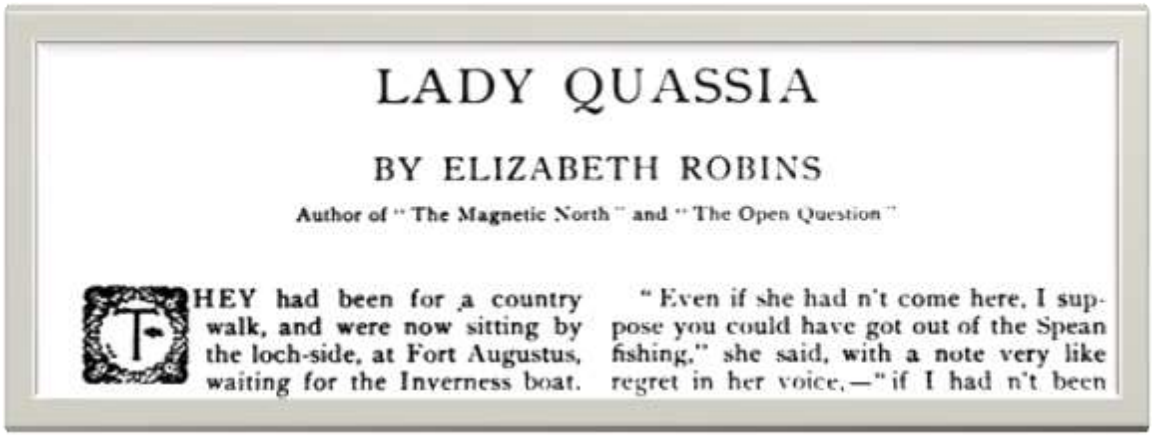
"Lady Quassia" by Elizabeth Robins Cover Page



LADY QUASSIA

BY ELIZABETH ROBINS

Author of "The Magnetic North" and "The Open Question"

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"Even if she had n't come here, I suppose you could have got out of the Spean fishing," she said, with a note very like regret in her voice,—"if I had n't been

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LADY QUASSIA

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THEY had been for a country walk, and were now sitting by the loch-side, at Fort Augustus, waiting for the Inverness boat. The other people idling on the quay stared at them. The man was aware of the inspection, and resented it; or was it the prolonged warfare with the midges that had fixed that slight scowl on the genial face of the soldier? His companion looked steadily at the far-off plume of smoke blowing out from the tall hat of the approaching steamer, not seeing it at all—seeing only the sunburnt face toward which she never turned her eyes.

The somewhat unsuitable town air of the tall young woman, wearing a Bond-street hat on her elaborately *ondulé* brown hair, contrasted strongly with the rough grace of the great tweed-clad creature beside her.

"I have the largest hands and feet in the empire," Major Mackenzie had once been heard to say. It was remembered as his sole boast, although he was one of those servants of the crown who, young as he still was, had done noteworthy things in the Far East, before the outbreak of the Boer War had changed the scene of his campaigning. Even out of Africa, that "graveyard of reputations," he had wrung distinction. It was confidently said that in the list of coronation honors would be found a knighthood for Ferrall Mackenzie of the Seventeenth. But with three more months' furlough (and the girl of his heart) in front of him, that doughty soldier seemed to think as little of battles as of honors.

"Great luck," he was saying, "that your aunt chose the place near Invergarry."

Margaret Howe did not look as if she found the luck without a flaw.

"Even if she had n't come here, I suppose you could have got out of the Spean fishing," she said, with a note very like regret in her voice,—"if I had n't been coming to Scotland, too."

"Not so easy," he answered.

"Nonsense!" She flourished in front of her a piece of bracken bronzed and gilded by rain and shine; brandished it vigorously to discourage the onslaught of the army of midges. "We were n't engaged when you promised to go fishing. Nobody would have expected you—"

"Well, you see, Dick Ainger and I had talked about it ever since we left Bombay. Poor old Dick!"

"Why 'poor old Dick'?"

"Well—have n't you noticed?"

"What?"

"Your little cousin has bowled him over."

"Not Lettice!"

He nodded.

"Did he tell you so?"

"Oh, I did n't need telling. Poor old chap!"

"I would n't be so low in my mind about it. Letty Canby 's a selfish little monster." Then, pulling herself up, "However, I suppose a man might do worse."

