addressed to her represented a bald, fat old woman at her toilet, surrounded by cosmetics, chignons, false plaits, and false curls. Her maid was lacing her stays, and beneath the hideous caricature was written—

"Do what you will, my antiquated charmer,  
You'll still remind us of a hog in armour."

"What low, vulgar things them valentines is!" said Mrs. Green Bubbell. "I'm ashamed of having suspected a peer of the realm of bemoaning himself to send one! Come, Halmeriar, I hear our 'osses pawing the ground! Let's leave Willet to the enjoyment of her valentines."

And away waddled the fat Amazon, followed by her fast daughter.

When they were gone Violet took up her beautiful valentine, examined it, kissed it, hung the ring on the delicate Venetian gold chain, and hid both in her bosom. She then opened her other valentines; they were all more or less pretty, fragrant, and containing stereotyped declarations of passionate love; but they only provoked a smile, while on that which contained the ring and chain Violet bestowed some tears and a good many kisses.

### CHAPTER II.

VIOLET was only three years old when her father married a second time, and gave her a stepmother. Of course, a very vain, ambitious, passionate woman like Mrs. Green Bubbell was not likely to be a very kind or gentle stepmother to poor little Violet; but it was not

till Almeria Ann grew up to womanhood that the very great difference in the treatment of her daughter and her stepdaughter became notorious. She had often tried to make Violet more of a humble companion than a sister to the imperious little Almeria; but when Violet was twelve years old, in order to conceal from the world and from her husband the difference she could not but make in her treatment of the two girls, she persuaded Mr. Green Bubbell to send Violet, who was a delicate child, to a boarding-school in Kensington—a very good one it proved to be, and where several noblemen and gentlemen of distinction had placed their daughters. This step was, although certainly not prompted by affection, the most advantageous possible for pale, fragile little Violet.

Violet had the sweetest of tempers, the kindest of hearts, and the brightest of intellects; she was high-minded, generous, and devoted in the extreme, and these qualities, which at home were ignored, if not crushed, by all but her father, made her the most popular girl at Park House.

Among the young ladies who loved and clung to Violet with the admiring fondness so beautiful in early girlhood was a wild, lovely, passionate young creature of nearly the same age as Violet—Lady Christabel Courtenay, daughter of the Earl of Templeville, by his first wife.

He had married a second time, like Mr. Green Bubbell, and the beautiful Christabel, who had been petted and spoiled to excess by her own mother, became insupportable to the new countess, and was sent to Park House to complete her education.

The similarity of their positions—both having lost their own mothers, and both having, alas! stepmothers, in the worst acceptation of the term—drew the two young girls' hearts together.

Violet's influence over the beautiful but petulant and unmanageable Lady Christabel was unbounded. From having been the wildest and naughtiest girl in the school, Lady Christabel became one of the most tractable.

Her stepmother, the Countess of Templeville, having, when Christabel had been some years at Park House, been ordered to the south of France for an affection of the lungs, the earl, whose duties—for he was in office—prevented his accompanying her, sent for Lady Christabel to come home to spend the Christmas holidays.

Lady Christabel persuaded her father to allow her to invite her dear Violet to accompany her.

Violet, who was to have spent her holidays at Park House—her stepmother still pretending that the air of Berkshire, where their own seat was, disagreed with her—obtained her father's permission to accept Lady Christabel's invitation, and accompany her beautiful young friend to Templeville Castle, not far from Ilfracombe, Devonshire.

Nothing could exceed the happiness of the new "Helena and Hermia" during the six weeks, which to Violet seemed a blissful dream.

Lord Templeville, who had heard from the Misses Martinet—the lady principals of Park House—how invaluable had been Violet's influence over the volatile Lady Christabel, and who himself perceived the wondrous change for the better in the conduct and temper of the child he secretly idolized—secretly, for his new countess was a jealous tyrant—could not make too much of the gentle Violet.

