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FENWICK'S CAREER

by

MRS HUMPHRY WARD

1910

TO

MY DEAR SISTER

J.F.H.

MAY, 1906

[Illustration: *Robin Ghyll Cottage*]

A PREFATORY WORD

The story told in the present book owes something to the past, in its picturing of the present, as its

predecessors have done; though in much less degree. The artist, as I hold, may gather from any field, so long as he sacredly respects what other artists have already made their own by the transmuting processes of the mind. To draw on the conceptions or the phrases that have once passed through the warm minting of another's brain, is, for us moderns, at any rate, the literary crime of crimes. But to the teller of stories, all that is recorded of the real life of men, as well as all that his own eyes can see, is offered for the enrichment of his tale. This is a clear and simple principle; yet it has been often denied. To insist upon it is, in my belief, to uphold the true flag of Imagination, and to defend the wide borders of Romance.

In addition to this word of notice, which my readers will perhaps accept from me once for all, this small preface must also contain a word of thanks to my friend Mr. Sterner, whose beautiful art has contributed to this story, as to several of its forerunners. I have to thank him, indeed, not only as an artist, but as a critic. In the interpreting of Fenwick, he has given me valuable aid; has corrected mistakes, and illumined his own painter's craft for me, as none but a painter can. But his poetic intelligence as an artist is what makes him so rare a colleague. In the first lovely drawing of the husband and wife sitting by the Westmoreland stream, Phoebe's face and look will be felt, I think, by any sympathetic reader, as a light on the course of the story; reappearing, now in storm, as in the picture of her despair, before the portrait of her supposed rival; and now in tremulous afterglow, as in the scene with which the drawings close. To be so understood and so bodied forth is great good-fortune; and I beg to be allowed this word of gratitude.

The lines quoted on page 166 are taken, as any lover of modern poetry will recognise, from the 'Elegy on the Death of a Lady,' by Mr. Robert Bridges, first printed in 1873.

MARY A. WARD.

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This cottage, known as Robin Ghyll, is situated near the Langdale Pikes in Westmoreland. It is owned by Miss Dorothy Ward, the author's daughter. The older part of the building served as the model for Fenwick's cottage.

HUSBAND AND WIFE

From an original drawing by Albert Sterner.

EUGÉNIE

From an original drawing by Albert Sterner.

PHOEBE'S RIVAL

From an original drawing by Albert Sterner.

'BE MY MESSENGER'

From an original drawing by Albert Sterner.

ROBIN GHYLL COTTAGE

A nearer view of Miss Ward's cottage. (See frontispiece.)

FENWICK STOOD LOOKING AT THE CANVAS

From an original drawing by Albert Sterner.

All of the illustrations in this volume are photogravures, and except where otherwise stated, are from photographs taken especially for this edition.

INTRODUCTION

Fenwick's career was in the first instance suggested by some incidents in the life of the painter George Romney. Romney, as is well known, married a Kendal girl in his early youth, and left her behind him in the North, while he went to seek training and fortune in London. There he fell under other influences, and finally under the fascinations of Lady Hamilton, and it was not till years later that he returned to Westmoreland and his deserted wife to die.

The story attracted me because it was a Westmoreland story, and implied, in part at least, that setting of fell and stream, wherein, whether in the flesh or in the spirit, I am always a willing wanderer. But in the end it really gave me nothing but a bare situation into which I had breathed a wholly new meaning. For in Eugénie de Pastourelles, who is Phoebe's unconscious rival, I tried to embody, not the sensuous intoxicating power of an Emma Hamilton, but those more exquisite and spiritual influences which many women have exercised over some of the strongest and most virile of men. Fenwick indeed possesses the painter's susceptibility to beauty. Beauty comes to him and beguiles him, but it is a beauty akin to that of Michel Angelo's 'Muse and dominant Lady, spirit-wed'—which yet, for all its purity, is not, as Fenwick's case shows, without its tragic effects in the world.

On looking through my notes, I find that this was not my first idea. The distracting intervening woman was to have been of a commoner type, intellectual indeed rather than sensuous, but yet of the predatory type and class, which delights in the capture of man. When I began to write the first scene in which Eugénie was to appear, she was still nebulous and uncertain. Then she did appear—suddenly!—as though the mists parted. It was not the woman I had been expecting and preparing for. But I saw her quite distinctly; she imposed herself; and thenceforward I had nothing to do but to draw her.