"Well, *ra*ther!"

"Oh, you like her."

"Yes; don't you?"

"Of course—she 's my cousin. You think she 's pretty?"

"Yes; don't you?"

"Oh, yes," said the girl.

"Dick has n't the ghost of a chance."

"How do you know?"

"She told me so herself — *laughed* about—" Ferrall Mackenzie frowned and struck out savagely with one of his great

hands at the pestiferous legions peppering the air in front of him.

"I thought Letty was very confidential with you last night, after dinner."

Not so much the words as the tone made him turn and look at her an instant with an unenlightened surprise. Then thoughtfully he prodded the ground with his stick.

"What was it Letty laughed about?" Margaret persisted coldly.

"Oh—ah—she 's got hold of some prejudice about life in the navy."

"H'm! Prefers the army, I suppose?"

This seemed no oddity to Mackenzie; but what was odd was Margaret's manner. It had occurred to him several times that she had seemed "different" since they had been in the Highlands. Had this delightful Margaret an uncomfortable temper, after all?

Now Ferrall Mackenzie was a man of courage, and could face wild tribes and tigers and even Boers with an equal mind, but his heart quailed at the thought of a faultfinding woman. The nagging wife of his beloved general had it in her puny hands to make more than one brave soldier quake and flee. To Mackenzie's discredit it must be set down that he was ever ready to lead the vanguard in that retreat.

After his first unreasoning attraction toward Margaret he had been anchored in his preference by a quite unformulated and yet governing faith in her dignity of mind. Her girlhood, parceled out among her relatives, had not been very happy, he gathered, and yet Margaret had never complained. She had made the best of her little patrimony and her social conditions, and had confronted life with a serenity that had not been without its charm to other men than himself.

"What were you doing this time last year?" Ferrall asked presently.

"Sitting by the *plage* at Deauville, pretending to be horrified at the *costumes des bains*."

"Same party?"

She nodded. "Letty, her father and mother, Miss Roper, and I. How we have chased about, summer after summer!"

"Do the Canbys always take the spinster along?"

"When they can get her."

"And can't they always?"

"No. She 's 'attached' in a kind of way to two or three other families, and they 're frightfully selfish about letting her go. You see, she does a lot for them."

"Oh, she 's got money?"

"Pretty well off, I think; but that 's not what I mean. She has a queer genius for doing things for people that they want done, and never making a fuss about it."

"What kind of things?"

"Depends on who it is. You were all admiring the new way Letty wore her hair yesterday. Georgie Roper did it for her."

"No!"

"Yes, she did. Why do you say 'no' in that tone?"

"I was only wondering why Miss Roper does n't do her own hair."

Margaret seemed to regard the observation as unworthy of notice.

"No doubt Miss Roper finds the result more creditable," he pursued, "when she expends her skill on—somebody else."

Margaret waved the bracken, and now and then flapped it in her face.

"Uncle John thinks she is the one person in the world who can read the stock-market quotations intelligently. Aunt Mary, who won't let a masseuse touch her, keeps poor Georgie busy performing the Swedish movement on her rheumatic shoulder. Miss Roper was a school friend of my mother's, you know, and the family adopted her. I don't wonder; she 's an old dear."

"She 's an old fright," laughed Ferrall.

Margaret Howe's flushed face took a deeper hue, but perhaps the midges were not wholly to blame. She lifted her head with a disdainful air.

"Talk of women caring about looks! It 's nothing—but *nothing*—to men's abject slavery to smart frocks and pretty faces."

He laughed down at her.

"Well, you can't help your pretty face, Madge; but why do you pander to the weakness of my sex with a gown like that?"

"Do you like it?" she returned, slightly mollified.

"Oh, yes, *I* like it; but that 's because it is n't a raging check—up to your boot-tops in front and limping along the ground behind."

"Georgie promised me she would n't wear that skirt again. I should n't have thought—" Margaret rubbed her chin and, surreptitiously, through her gown, the

much-stung calf of her leg—"should n't have thought a soldier was so taken up with clothes."

"Lord bless you! a soldier has eyes, until they 're blown out—or filled with these beastly midges."

His own eyes were of that look-you-straight-in-the-face kind that seemed, never since they opened on the world, to have had aught to be ashamed of or to conceal. They rested now upon the steamer nearing the quay.