Violet and Lady Christabel were, as we have said, nearly of an age—that is to say, Violet was not quite a year older than her brilliant friend; but any one who did not know their ages would have imagined Violet to have been several years Christabel's senior.

Lady Christabel was a brilliant and perfect beauty, with large, sparkling hazel eyes, a profusion of golden hair, a complexion of lilies and roses, exquisite features, a form of symmetry, rather tall, and a perfect Nourmahal for the endless variety of charms in her ever-changing mood, manner, and expression of face.

The earl had a very large party staying at Templeville. The shooting there was excellent, and the earl and Lord Belmont, his eldest son, entered fully into all the sports so dear to the English aristocracy.

The Honourable Everard Courtenay, the younger son, was prevented by his very delicate health from joining in these sports. He had been intended for the Church, and for the excellent family living of Templeville; but in consequence of a fall in his infancy—a fall which his nurse had never revealed—a weakness of the spine became apparent when he was about eighteen. The best doctors of the age, after a consultation, declared that nothing could prevent his being a cripple but his lying on a reclining-board, without rising, for at least two years.

It was just as he was to have matriculated at Oxford that this doom was pronounced, and Everard was confined to this reclining-board at the time of Violet's visit to Templeville Castle.

Christabel, who had a very kind heart, doted on her afflicted brother, and very often Violet and herself spent the greater part of a wet or snowy day in the sufferer's own sitting-room.

Everard, like most of those physically afflicted, was

endowed with great intellectual powers, and with every virtue.

He was very pale and much attenuated. He had a very full, massive brow, large dark eyes, and finely-chiselled features; but his temples and cheeks were sunken, his eyes hollow, his chin sharp, and his fingers were painfully long, and of a primrose hue.

He was very fond of his joyous, brilliant sister, Christabel, and ere long the presence of Violet, her conversation, her singing, and her reading, gave to his enforced seclusion a mystic enchantment, and the landscape he saw from his reclining-board through the Gothic windows of his room was bathed for him in the golden mists and purple light of love.

At Violet's approach a crimson flush would suffuse the deadly pallor of Everard's wan face, and the touch of her gentle hand would make him tremble with ecstasy.

But Violet was much too meek and modest to imagine too readily that she was the cause of the flush on Everard's cheek. Indeed, as her eyes were generally downcast, and seldom met his, she was not always aware of the ardent gaze he fixed upon her.

As for Lady Christabel she was now generally too much taken up with her own inner life to notice the evidences of a wondrous change in her brother, and, sooth to say, in her friend Violet too.

Among the guests at Templeville was Captain Manners—"Lovely Manners," as he was called—one of the "fastest of the fast," to use the vulgar expression in vogue, and he had made a decided impression on Christabel's heart.

Very extravagant, witty, dissipated, and sarcastic was this young Merivale Manners. He was a captain in the Guards. At four and twenty he had run through one good fortune, and had come into another, which he was spending in the same way; but he was the glass of fashion and the mould of form all the same. He had given his name to an overcoat, a tie, and a carriage. He had broken many hearts and blighted many lives; and even Lord Belmont, Lady Christabel's eldest brother, though only a rough sporting man, warned his sister against Manners, and told her, if she wished to get married, Biluster would make her an excellent husband.

Biluster was a very wealthy sporting viscount, with a magenta-coloured face and bushy black whiskers. He had confided to his friend, Lord Belmont, his admiration for Lady Christabel.

Love is a very egotistical little deity. Lady Christabel was so much taken up with her own passion that she was hardly aware of the impression she was making on the viscount; and when, during the Christmas vacation at Templeville, he made his proposal to her, he was immediately rejected.

Lord Belmont was very angry, and tried to make his father insist on Christabel's altering her decision. The earl, who was a very matter-of-fact man, said he thought Christabel much too young to marry at present, and that he highly approved of her rejection of Lord Biluster.