The drawing of Eugénie made perhaps my chief pleasure in the story, combined with that of the two landscapes—the two sharply contrasted landscapes—Westmoreland and Versailles, which form its main background. I find in a note-book that it was begun 'early in May, 1905, at Robin Ghyll. Finished (at Stocks) on Tuesday night or rather Wednesday morning, 1 A.M., Dec. 6, 1905. Deo Gratias!' And an earlier note, written in Westmoreland itself, records some of the impressions amid which the first chapters were written. I give it just as I find it:

'The exquisiteness of the spring. The strong-limbed sycamores with their broad expanding leaves. The leaping streams, and the small waterfalls, white and foaming—the cherry blossom, the white farms, the dark yews which are the northern cypresses—and the tall upstanding firs and hollies, vigorously black against the delicate bareness of the fells, like some passionate self-assertive life….

'The "old" statesman B——. His talk of the gentle democratic poet who used to live in the cottage before us. "He wad never täak wi the betther class o' foak—but he'd coom mony a time, an hae a crack wi my missus an me."

'The swearing ploughman that I watched this morning—driving his plough through old pastures and swearing at the horse—"Dang ye! Darned old hoss! Pull up, will ye—*pull* up, dang ye!"

'Elterwater, and the soft grouping of the hills. The blue lake, the woods in tints of pale green and pinkish brown, nestling into the fells, the copses white with wind flowers. Everywhere, softness and austerity side by side—the "cheerful silence of the fells," the high exhilarating air, dark tortured crags and ghylls—then a soft and laughing scene, gentle woods, blue water, lovely outlines, and flower-carpeted fields.

'The exquisite *colour* of Westmoreland in May! The red of the autumn still on the hills,—while the bluebells are rushing over the copses.'

The little cottage of Robin Ghyll, where the first chapters were written, stands, sheltered by its sycamore, high on the fell-side, above the road that leads to the foot of the Langdale Pikes. But—in the dream-days when the Fenwicks lived there!—it was the *old* cottage, as it was up to ten or fifteen years ago;—a deep-walled, low-ceiled labourer's cottage of the sixteenth century, and before any of the refinements and extensions of to-day were added.

The book was continued at Stocks, during a quiet summer. Then with late September came fatigue and discouragement. It was imperative to find some stimulus, some complete change of scene both for the tale and its writer. Was it much browsing in Saint-Simon that suggested to me Versailles? I cannot remember. At any rate by the beginning of October we were settled in an apartment on the edge of the park and a stone's throw from the palace. Some weeks of quickened energy and more rapid work followed—and the pleasures of that chill golden autumn are reflected in the later chapters of the book. Each sunny day was more magnificent than the last. Yet there was no warmth in the magnificence. The wind was strangely bitter; it was winter before the time. And the cold splendour of the weather heightened the spell of the great, dead, regal place; so that the figures and pageants of a vanished world seemed to be still latent in the sharp bright air—a filmy multitude.

This brilliance of an incomparable *décor* followed me back to Hertfordshire, and remained with me through winter days. But when the last pages came, in December, I turned back in spirit to the softer, kinder beauty amid which the little story had taken its rise, and I placed the sad second spring of the two marred lives under the dear shelter of the fells.

MARY A. WARD.

PART I

WESTMORELAND

'Who can contemplate Fame through clouds unfold
The star which rises o'er her steep, nor climb?'

CHAPTER I

Really, mother, I can't sit any more. I'm that stiff!—and as cold as anything.'

So said Miss Bella Morrison, as she rose from her seat with an affected yawn and stretch. In speaking she looked at her mother, and not at the painter to whom she had been sitting for nearly two hours. The young man in question stood embarrassed and silent, his palette on his thumb, brush and mahlstick suspended. His eyes were cast down: a flush had risen in his cheek. Miss Bella's manner was not sweet; she wished evidently to slight somebody, and the painter could not flatter himself that the somebody was Mrs. Morrison, the only other person in the room beside the artist and his subject. The mother looked up slightly, and without pausing in her knitting—'It's no wonder you're cold,' she said, sharply, 'when you wear such ridiculous dresses in this weather.'