"The fact is," Margaret was saying in a softened voice, "no one, since my mother died, has been so good to me as Geo—" She had turned at last, and looked at Ferrall for the sympathy she felt must be in his heart and on his face. She followed the inattentive brightness of his glance, and saw her cousin's little figure leaning over the side of the steamer. Margaret turned her eyes again on Ferrall for the fraction of a moment, and seemed to make some rapid calculation. Whatever it was she saw, or thought she saw, there, the effect of it was suddenly to flash some resolution upon the girl. She stood up and tightened her veil, while Ferrall waved his stick to the group on the steamer.

Behind Lettice was Lady Canby, big, brown, and correct, from her felt hat to her tan shoes. On the other side of the deck, any one who had cared to look for her might have seen Miss Georgina Roper, reluctantly giving back a fat baby in a red hood to the clumsy arms of a young farmer. The baby shrieked with disfavor at the transference, and clawed Miss Roper's hat till it assumed an angle even more eccentric than usual.

That lady darted about the boat as the passengers disembarked, catching up a sketching-stool from one quarter, a reticule from another, a drawing-book, a small bottle of something, an umbrella, and Letty's silver-handled walking-stick.

"Dear Georgina! she 's always late," said Lady Canby, benevolently, as she paused, after returning her niece's and Major Mackenzie's greeting. "Where 's my—oh, Georgie!" she called, as the queer little figure came bustling along the gangway, "since you 're the last, do you mind bringing me my thick brown veil? I left it on the far side." Then, with raised voice, "The one for midges."

With a nod and a smile, back to the side set apart "for midges," as it would appear, did Miss Roper repair.

"How you two can go without veils!" Margaret said, looking from the pink and white of Letty's face to Lady Canby's smooth and brown.

"Oh, Georgie 's discovered a way of treating those horrid midges," Lettice smiled up at Major Mackenzie.

"How 's that? Intimidation or an appeal to their better feelings?"

Lettice gave him her sole encumbrance to carry, and walked on at his side, lightheartedly recalling the Italian's advice: "If you go to Scotland, take always your mackinproof—I should say your watertosh."

At the corner Ferrall turned.

"Are n't you coming, Margaret?"

"No; I 'm going to drive up."

Miss Georgina looked sharply at Margaret a moment before following Lady Canby into the dog-cart, and then seemed to forget the girl's existence in a lively discussion about the contemplated coaching trip.

"What, are *you* coming, Aunt Mary?" asked Margaret, presently rousing herself with an effort.

"Oh, yes; I think I might as well," said Lady Canby.

"You are wonderfully enterprising, all of a sudden. What 's happened?"

"Quassia 's happened!" replied her aunt, briskly, as the dog-cart stopped at the door of the house they had taken.

Margaret kept looking back. No one in sight on the long, shadeless road, although one could see to the very bottom of the hill.

LETTY and Major Mackenzie came in late, laughing and sparring, and bringing with them that atmosphere of friendly nonsense that announces the satisfactory issue of an agreeable tête-à-tête. Evidently they had not bored themselves.

"I 'm afraid the tea 's cold," said Lady Canby; "but it serves you right for loitering."

"We did n't loiter; we toiled," said Lettice, dropping into a chair.

"You thought the highroad less agreeable than the bog, apparently," said Margaret, as Major Mackenzie stood a little awkwardly in front of her, holding out some grass of Parnassus.

He looked down at his feet with an uneasy air.

"Well, it *was* less—dusty," and he laid the little white flowers on the table near Margaret. After hesitating a moment, he went over and stood by Lettice at the tea-tray.

Margaret got up almost at once and went out, giving not so much as a glance at Ferrall or his flowers. Miss Roper cocked her queer little head on one side, like a bird listening. Her small bright eyes twinkled with friendly concern.

"Give me my quassia, Mary," she said, suddenly rising and shaking a few crumbs carefully out of the French window.

Lady Canby, with visible reluctance, yielded up a modest-sized vial two thirds full of a colorless liquid.

"Oh, don't take that away!" screamed Lettice, as Miss Roper stepped out on the lawn.

"Why not?" said Georgina, shortly.

"Because I 'm sure to want some more if I go out."

"Then you can stay at home till I get back."