"She was," he added, "only a school-girl, and he meant to send her back to Park House for another year."

The Christmas vacation came to a close, and the two girls were obliged to quit the feudal grandeur, the modern elegance, the exquisite comfort of Templeville Castle—the liberty, the luxury, the glorious scenery, and all the delights of a spot bathed for both in the fairy-like enchantment of first sweet, unacknowledged love—for Park House, with its early hours, strict rules, plain one o'clock dinners, weak tea, monotonous and now, alas! uninteresting studies, and walks two and two in file along the alleys of Kensington Gardens or Hyde Park, with two of the Misses Martinet in the van, and two in the rear.

Lady Christabel, very emotional and impassioned, could not long keep her secret from her bosom friend. Captain Manners had never owned that he loved her; but she told Violet she was certain that he did, and she had a little hoard of mottoes, out of cracker *bonbons* which he had given her, and a dead flower, which she watered with her tears, and a sprig of myrtle, which was not quite dead, and which she hoped to revive and rear.

The mines of Golconda contain no gems so precious as such relics as these to a loving girl.

Violet's own heart was fuller even than Christabel's, and of a deeper, stronger, more passionate love; but she said nothing. She knew by this time that she adored Everard Courtenay; but in her sweet humility, her modest self-depreciation, she could not believe it possible that he, the thoughtful, gifted, high-minded Everard, a poet, a scholar, and the son of so proud a peer, had ever even thought of the pale, quiet daughter of Mr. Green Bubbell.

### CHAPTER III.

At the expiration of another year, spent entirely at Park House, the friends parted.

Lord Templeville, who was very fond of yachting was gone in his beautiful new yacht, the Christabel, to Sicily, where the countess was staying, and he had resolved to take Christabel with him.

Violet went home to Bubbell Hall; but her step-mother could not endure her presence there, and proposed to her father to give her the great advantage of a twelvemonth at a finishing-school in Paris.

Green Bubbell, who was a "peace-at-any-price man," agreed, and Violet was happier anywhere than at home.

Lady Christabel and Violet kept up a correspondence, which at first was well sustained on both sides; but ere long Captain Merivale Manners reappeared on the stage, or rather the deck of her father's yacht, for he was cruising with a friend, also bound for Sicily, and when love had possession of the maiden's heart friendship was for a time neglected and forgotten.

One day, while walking in the formal garden of her *maison d'éducation*, Violet received a letter from Lady Christabel, written in a tumult of joy, announcing that her father had at length consented to her union with Captain Merivale Manners, and that the marriage was to take place at once.

Lady Christabel expressed great regret that her dearest friend could not be present at the wedding, but hoped, when she was settled in a home of her own, that they should spend a long and happy time together.

Violet heard no more from the beautiful and happy bride for a long time, and she did not know whether she was traveling abroad, or settled with her beloved in "a cottage of gentility." Lady Christabel had been an eloquent advocate of "love in a cottage," when Merivale Manners had run through his two fortunes.

Violet felt very anxious to hear of her friend's welfare, when, just as she was about to return to Bubbell Hall, one of her English schoolfellows at Madame L'Estrange's—a girl whose mother was one of the *élite* of the British world of fashion—received a letter full of *on dits* of the *beau monde*.

Among other tit-bits of scandal, it was reported that Lady Christabel Manners, who had married for love, had found out her mistake before the end of the honeymoon, at the expiration of which time there was no more honey, but, if report said true, plenty of stings, and even *war*; that Merivale, like most gay men, was a tyrant and a brute, and everyone wondered how the spoilt beauty, Lady Christabel, could put up with his private ill-usage and public neglect.