It was now the daughter's turn to flush; she coloured and pouted. The artist, John Fenwick, returned discreetly to his canvas, and occupied himself with a fold of drapery.

'I put it on, because I thought Mr. Fenwick wanted something pretty to paint. And as he clearly don't

see anything in *me*!'—she looked over her shoulder at the picture, with a shrug of mock humility concealing a very evident annoyance—'I thought anyway he might like my best frock.'

'I'm sorry you're not satisfied, Miss Morrison,' said the artist, stepping back from his canvas and somewhat defiantly regarding the picture upon it. Then he turned and looked at the girl—a coarsely pretty young woman, very airily clothed in a white muslin dress, of which the transparency displayed her neck and arms with a freedom not at all in keeping with the nipping air of Westmoreland in springtime—going up to his easel again after the look to put in another touch.

As to his expression of regret, Miss Morrison tossed her head.

'It doesn't matter to me!' she declared. 'It was father's fad, and so I sat. He promised me, if I didn't like it, he'd put it in his own den, where *my* friends couldn't see it. So I really don't care a straw!'

'Bella! don't be rude!' said her mother, severely. She rose and came to look at the picture.

Bella's colour took a still sharper accent; her chest rose and fell; she fidgeted an angry foot.

'I told Mr. Fenwick hundreds of times,' she protested, 'that he was making my upper lip miles too long—and that I *hadn't* got a nasty staring look like that—nor a mouth like that—nor—nor anything. It's—it's too bad!'

The girl turned away, and Fenwick, glancing at her in dismay, saw that she was on the point of indignant tears.

Mrs. Morrison put on her spectacles. She was a small, grey-haired woman with a face, wrinkled and drawn, from which all smiles seemed to have long departed. Even in repose, her expression suggested hidden anxieties—fears grown habitual and watchful; and when she moved or spoke, it was with a cold caution or distrust, as though in all directions she was afraid of what she might touch, of possibilities she might set loose.

She looked at the picture, and then at her daughter.

'It's not flattered,' she said, slowly. 'But I can't say it isn't like you, Bella.'

'Oh, I knew *you'd* say something like that, mother!' said the daughter, scornfully. She stooped and threw a shawl round her shoulders; gathered up some working materials and a book with which she had been toying during the sitting; and then straightened herself with an air at once tragic and absurd.

'Well, good-bye, Mr. Fenwick.' She turned to the painter. 'I'd rather not sit again, please.'

'I shouldn't think of asking you, Miss Morrison,' murmured the young man, moving aside to let her pass.

'Hullo, hullo! what's all this?' said a cheery voice at the door.
'Bella, where are you off to? Is the sitting done?'

'It's been going on two hours, papa, so I should think I'd had about enough,' said Miss Bella, making for the door.

But her father caught her by the arm.

'I say, we *are* smart!—aren't we, mamma? Well, now then—let me have a look.'

And drawing the unwilling girl once more towards the painter, he detained her while he scrutinised the picture.

'Do I squint, papa?' said Miss Morrison, with her head haughtily turned away.

'Wait a minute, my dear.'

'*Have* I got the colour of a barmaid, and a waist like Fanny's?' Fanny was the Morrison's housemaid, and was not slim.

'Be quiet, Bella; you disturb me.'

Bella's chin mounted still higher; her foot once more beat the ground impatiently, while her father looked from the picture to her, and back again.

Then he released her with a laugh. 'You may run away, child, if you want to. Upon my word, Fenwick, you're advancing! You are: no doubt about that. Some of the execution there is astonishing. But all the

same I don't see you earning your bread-and-butter at portrait-painting; and I guess you don't either.'

The speaker threw out a thin hand and patted Fenwick on the shoulder, returning immediately to a close examination of the picture.

'I told you, sir, I should only paint portraits if I were compelled!' said the young man, in a proud, muffled voice. He began to gather up his things and clean his palette.

'But of course you'll be compelled—unless you wish to die "clemmed," as we say in Lancashire,' returned the other, briskly. 'What do *you* say, mamma?'

He turned towards his wife, pushing up his spectacles to look at her. He was a tall man, a little bent at the shoulders from long years of desk-work; and those who saw him for the first time were apt to be struck by a certain eager volatility of aspect—expressed by the small head on its thin neck, by the wavering blue eyes, and smiling mouth—not perhaps common in the chief cashiers of country banks.