"Oh, Lady Quassia! *Dear* Lady Quassia!" called Lettice in wheedling tones as the little old maid went down into the garden, never turning her head. She was sure Margaret had gone that way, but where? Presently over the stone fence she caught sight of the girl hurrying across the moor.

"Margaret!" called a weak, piping voice; and again, "Margaret!"

It was the voice an energetic mouse would have, could it speak a human name. The girl went on. Miss Georgina pulled a long blade of ribbon-grass, and, holding it between her thin thumbs, blew a strident blast, another, and another. The girl half-way up the hill looked round. To Georgina's sign that she was to come back Margaret shook her head and walked on.

Miss Georgina swarmed up the stone fence in gallant style, caught her flapping skirt on a jagged stone, and fell flat on the other side. She picked herself up, clapped on her hat, and blew another blast on the bit of grass, which she still clutched in one hand.

Again Margaret turned to make a motion of "Let me alone"; but the vision of Georgina toiling up the glen coerced the younger woman into impatient waiting.

Miss Roper had once been heard to say that she meant to write a poem beginning:

> Wise is the woman who realizes
> The day when violent exercises
> Cease to become her.

But she made as little pretension to poetry as to wisdom, and toiled on with disheveled hair, a purple mottle overspreading her face.

"What *is* it?" said Margaret, when they were within speaking distance.

"Oh, a—" (puff)—"I—a—" (puff, puff). "*Oh*, my dear!" Miss Georgina dropped incontinently on the springy heather and gasped while she straightened her hat. "Have n't you—walked enough—for one day?"

Margaret looked down upon her with ill-disguised impatience.

"You have n't run all this way to ask me that, I suppose?"

Miss Georgina shook her head, speechless, smiling in a deprecatory way. Then: "Sit down—till I—get my breath."

Not at all graciously, Margaret obeyed. Instantly the midges gathered thick about their heads, but presently Margaret seemed to engross their undivided attention.

"Where did you get that?" said Miss Georgina, presently, fixing her bright eyes on a spray of white heather in Margaret's belt.

"Ferrall— It came from—a rocky place above Loch Oich. You may have it, if you like." She held it out.

"Oh, no! What would Major Mackenzie think?"

"It does n't matter what he thinks." The girl made a thrust at the midges with the heather, then threw it in Miss Roper's lap, and seemed to follow with interest the fleeting gleam of white in the upturned tail of a rabbit as it disappeared into a clump of gorse.

"What have you two quarreled about?" asked Miss Georgina.

"We have n't quarreled."

"Why are you forever throwing him with Letty?"

"If you ask me, I think it 's Letty who does the throwing."

"You could prevent her hitting the mark so often if you chose."

"And I *don't* choose!" Margaret held up her head and permitted herself the consolation of looking very proud.

"Margaret," — Miss Georgina leaned forward and looked the girl steadily in the face, —"men are inconceivably stupid. Don't count on Major Mackenzie's seeing your point."

"I don't."

"You are n't giving him up?" gasped Miss Georgina.

Margaret's face whitened. "I won't struggle to keep a man who—" She swallowed suddenly, and turned away her head.

"You need n't struggle. You need only behave like a rational being," said Miss Georgina. "What demon makes you give Letty every opportunity, morning, noon, and night, to practise her wiles on the man you 're engaged to marry?"

"Because I 'm not going to marry him, you see. They may have it all their own way."

"No, they may n't!" Miss Roper settled her hat on her head with a warlike air, as if it had been a helmet. "Now, we 'll grant that I 'm meddlesome, and don't understand affairs of the heart. Suppose for a moment that I care about Letty's happiness."

"Oh, I 'm willing to admit that should be everybody's first consideration."

Miss Roper wasted no time over Margaret's sarcasm.

"Very well. Now, even if Letty was n't too young and too flighty to marry at once and fill such a position as Major Mackenzie's wife will have to occupy, she would bore and exasperate Ferrall into desertion inside of a year. But, fortunately, it would never come to that. I 'm not saying, mind, that if you go on in the way you 've begun, that you might n't make them imagine they had a great deal in common."

"They don't seem to need much help from me."

"Oh, yes, they do. And you are giving it. If that 's what you 're after, you can see one engagement broken and another made before pheasant-shooting begins." They were silent a moment. "And then Letty," she went on, "having taken Ferrall away from you, will feel she 's accomplished that mission and will look about for some new interest."