Violet wept bitterly when she heard the sad result of her dear friend's imprudent choice. She had never liked Merivale Manners. She thought, in spite of all his playful urbanity of manner, and his pretended frankness and contempt of danger, that he was both sly, cruel, and cowardly. She had seen him by accident, for he had no idea that she was at hand, tie up and cruelly beat and kick a pointer who had disobeyed him. She had never thought well of him after this. She had seen him turn pale when Lady Christabel's little lap-dog snapped at him, and she suspected that a hurt the poor little Snowdrop had received had been slyly inflicted by him in revenge.

These things had occurred at Templeville Castle, when Violet was spending the Christmas holidays there; but she had never forgotten them, and had mentioned them to Christabel, who would not believe a word against her idolized Merivale.

Violet wrote to Lady Christabel, sending her letter to Templeville Castle, to be forwarded immediately. She received no answer, and wrote again to what her schoolfellow told her she believed to be her London address.

This letter remained unacknowledged, and Violet began to fear either that Lady Christabel was ill, or that she had forgotten her early friend.

About this time Violet left her French school, and rejoined her friends at Brighton. She spent two or three days at Park House on her way home, and one morning, while walking in Kensington Gardens, she saw Everard Courtenay sitting on one of the benches.

Everard was in deep mourning; but he looked stronger than of yore. He was very agitated when Violet drew near and spoke to him. He told her he was now Lord Belmont, his poor brother having died from an accident in the hunting-field; and added that he felt more than ever lonely and desolate, having neither brother, nor sister, nor friend to comfort him.

Violet told him she was going the next day to Brighton, and at his request gave him her address; and so, when she received the precious valentine, she felt sure it came from him.

We have now brought our narrative up to the very hour we described at the opening of this tale.

### CHAPTER IV.

MR. GREEN BUBBELL drove himself over to the station to meet his daughter Violet. It was for his own sake, poor old gentleman, that he had resolved to have her again at home.

Mrs. Green Bubbell and Almeria Ann were now so entirely taken up with their plots and plans, that Mr. Green Bubbell was quite forgotten, except when he was wanted to write a cheque, which he did with a very bad grace, and many a grunt.

"I shall be so glad to have you back again, Violet," said poor old Green Bubbell; "your mother's head is quite turned, and so is Almeria Ann's. They neither

of them now think it worth while to come down to breakfast, and I should have to pour out my own tea and butter my own rolls, and help myself, only that, as the new daily governess comes at eight, and, of course can't have had much of a breakfast before starting, I have Clara, and Edith, and Morris in, and I make Miss Reed preside. You'll hardly believe that I can't get your mother or sister to sew a button or set a stitch for me; and Frizzig, their new maid, is always much too busy to be disturbed. I should be positively wretched, only Miss Reed is a very handy, obliging person, and always does any little thing I want; but now I've got you, Violet, I needn't trouble her!"

"Is Miss Reed a nice person, papa?" asked Violet.

"Oh, very. I'm sure you'll like her, and be kind to her, and that will make up to her for the very haughty manner in which Mrs. Green Bubbell and Almeria Ann treat her. But I fancy she has seen much better days. I'm not sure that she's not a daughter of that Reed who broke for three hundred thousand pounds, and shot himself; if so, she may have been in first-rate society in her young days, for he was Lord of the Treasury, and the deuce knows what besides. He let me in for a cool three thousand, and I'm glad it wasn't a great deal more!"

"Poor thing!" said Violet, "how sad for her, if she has been so well off, to be a daily governess!"

"Yes; and here above all," added her father.

"Is Miss Reed pretty?" asked Violet.

"She would be rather good-looking if she dressed better," said Mr. Green Bubbell, "but, as Almeria says, she makes a sad guy of herself. She wears her black hair in a frizzy crop, is so very thin and pale, and has weak eyes, and is so near-sighted she is obliged to wear spectacles. Then she is a sad dowdy in dress."

"How did mamma become acquainted with her?" asked Violet.