As his wife met his appeal to her, the slight habitual furrow on her own brow deepened. She saw that her husband held a newspaper crushed in his right hand, and that his whole air was excited and restless. A miserable, familiar pang passed through her. As the chief and trusted official of an old-established bank in one of the smaller cotton-towns, Mr. Morrison had a large command of money. His wife had suspected him for years of using bank funds for the purposes of his own speculations. She had never dared to say a word to him on the subject, but she lived in terror—being a Calvinist by nature and training—of ruin here, and Hell hereafter.

Of late, some instinct told her that he had been forcing the pace; and as she turned to him, she felt certain that he had just received some news which had given him great pleasure, and she felt certain also that it was news of which he ought rather to have been ashamed.

She drew herself together in a dumb recoil. Her hands trembled as she put down her knitting.

'I'd be sorry if a son of mine did nothing but paint portraits.'

John Fenwick looked up, startled.

'Why?' laughed her husband.

'Because it often seems to me,' she said, in a thin, measured voice, 'that a Christian might find a better use for his time than ministering to the vanity of silly girls, and wasting hours and hours on making a likeness of this poor body, that's of no real matter to anybody.'

'You'd make short work of art and artists, my dear!' said Morrison, throwing up his hands. 'You forget, perhaps, that St. Luke was a painter?'

'And where do you get that from, Mr. Morrison, I'd like to ask?' said his wife, slowly; 'it's not in the Bible—though I believe you think it is. Well, good-night to you, Mr. Fenwick. I'm sorry you haven't enjoyed yourself, and I'm not going to deny that Bella was very rude and trying. Good-night.'

And with a frigid touch of the hand, Mrs. Morrison departed. She looked again at her husband as she closed the door—a sombre, shrinking look.

Morrison avoided it. He was pacing up and down in high spirits. When he and Fenwick were left alone, he went up to the painter and laid an arm across his shoulders.

'Well!—how's the money holding out?'

'I've got scarcely any left,' said the painter, instinctively moving away. It might have been seen that he felt himself dependent, and hated to feel it.

'Any more commissions?'

'I've painted a child up in Grasmere, and a farmer's wife just married. And Satterthwaite, the butcher, says he'll give me a commission soon. And there's a clergyman, up Easedale way, wants me to paint his son.'

'Well; and what do you get for these things?'

'Three pounds—sometimes five,' said the young man, reluctantly.

'A little more than a photograph.'

'Yes. They say if I won't be reasonable there's plenty as'll take their pictures, and they can't throw

away money.'

'H'm! Well, at this rate, Fenwick, you're not exactly galloping into a fortune. And your father?'

Fenwick made a bitter gesture, as much as to say, 'What's the good of discussing *that*?'

'H'm!—Well, now, Fenwick, what are your plans? Can you live on what you make?'

'No,' said the other, abruptly. 'I'm getting into debt.'

'That's bad. But what's your own idea? You must have some notion of a way out.'

'If I could get to London,' said the other, in a low, dragging voice,
'I'd soon find a way out.'

'And what prevents you?'

'Well, it's simple enough. You don't really, sir, need to ask. I've no money—and I've a wife and child.'

Fenwick's tone was marked by an evident ill-humour. He had thrown back his handsome head, and his eyes sparkled. It was plain that Mr. Morrison's catechising manner had jarred upon a pride that was all on edge—wounded by poverty and ill-success.

'Yes—that was an imprudent match of yours, my young man!
However—however—'

Mr. Morrison walked up and down ruminating. His long, thin hands were clasped before him. His head hung in meditation. And every now and then he looked towards the newspaper he had thrown down. At last he again approached the artist.

'Upon my word, Fenwick, I've a mind to do something for you—I have indeed. I believe you'd justify it—I do! And I've always had a soft heart for artists. You look at the things in this room'—he waved his hand towards the walls, which were covered with water-colour drawings—'I've known most of the men who painted them, and I've assisted a very great many of them. Those pictures—most of them—represent loans, sir!—loans at times of difficulty, which I was *proud* to make'—Mr. Morrison struck his hand on the table—'yes, proud—because I believed in the genius of the men to whom I made them. I said, "I'll take a picture"—and they had the money—and the money saved their furniture—and their homes—and their wives and children. Well, I'm glad and proud to have done it, Fenwick!—you mark my words.'