"I never knew you thought so meanly of Major Mackenzie."

"I am not such a goose as to think meanly of him. He 's a splendid fellow —but—" she shook her head, smiling in an odd little way—"he 's lived most of his life away from civilization, and he comes back to it—an infant. It 's part of his amazing luck that he stumbled upon you. When you get the hang of him, and give up expecting him to see what is n't under his nose, you 'll make him happier than any one has a right to be in this topsy-turvy world."

"And what about me and my happiness?" demanded Margaret, with a little shake in her voice.

"Your best chance is to be faithful to your love." Miss Georgina laughed nervously. "I sound frightfully sentimental, don't I?" She laughed again.

"You seem to think," said Margaret, with recovered stiffness, "that if I let Major Mackenzie go, I may not have another chance."

"It 's possible," said Miss Georgina, quietly.

"Good heavens, you talk as if I were forty!"

"You are n't eighteen, my dear."

Lettice was eighteen; Lettice was an heiress; Lettice was everything desirable.

"After all," said Margaret, "I 'm not a fright, though you *do* seem to—"

"No," said Miss Georgina, unmoved; "you 're not a fright, and you 're not a beauty."

Margaret blinked her pretty brown eyes with surprise, ready to laugh and even ready to cry.

"And"—the brusque old voice dropped into a curiously quiet note—"and you 've no talent for being an old maid."

Margaret looked at her. It would be absurd to quarrel with Georgie.

"Oh, come, cheer up," the girl spoke with a fine affectation of lightness of heart; "after all, I 'm only twenty-eight, and I look younger."

"Nothing is more dangerous than to 'look younger.'"

"Don't be so tragic, Georgie!"

"People put such faith in it, and yet women who 'look younger' grow old in a night. I did."

The last two words were breathed rather than spoken. Margaret, frankly frowning, and fighting the midges with a brush of bog-myrtle, did not catch them.

Miss Georgina had clasped her nervous little hands and was looking before her

into space. Any one less busy with her own lacerated feelings than Margaret would have been struck with the unwonted intensity in the queer little face.

"Margaret—" Miss Roper began.

"I tell you, I 've made up my mind, and I 'm going for a walk." The girl jumped to her feet. "Seeing that I 'm not eighteen, and no beauty, and likely to wake up any day and, instead of being in bed, find myself on the shelf—" she laughed angrily—"for these reasons I 'm to eat humble-pie! After flouting Ferrall for a fortnight, I 'm to go back now and say, 'Please, sir, I 'll be grateful for the smallest favors if only you 'll save me—from the shelf!' You know quite well, Georgie, it 's impossible; things have gone too far, and I shall take a walk."

Margaret turned away sharply.

Miss Roper made a dash forward and held the girl fast by the skirt. Margaret turned on her angrily, but Miss Roper gave her no time to speak.

"Don't be a fool!" she said. "It was just like this that I spoiled my life."

"Georgie!"

"Yes, yes; I dare say it sounds funny enough," she tried to laugh, and the look in her face brought the tears to the younger woman's eyes. "You think I was always like this; but once, a long time ago, I was young, and—some one I cared about thought I was—no, that would be *too* funny, perhaps, to believe." Her birdlike eyes were dim and drowned. "Nobody knew, but we were engaged to be married, and I—" the wavering voice grew suddenly harsh and firm—"I was bent on being the same kind of fool you 'd like to be. But I—I won't let you, Margaret; for your father's sake, I won't let you."

"For my father's sake!"

Miss Roper gave a little start, then seemed to cover her confusion by quickly adopting the large, impersonal view.

"Women expect too much of men. We want them to be heroes, demigods; we find them—" she gave a contemptuous flip of her claw-like hand—"*infants!* What they want is not a proud beauty to do battle for, but some one to mother them, feed them, and love them, and make them behave. Of course,"—she glanced apprehensively over her shoulder,—"it 's only women, and only women in some intensely private moment, who may admit this. We must keep up appearances. But it 's no use—no use in the world, my dear, to give men tasks, in our pride and confidence, that they can't or don't perform."