"Miss Reed answered an advertisement which your mother put in the *Times* when we were last at Bubbell Hall. She's quite a lady, and highly accomplished, and she agrees to take a small salary on condition that we found her a furnished apartment close to the Hall. So she has the two little rooms Pratt, the upper gardener, lets, and which we pay for; but she has all her meals here, and I begin to find her a very great comfort. There's a good bit of quiet fun in her; but I fancy she must be Slingsby Reed's daughter. She's seen better days, that I'm quite sure of."

"Of course mamma had a reference with her," said Violet.

"Oh! I believe so—at least, she told me so; but, as I said before, your mother and Almeria think it fashionable to fib whenever it suits them, and as I had said that I would not let your mother go to town until the children had a governess, I suspect your mother went to work in a hand-over-head way, and did not give herself much trouble about inquiries. But it is of no consequence as far as Miss Reed is concerned, for I'm certain she's a lady, and a well-conducted one too. But that's no thanks to your mother, Violet. As I said before, she's beside herself with pride and vanity, and the idea of getting Almeria married to a lord."

When Violet reached home, Miss Reed and the children were out walking, and as a storm had arisen while they were on their way back, Miss Reed had stopped at her lodging, and did not appear that evening.

The next morning Miss Reed sent a note to Mrs. Green Bubbell, saying she had caught a very bad cold through getting wet in the storm the day before, and begged to be excused attending till she was better.

"I should have been quite in a fix," said Mr. Green Bubbell, "if I hadn't you, Violet, to pour out my tea and butter my rolls, and, look, I haven't a button on my wristbands, nor at the back of my collar. You must sew them on at once, I'm wretched like this."

### CHAPTER V.

A FORTNIGHT passed, and still Miss Reed continued to be too ill to attend her pupils. The Green Bubbells' time at Brighton was up, and they set off for Bubbell Hall, Berks; but Almeria was still free, and Lord St. Leger was engaged to a rich widow. Mrs. Green Bubbell had called on Miss Reed and arranged with her that she should come to them at Bubbell Hall in a few days.

One morning, Violet, who was habitually a very early riser, was up betimes. Before any one was stirring in Bubbell Hall, she was dressed and out. It was a lovely May morning, and Violet longed to cross the heath and get into the beautiful forest.

"Thy forest, Windsor, and thy green retreats,  
At once the monarch's and the muse's seats."

As she was making her way through the shrubbery, and turning into the green lane that led to the cottage of Pratt, the gardener, she saw through the trellis work of an arbour, in which she had just sat down to rest, a tall, thin lady, dressed in deep mourning, and wearing a close bonnet and a thick veil of double crape. The lady issued from the porch of Pratt's cottage, and walked up the lane on her way to the heath and the forest.

"Of course that is Miss Reed," thought Violet; "and papa is right. She is a very ladylike person, and

walks gracefully. I will make sure that it is Miss Reed, and then I will introduce myself."

Meanwhile, Miss Reed, who had arrived the preceding evening, light as a fawn, tripped away, and was soon at the end of the lane.

Violet, seeing Jemmy Pratt, the gardener's freckled, flaxen-headed boy, riding on a gate close by, asked him the name of the lady in black, whose figure was still visible.

"What?" said the urchin, with a vacant stare, pretending not to understand, but sharp enough for all that; "what?"

"I asked you the name of that lady in black," said Violet.

"Why, her name's Miss Reed," said the boy. "She be teacher up at the Hall, she be. She knows a soight, she do, and she want to teach I; but I don't hold with so much taching, no more don't feather. I've heerd of a boy who wor t'ached so much, one o' his eyes wor bunged up wi' r'ading, and some't for all the world like a horn growed out o' the back o' his head, and he went dundery, he did. Noa, I've enough o' t'aching at the Sunday-school, and feather says so too."

Violet smiled, gave the ante-educationalist a penny, and quickened her pace; but Miss Reed was so fleet, she was in the forest before Violet, who did not like to run after her, could get near her.