He paused, his eyes on the artist, his attitude grasping, as it were, at the other's approval—hungry for it. Fenwick said nothing. He stood in the shadow of a curtain, and the sarcasm his lip could not restrain escaped the notice of his companion. 'And so, you see, I'm only following out an old custom when I say, I believe in you, Fenwick!—I believe in your abilities—I'm sorry for your necessities—and I'll come to your assistance. Now, how much would take you to London and keep you there for six months, till you've made a few friends and done some work?'

'A hundred pounds,' said the painter, breathing hard.

'A hundred pounds. And what about the wife?'

'Her father very likely would give her shelter, and the child. And of course I should leave her provided.'

'Well, and what about my security? How, John, in plain words, do you propose to repay me?'

Mr. Morrison spoke with extreme mildness. His blue eyes, whereof the whites were visible all round the pupils, shone benevolently on the artist—his mouth was all sensibility. Whereas, for a moment, there had been something of the hawk in his attitude and expression, he was now the dove—painfully obliged to pay a passing attention to business.

Fenwick hesitated.

'You mentioned six guineas, I think, for this portrait?' He nodded towards the canvas, on which he had been at work.

'I did. It is unfortunate, of course, that Bella dislikes it so. I shan't be able to hang it. Never mind. A bargain's a bargain.'

The young man drew himself up proudly.

'It is so, Mr. Morrison. And you wished me to paint your portrait, I think, and Mrs. Morrison's.' The elder man made a sign of assent. 'Well, I could run up to your place—to Bartonbury—and paint those in the winter, when I come to see my wife. As to the rest—I'll repay you within the year—unless—well, unless I go utterly to grief, which of course I may.'

'Wait here a moment. I'll fetch you the money. Better not promise to repay me in cash. It'll be a millstone round your neck. I'll take it in pictures.'

'Very well; then I'll either paint you an original finished picture—historical or romantic subject—medium size, by the end of the year, or make you copies—you said you wanted two or three—one large or two small, from anything you like in the National Gallery.'

Morrison laughed good-temperedly. He touched a copy of *The Art Journal* lying on the table.

'There's an article here about that German painter—Lenbach—whom they crack up so nowadays. When he was a young man, Baron Schack, it appears, paid him one hundred pounds a year, *for all his time*, as a copyist in Italy and Spain.' He spoke very delicately, mincing his words a little.

Fenwick's colour rose suddenly. Morrison was not looking at him, or he would have seen a pair of angry eyes.

'Prices have gone up,' said the painter, dryly. 'And I guess living in London's dearer now than living in Italy was when Lenbach (which he pronounced Lenback) was young!'

'Oh! so you know all about Lenbach?'

'You lent me the article. However'—Fenwick rose—'is that our bargain?'

The note in the voice was trenchant, even aggressive. Nothing of the suppliant, in tone or attitude. Morrison surveyed him, amused.

'If you like to call it so,' he said, lifting his delicate eyebrows a moment. 'Well, I'll take the risk.'

He left the room. Fenwick thrust his hands into his pockets, with a muttered exclamation, and walked to the window. He looked out upon a Westmoreland valley in the first flush of spring; but he saw nothing. His blood beat in heart and brain with a suffocating rapidity. So his chance was come! What would Phoebe say?

As he stood by the large window, face and form in strong relief against the crude green without, the energy of the May landscape was, as it were, repeated and expressed in the man beholding it. He was tall, a little round-shouldered, with a large, broad-browed head, covered with brown, straggling hair; eyes, glancing and darkish, full of force, of excitement even, curiously veiled, often, by suspicion; nose, a little crooked owing to an injury at football; and mouth, not coarse, but large and freely cut, and falling readily into lines of sarcasm.

The general look was one of great acuteness, rather antagonistic, as a rule, than sympathetic; and the hands, which were large and yet slender, were those of a craftsman finely endowed with all the instincts of touch.

Suddenly the young man turned on his heel and looked at the water-colours on the wall.

'The old hypocrite!' he thought; 'they're worth hundreds—and I'll be bound he got them for nothing. He'll try to get mine for nothing; but he'll find I'm his match!'