They were silent a moment, and Margaret, sitting with lowered eyes, started to see a tear drop on the thin, tight-clasped hands in Miss Roper's lap. As the girl looked up she saw with a sense of vague surprise that Georgina was not bending solicitous looks upon her young friend. The tear-filled eyes were looking into some world where Margaret was a stranger and where the other was at home.

"We want to think," she said huskily, "that nothing else is 'possible' to the man we love but one's self." She shook her head. "Several other things are possible."

"Then it shows," Margaret burst out, "how worthless such 'love' is."

"It shows," said Miss Roper, firmly, "that a man may love one woman and yet make another an excellent husband."

"I don't believe it!"

The little old maid looked at Margaret an instant and then said low and hurriedly:

"Shall I tell you who convinced me?"

"Who?"

"Reginald Howe."

"Not my father!"

Miss Roper got up and brushed some dust and bits of dry heather off her dress. Underneath Margaret's astonishment she was queerly aware of the effort Georgina's confession had cost, and her agitation at speaking the name of the father Margaret herself had never seen.

"Dear Georgie!" The girl got up, too, and slipped her hand under her friend's arm. "I 'd love it if you 'd tell me about him. Oh!"

"What! an earwig or a mouse?" Georgina clutched her scanty petticoats.

"*Ferrall*—coming up the glen!"

"Oh, that 's all right. I 'll go down and do Letty's hair."

Margaret held her fast.

"You 'll do nothing of the kind. I 'd never forgive you."

"Margaret!" Miss Roper's tone of gentle entreaty seemed to come like an echo out of that past of which the girl had to-day had the first glimpse.

"He saw you come after me," the girl faltered; "Letty did, anyhow—trust her! And they 'll know you 've warned me. Oh, he sees us; he 's making signs!"

"Make a sign back," commanded Miss Roper.

Margaret's feeble lifting and lowering of the bit of bog-myrtle might have been the dying remonstrance of a midge-bitten martyr. But Miss Roper waved vigorously.

"Don't, Georgie!" pleaded the girl, half in tears.

"Don't what?"

"Don't make signals of distress," the girl laughed nervously through her tears.

"Let me alone. You attend to the distress and I 'll make the signals."

Ferrall, still some distance below them, hesitated a moment at a strip of intervening bog. Miss Roper waved and gesticulated as if to cheer his fainting spirit.

"*Georgie!*" Margaret seized her arm. "Don't go on like a lunatic! Anybody 'd think we were shipwrecked on a desert isle."

"So we are," said Miss Roper, gesticulating more than ever; "and you 've got to be rescued." Then, with a sudden change of manner: "Dear child, he *adores* you!"

"Do you really believe—"

"I know it."

"Then why does he—"

"Because he 's a man, and a man 's a goose."

"Oh, what *shall* I do, Georgie," Margaret whispered as Ferrall came nearer, "I 've been so *horrid* for days! He 'll suspect now that I 'm being prudent, or 'twenty-eight,' or something dreadful. How *am* I to account for—"

Miss Roper had mechanically taken Margaret's bit of bog-myrtle out of her hand and brandished it at the midges for one perplexed instant, and then dropped it with a cry. It might have been "Eureka!" but the word sounded like "Quassia!"

"Here, take up your veil."

"My veil!" echoed the astonished Margaret.

"Take it up—quite off—there!" Had the girl not been rather unnerved, she would have refused to comply without some explanation. Miss Roper had had a short, sharp struggle with her pocket, and now brought forth a vial. She poured some of the colorless liquid on a cambric handkerchief. Turning with quick, birdlike movement, she reached up and dabbed the soaked linen lightly over Margaret's astonished face.

"What is it?" asked the girl, feebly, thinking that poor Georgina's wits must have suddenly departed.

"Have you come for some quassia, too, Major Mackenzie?" Miss Roper called out.

"No, thanks."

"You can't imagine how good it is to keep off—"

"Oh, yes; I 've used it sometimes in India."

"Well, I 'm ashamed of you."

"Eh—wh—what?"

"Yes; I 'm ashamed of you for not mentioning it before."

"Oh—a—why?" said Ferrall, a little anxious, apparently, lest he were going to be scolded some more.

"All the abuse I get in this family," Miss Roper went on briskly, dabbing Margaret's wrists and hands with the essence of the Eastern vine—"all the scorn heaped on me because in traveling I sometimes make friends with my fellow-beings. And yet if I had n't told that woman in the Inverness boat that her hair was coming off—down, she would never have offered me quassia to keep off the midges. And *then* where would we all be?" She seemed to arraign Mackenzie.