When Violet at length found herself in that "mighty cathedral of leaves," she could not see Miss Reed anywhere. Violet wandered about for some time, admiring to ecstasy the patriarchs of the forest, who, unlike other patriarchs, had green heads on gray shoulders. She listened to the sweet warbling of the birds, and she gathered lovely mosses, scarce fungi, feathery ferns, and sweet wild flowers.

Presently she came close to two magnificent old thorns, whose branches were intertwined, and the nutty fragrance of whose white and pink blossoms—for it was now the merry month of May—intoxicated the senses. Under the odoriferous shade of these thorns, the trunk of a fallen tree formed a pleasant seat. Violet saw two persons sitting there side by side. One of them was Miss Reed; the other was a very tall and elegant young man. He held Miss Reed's hand in his own. Her head rested on his shoulder.

Violet's heart beat quickly, her cheeks burned, her temples throbbled. There was something in the outline of the young man which was familiar to her. She peered eagerly through the leafy screen. At that moment the stranger rose, and confronted Miss Reed. Violet then distinctly saw the massive brow, the dark eyes, the fine features, and waving dark hair of Everard Courtenay, or rather Lord Belmont; but Everard grown well, strong, restored to health, and certainly one of the noblest and most interesting-looking men she had ever seen or imagined.

Yet Violet's eyes filled with tears, and her heart sank. There was a choking sensation in her throat, and a blank wall seemed to rise before and around her, shutting out all the verdant glories of the forest, and that long green vista, at the end of which, bathed in golden mist and rosy light, was the indistinct outline of a castle in the air—a castle of which Violet, unconsciously to herself, was the architect.

"He loves Miss Reed, then," she said to herself. "And why not? He never actually spoke of love to me, nor did he, perhaps, ever guess how wildly, how madly, I loved him."

Against her will her eyes sought those two forms once more.

She saw Miss Reed weeping on Everard's shoulder. She saw him clasp her to his heart, and tear himself away from her, and then Violet's tears fell like rain.

How love and hope can glide into the innermost recesses of our breasts, and nestle or lie dormant there, and only wake and make us feel their presence when some earthquake of the heart shakes us to the centre! And then, amid the wreck of the past, the ruins of the future, and the desolation of the present, we look into those broken hearts, and discover what had been hoarded there.

"Perhaps they are privately married," thought Violet. "His manner was more that of a tender husband than of an impassioned lover, and hers was rather the confiding fondness of a wife than the coy, half-bashful love of the maiden."

Violet took herself severely to task for the almost hysterical disappointment she felt. She asked herself why she had suffered her heart to cherish thus wildly the memory of one who had never spoken of love to her; by what right she felt injured, deceived, deserted—she who for more than two years had never seen or heard of Everard Courtenay, except that brief meeting in the park, and the dear, deceptive valentine.

"Alas!" she said to herself, "poor dear Christabel, doubtless believing readily what she ardently wished, misled me. She told me I was the only person besides herself whom he liked to see in his own sitting-room; that he sent for and read every book I had perused, and was always humming to himself the airs I had sung to him; that he had stored up every flower I had given to him, and that he had caused a sprig of myrtle which I had left on his table to be planted in a pot and placed by his side; that he tended it constantly, and