For among these pictures were a number of drawings by men long since well known, and of steady repute among the dealers or in the auctions, especially of Birmingham and the northern towns. Morrison had been for years a bank-clerk in Birmingham before his appointment to the post he now held. A group of Midland artists, whose work had become famous, and costly in proportion, had evidently been his friends at one time—or perhaps merely his debtors. They were at any rate well represented on the wall of this small Westmoreland house in which he spent his holidays.

Presently Mr. Morrison was heard returning. He placed an envelope in Fenwick's hand, and then, pointing him to a chair at the table, he dictated a form of IOU, specifying that the debt was to be returned within a year, either in money or in the pictures agreed upon.

'Oh, no fine speeches, please, my boy—no fine speeches!' said Morrison, as the artist rose, stammering out his thanks. 'That's been my nature all my life, I tell you—to help the lame dogs—ask anybody that knows me. That'll do; that'll do! Now then, what's going to be your line of action?'

Fenwick turned on him a face that vainly endeavoured to hide the joy of its owner.

'I shall look out, of course, first of all, for some bread-and-butter work. I shall go to the editors of the illustrated papers and show them some things. I shall attend some life-school in the evenings. And the rest of the time I shall paint—paint like Old Harry!'

The words caused a momentary wrinkling of Mr. Morrison's brow.

'I should avoid those expressions, if I were you, Fenwick. But paint what, my dear boy?—paint what?'

'Of course I have my ideas,' said Fenwick, staring at the floor.

'I think I have earned a right to hear them.'

'Certainly. I propose to combine the colour and romance of the Pre-Raphaelites with the truth and drawing of the French school,' said the young man, suddenly looking up.

Surprise betrayed his companion into a broad grin.

'Upon my word, Fenwick, you won't fail for lack of ambition!'

The young man reddened, then quietly nodded.

'No one gets on without ambition. My ideas have been pretty clear for a long time. The English Romantic school have no more future, unless they absorb French drawing and French technique. When they have done that, they will do the finest work in the world.'

Morrison's astonishment increased. The decision and self-confidence with which Fenwick spoke had never yet shown themselves so plainly in the harassed and humbly born painter of Miss Bella's portrait.

'And you intend to do the finest work in the world?' said the patron, in a voice of banter.

Fenwick hesitated.

'I shall do good work,' he said, doggedly, after a pause. Then, suddenly raising his head, he added, 'And if I weren't sure of it, I'd never let you lend me money.'

Morrison laughed.

'That's all right.—And now what will Mrs. Fenwick say to us?'

Fenwick turned away. He repossessed himself of the envelope, and buttoned his coat over it, before he replied.

'I shall, of course, consult her immediately. What shall I do with this picture?' He pointed to the portrait on the easel.

'Take it home with you, and see if you can't beautify it a little,' said Morrison, in a tone of good-humour. 'You've got a lot of worldly wisdom to learn yet, my dear Fenwick. The women *must* be flattered.'

Fenwick repeated that he was sorry if Miss Bella was disappointed, but the tone was no less perfunctory than before. After stooping and looking sharply for a moment into the picture—which was a strong, ugly thing, with some passages of remarkable technique—he put it aside, saving that he would send for it in the evening. Then, having packed up and shouldered the rest of his painter's gear, he stood ready to depart.

'I'm awfully obliged to you!' he said, holding out his hand.

Morrison looked at the handsome young fellow, the vivacity of the eyes, the slight agitation of the lip.

'Don't mention it,' he said, with redoubled urbanity. 'It's my way—only my way! When'll you be off?'

'Probably next week. I'll come and say good-bye.'

'I *must* have a year! But Phoebe will take it hard.' John Fenwick had paused on his way home, and was leaning over a gate beside a stream, now thinking anxiously of his domestic affairs, and now steeped in waves of delight—vague, sensuous, thrilling—that flowed from the colours and forms around him. He found himself in an intricate and lovely valley, through which lay his path to Langdale. On either side of the stream, wooded or craggy fells, gashed with stone-quarries, accompanied the windings of the water, now leaving room for a scanty field or two, and now hemming in the river with

close-piled rock and tree. Before him rose a white Westmoreland farm, with its gabled porch and moss-grown roof, its traditional yews and sycamores; while to his left, and above the farm, hung a mountain-face, dark with rock, and purple under the evening shadows—a rich and noble shape, lost above in dim heights of cloud, and, below, cleft to the heart by one deep ghyll, whence the golden trees—in the glittering green of May—descended single or in groups, from shelf to shelf, till their separate brilliance was lost in the dense wood which girdled the white farmhouse.