"A—really, I—I don't know."

"*You* would see Margaret and all of us bitten into a fever and *you 'd* never suggest quassia."

"I 'm sorry I—"

"Even Margaret's *beautiful* nature getting quite ruined with the irritation—a little more on your chin, dear. Day after day goes by, you see her suffering, and still you never say, 'Quassia'!"

"Awfully sorry. I 'd have said 'Quassia' all day long if I 'd only known."

"Oh, *you* had n't noticed any change in Margaret, of course. We all know love is blind. But *I 've* got so I 've been afraid to go for a walk with her. You see, her skin is so fine the midges make her quite feverish. But, thank Heaven! there 's quassia! Don't you feel an extraordinary relief, dear?"

"Quite extraordinary," said the girl, smiling under lowered eyes.

"Now I must have some. But—" Georgina stopped in the act of pouring more of the stuff on her handkerchief—"don't stand staring at me, you two. I 'd rather do it when nobody 's looking."

They laughed and walked away a few paces.

"You must finish your walk without me, Margaret," she called after them; "I 'm tired. Besides, I 'm coming to pieces."

A backward glance showed Miss Roper perched on her heathery knoll, with her hat off, in the act of doing something mysterious to her hair.

"Come," said Ferrall, and they went on. Presently he added: "I can't say how awfully sorry I am I never thought of suggesting quassia."

"Oh, it 's all right, since Georgie 's discovered it," said the girl, meekly; and they walked on to the high comb of the moor.

Presently Margaret stopped.

"Oh!" she said.

"What is it?"

"Your beautiful grass of Parnassus—I left it to wither in the drawing-room."

"Oh, never mind."

"But I *do*."

"Did you care about it?"

"I loved it."

"That 's all right, then," he said, smiling; "but don't go back just yet." He took her hand, doubtfully, with an awkward little air of uncertainty as to whether she was going, after all, to "be good."

"We are n't alone together very much."

"And when we have been alone," she began, with an impulse toward confession, "I 've been so tormented—"

"I know—I know. I was a brute not to realize—" he brandished a great protecting arm in front of her—"that to any one with a complexion like a baby's—"

"Oh, it 's all right now," said Margaret. "Ferrall!"

"Yes."

"Whenever I 'm bad to you I wish you 'd just remind me of to-day."

He sat down in the heather, still keeping hold of her hand, and trying gently to draw her down beside him.

"Look at Georgie," said the girl, gazing down the glen.

"I 'd rather look at you."

"She *is* rather like Miss Robinson Crusoe."

"Oh, come! You thought I did n't speak respectfully enough, but I never called her *that*."

"I 've left her alone on the Desert Island—and—she 's hiding her face in her handkerchief."

"She does n't like the midges any more than you do."

"She does n't like—some other things any more than I—would. Ferrall,"—Margaret sat down, and, braving for once the observation of the sea-gulls and the swifts, she put her hand through Mackenzie's arm and leaned her cheek on his shoulder,—"you don't really dislike my old friend, do you?"

"Dislike her! Rather not." He beamed down at the recovered Margaret. This was the girl to whom he had lost his heart.

"Should you mind asking Georgie to come and make us a visit?"

"Not a bit."

"Let us go back now and tell her."

"I sha'n't budge for at least ten minutes."

"Well," said the happy Margaret, "we 'll call at the Desert Island on our way back and rescue her."

"By Jove! I feel as if *she 'd* done the rescuing!"

"Well, it 's true, Ferrall."

"Hey?"

"I 'm not going to say anything more; but just—whenever I 'm the least bad to you, dear—say quite low, so nobody else can hear—say, 'Quassia'!"

"And then will you be good?"

"Well—I 'll be better."

"I don't want you better: be like this."

He looked down at the happy face, and, whether dimly divining who had worked the miracle, or just to please Margaret, he called out, one arm uplifted as if proposing a toast:

"Long live Lady Quassia!"

The uplifted arm came down, and with the other completed the circle.

But the ten minutes stretched to sixty, and, for all their good intentions, had it depended upon the rescuing party, Lady Quassia would have gone dinnerless that night.