called it 'Picciola,' in memory of my having read that lovely tale to him. Then even I could not be mistaken in the eloquent language of Everard's earnest eyes. Why did the colour suffuse his pale face when I entered the room? Oh, he must—he must have loved me once! Who can this Miss Reed be? I remember Christabel spoke of a companion of the countess's, who bored Everard by singing and reading badly to him. This may be that companion. Christabel said she was pretty. I am aware that I am but a white violet—as he used to call me—by the side of that 'queen rose of the rosebud garden of girls,' beautiful Christabel; but Everard often said—and with what a passionate glance and tone he said it!—that the loved were lovely. Oh, that artful companion! I wish I could remember her name. Poor Everard! he was so lonely, and so grateful for any attentions paid to him. I know he did not like her; but she has persevered, and Thackeray says that any woman, not positively old and ugly, can get any man to marry her, no matter who or what he may be, if she is but resolved and perseveres. I much fear they are married. Yet why should I fear it? What am I to him? What is he to me? Well, I have one great comfort, one real happiness to dwell upon—his memory. He is no longer a lonely cripple, confined to a couch. He is able to do what he so pined to do when I knew him of yore—to enjoy his young existence unfettered, to walk, to ride, to dance, perhaps—oh yes, of course, to dance with her. But their love, their engagement, their marriage, perhaps, is secret. He does not own it to the proud earl, and perhaps she is obliged to hide herself away, and to become a governess for a livelihood. Or the earl may know it, and have disinherited Everard. She may be obliged to work, not merely to maintain herself, but—oh, blessed privilege!—to maintain him."

Thus thinking, Violet regained her home, and stole in at a wicket-gate, and by a side door and a back staircase, up to her own room.

The breakfast-bell was ringing as she threw herself, panting and sick at heart, on her bed.

A maid-servant knocked at the door.

"Please, miss, master begs you'll come down," she said.

"Is Miss Reed come?" asked Violet.

"Yes, miss. She's pouring out master's tea and buttering his roll."

"Kitty," said Violet, "I am not well. I have a bad headache, I've been out to try to walk it off, and I'm no better. Tell papa so, with my love, and beg him to excuse me. And, Kitty, bring me a cup of tea, please."

"Yes, miss. I've just taken my missus and Miss Halmeria Hann their breakfasts up into their rooms. The packing's done, and the carriage will soon be round to take them to the station. Missus is so pleased, and as for Miss Halmeria Hann, she don't seem to know whether she stands on her 'ead or her 'eels. She's so overjoyed at going to town for the season."

"Is papa going with them?" asked Violet.

"Oh, yes, miss; but master's as cross as ever. He don't want to go to no London; but missus says go he must, and she won't stand on no refusal."

Mr. Green Bubbell came up to Violet's room to wish her good-bye. Finding her very feverish and hysterical, he advised her to go to bed again, and to send for Dr. Purkiss if she did not get better soon.

Mrs. Green Bubbell and Almeria Ann looked in at the door, and said—

"Good-bye, Violet, we're off."

Mrs. Green Bubbell and Almeria Ann had been so anxious to get to town because they had seen in the *Court Journal* that Lord St. Leger's match with the rich widow was broken off.

Violet kept her bed for several days, feeling very ill and very miserable; but she was ashamed of a passion which she now felt sure had never been reciprocated, and she resolved to conquer it. Often and often she had almost torn it from her heart when the sight of her valentine, her ring, and chain would rekindle hope.

"No one but Everard could have sent me that valentine," she would say; "and what but love could have made him send it?"

She felt much too nervous to encounter Miss Reed, and she breakfasted in her own apartment, and avoided the school-room even when she was well enough to go down stairs.

One day, however, a note was brought up to her by the school-room maid. It was from Miss Reed, and ran as follows:—

"Miss Reed would feel very grateful to Miss Green Bubbell if she would honour her with a visit this evening at Pratt's cottage. Miss Reed has something of importance to communicate to Miss Green Bubbell, and must beg to see her alone."

"I dare say she wants to own she is a married woman, and perhaps wishes to give up her situation. Well, I must go through it. When I know the worst, my poor heart will be tranquil, I hope."

It was a lovely evening when Violet walked through the park, bathed in the rosy light of the setting sun, and drew near Pratt's cottage. As she turned into the lane, she saw a gentleman, who was a good deal in

advance of her, walking in the same direction. Although she only saw his back, she knew him at a glance. It was Everard Courtenay, Lord Belmont. She saw him enter Pratt's cottage.

"There is no doubt now," she said to herself; "hope and love are at an end."