The pleasure of which he was conscious in the purple of the mountain, the colour of the trees, and all that magic of light and shade which filled the valley—a pleasure involuntary, physical, automatic, depending on certain delicacies of nerve and brain—rose and persisted, while yet his mind was full of harassing and disagreeable thoughts.

Well, Phoebe might take her choice!—for they had come to the parting of the ways. Either a good painter, a man on the level of the best, trained and equipped as they, or something altogether different—foreman, a clerk, perhaps, in his uncle's upholstery business at Darlington, a ticket-collector on the line—anything! He could always earn his own living and Phoebe's. There was no fear of that. But if he was finally to be an artist, he would be a first-rate one. Let him only get more training; give him time and opportunity; and he would be as good as any one.

Morrison, plainly, had thought him a conceited ass. Well, let him!

What chance had he ever had of proving what was in him? As he hung over the gate smoking, he thought of his father and mother, and of his childhood in the little Kendal shop—the bookseller's shop which had been the source and means of his truest education.

Not that he had been a neglected child. Far from it. He remembered his gentle mother, troubled by his incessant drawing, by his growing determination to be an artist, by the constant effort as he grew to boyhood to keep the peace between him and his irritable old father. He remembered her death—and those pictorial effects in the white-sheeted room—effects of light and shadow—of flowers—of the grey head uplifted; he remembered also trying to realise them, stealthily, at night, in his own room, with chalk and paper—and then his passion with himself, and the torn drawing, and the tears, which, as it were, another self saw and approved.

Then came school-days. His father had sent him to an old endowed school at Penrith, that he might be away from home and under discipline. There he had received a plain commercial education, together with some Latin and Greek. His quick, restless mind had soaked it all in; nothing had been a trouble to him; though, as he well knew, he had done nothing supremely well. But Homer and Virgil had been unlocked for him; and in the school library he found Shakespeare and Chaucer, 'Morte d'Arthur' and 'Don Quixote,' fresh and endless material for his drawing, which never stopped. Drawing everywhere—on his books and slates, on doors and gate-posts, or on the whitewashed wall of the old Tudor school-room, where a hunt, drawn with a burned stick, and gloriously dominating the whole room, had provoked the indulgence, even the praise, of the headmaster.

And the old drawing-master!—a German—half blind, though he would never confess it—who dabbled in oil-painting, and let the boy watch his methods. How he would twirl his dirty brush round and dab down a lump of Prussian blue, imagining it to be sepia, hastily correcting it a moment afterwards with a lump of lake, and then say chuckling to himself: 'By Gode, dat is fine!—dat is very nearly a good purple. Fenwick, my boy, mark me—you vill not find a good purple no-vere! Some-vere—in de depths of Japanese art—dere is a good purple. Dat I believe. But not in Europe. Ve Europeans are all tam fools. But I vill not svear!—no!—you onderstand, Fenwick; you haf never heard me svear?' And then a round oath, smothered in a hasty fit of coughing. And once he had cut off part of the skirt of his Sunday coat, taking it in his blindness for an old one, to clean his palette with; and it was thought, by the boys, that it was the unseemly result of this rash act, as disclosed at church the following Sunday morning, which had led to the poor old man's dismissal.

But from him John had learnt a good deal about oil-painting—something too of anatomy—though more of this last from that old book—Albinus, was it?—that he had found in his father's stock. He could see himself lying on the floor—poring over the old plates, morning, noon, and night—then using a little lad, his father's apprentice, to examine him in what he had learnt—the two going about arm-in-arm—Backhouse asking the questions according to a paper drawn up by John—'How many heads to the deltoid?'—and so on—over and over again—and with what an eagerness, what an ardour!—till the brain was bursting and the hand quivering with new knowledge—and the power to use it. Then Leonardo's 'Art of Painting' and Reynolds's Discourses'—both discovered in the shop, and studied incessantly, till the boy of eighteen felt himself the peer of any Academician, and walked proudly down the Kendal streets, thinking of the half-finished paintings in his garret at home, and of the dreams, the conceptions, the ambitions of which that garret had already been the scene.