How pale was Violet as she reached the porch, and how her hand trembled as she knocked at the door! Mrs. Pratt opened it, and ushered Violet at once into the little sitting-room.

Miss Reed was sitting at a window, with her back to the door—a very thin, tall figure in black, with a bushy crop of wiry dark hair.

"Miss Green Bubbell, please, Miss Reed," said Mrs. Pratt, shutting Violet in and herself out.

As soon as the door was shut, Miss Reed started up. Violet thought she was mad, for before she turned round she twitched off and flung from her the bushy wig, and while her golden hair fell around her she rushed into Violet's arms, Violet wildly exclaiming—

"Christabel! my dear, loved, long-lost Christabel! Oh, can it indeed be you? Alas! how pale, how thin, how changed—but still my dear, dear friend!"

"Ah!" said Lady Christabel, "if I had but listened to you, Violet! You know how I loved Merivale, and you can imagine what his treatment of me must have been since it induced me to leave him, and to have driven me to this disguise and this expedient, to hide and live away from him, and be self-dependent."

"And your father and your brother—"

"Oh, he has talked over papa, but not Everard—Everard is on my side; he alone knows of my retreat. Think of papa's urging a reconciliation, when he knows Merivale intercepted all my letters, that he has often struck me, and may have even seen these scars!"

She raised some locks of her golden hair, and two deep scars became visible.

"You never had my letters, then, dearest?" said Violet.

"Never; he never let any letter reach me till he had first read it. Of course he got hold of yours, and suppressed them. I guessed he had intercepted several I wrote to you."

"Where is he now?" asked Violet, with a shudder.

"Yachting with papa. He thinks I am somewhere on the borders of the Mediterranean, and that by cruising about, and inquiring here and there, they may discover my retreat. They take it very coolly, and I am very glad they do, for all I want is to get quietly off to Canada—"

"To Canada!"

"Yes; I have an aunt married to a French nobleman there, you know, and she often invited me to go out there, but I should not like to go alone. I want you to come with me."

"Two young girls go to Canada together alone!" said Violet.

"Two married women, you mean, dearest. Surely there's no doubt that I am one, and if you are not one soon it will be your own fault."

She went to a door, opened it, and left the room, while Everard Courtenay hurried up to the astounded but delighted Violet. What he said I know not; but when Lady Christabel returned—and she was absent but a few minutes—Violet and Everard were sitting side by side on the old black horsehair sofa. One hand was clasped in his, the other was on his shoulder, and Christabel kissed her and called her sister.

\* \* \* \* \*

A year has passed away. Almeria Ann, having failed to capture Lord St. Leger, eloped with a very handsome foreigner, called Le Marquis de Montfanesse; but he, alas! turned out to be a penniless adventurer, and Mr. Green Bubbell had to maintain him.

Captain Merivale Manners was killed in a duel at Homburg, where he, while playing very high, had detected a Russian blackleg in the act of cheating.

Lady Christabel returned to her father, and soon persuaded him to sanction Everard's marriage with Violet.

Mrs. Green Bubbell was much amazed when she discovered who Miss Reed really was, and she was never weary of boasting that her girls had had a peer's daughter for their governess.

Violet's wedding-day came at last. Her affianced lover had presented her with beautiful jewels, but no ornaments she had were so dear to her as the gold chain and ring Lord Belmont—her Everard, as she still called him—had sent her; and often, when over-fine people professed to despise valentines, and to consider them vulgar and old-fashioned, she tells the story of that which Everard sent her, and describes the comfort, the hope, the happiness it brought to her sore heart and troubled spirit, and she herself begged to have her story told, and wished it to be called "VIOLET'S VALENTINE."

THE QUEEN AND MR. BRIGHT.—On the occasion of Mr. Bright's recent visit to Osborne, the Queen presented him with her "Life in the Highlands," inscribed with her own hand, and Mr. Bright, at the Queen's express desire, presented her Majesty with the recently-published volume of his speeches.