After that—some evil days! Quarrels with his father, refusals to be bound to the trade, to accept the shop as his whole future and inheritance—painful scenes with the old man, and with the customers who complained of the son's rudeness and inattention—attempts of relations to mediate between the two, and all the time his own burning belief in himself and passion to be free. And at last a time of truce, of conditions made and accepted—the opening of the new Art School—evenings of delightful study there—and, suddenly, out of the mists, Phoebe's brown eyes, and Phoebe's soft encouragement!

Yes, it was Phoebe, Phoebe herself who had determined his career; let her consider that, when he asked for sacrifices! But for the balm she had poured upon his sore ambitions—but for those long walks and talks, in which she had been to him first the mere recipient of his dreams and egotisms, and then—since she had the loveliest eyes, and a young wild charm—a creature to be hotly wooed and desired, he might never have found courage enough to seize upon his fate.

For her sake indeed he had dared it all. She had consoled and inspired him; but she had made the breach with his father final. When they met she was only a struggling teacher in Miss Mason's school, the daughter of a small farmer in the Vale of Keswick. Old Fenwick looked much higher for his son. So there was renewed battle at home, till at last a couple of portrait commissions from a big house near Kendal clinched the matter. A hurried marriage had been followed by the usual parental thunders. And now they had five years to look back upon, years of love and struggle and discontent. By turning his hand to many things, Fenwick had just managed to keep the wolf from the door. He had worked hard, but without much success; and what had been an ordinary good opinion of himself had stiffened into a bitter self-assertion. He knew very well that he was regarded as a conceited, quarrelsome fellow, and rather gloried in it. The world, he considered, had so far treated him ill; he would at any rate keep his individuality.

Phoebe, too, once so sweet, so docile, so receptive, had begun to be critical, to resist him now and then. He knew that in some ways he had disappointed her; and there was gall in the thought. As to the London plan, his word would no longer be enough. He would have to wrestle with and overcome her.

London!—the word chimed him from the past—threw wide the future. He moved on along the rough road, possessed by dreams. He had a vision of his first large picture; himself rubbing in the figures, life-size, or at work on the endless studies for every part—fellow-students coming to look, Academicians, buyers; he heard himself haranguing, plunging headlong into ideas and theories, holding his own with the best of 'the London chaps.' Between whiles, of course, there would be hack-work—illustration—portraits—anything to keep the pot boiling. And always, at the end of this vista, there was success—success great and tangible.

He was amused by his own self-confidence, and laughed as he walked.
But his mood never wavered.

He *had* the power—the gift. Nobody ever doubted that who saw him draw. And he had, besides, what so many men of his own class made shipwreck for want of—he had *imagination*—enough to show him what it is that makes the mere craftsman into the artist, enough to make him hunger night and day for knowledge, travel, experience. Thanks to his father's shop, he had read a great deal already; and with a little money, how he would buy books, how he would read them!—

And at the thought, fresh images, now in rushing troops, and now in solitary fantastic beauty, began to throng before the inward eye, along the rich background of the valley; images from poetry and legend, stored deep in a greedy fancy, a retentive mind. They came from all sources—Greek, Arthurian, modern; Hephaestus, the lame god and divine craftsman, receiving Thetis in his workshop of the skies, the golden automata wrought by his own hands supporting him on either side; the maidens of Achilles washing the dead and gory body of Hector in the dark background of the hut, while in front swift-foot Achilles holds old Priam in talk till the sad offices are over, and the father may be permitted to behold his son; Arthur and Sir Bedivere beside the lake; Crusaders riding to battle—the gleam of their harness—the arched necks of their steeds—the glory of their banners—the shade and sunlight of the deep vales through which they pass; the Lady of Shalott as the curse conies upon her—Oenone—Brunhilda—Atalanta. Swift along the May woods the figures fled, vision succeeding vision, beauty treading on beauty. It became hallucination—a wildness—an ecstasy. Fenwick stood still, gave himself up to the possession—let it hold him—felt the strangeness and the peril of it—then, suddenly, wrenched himself free.

Running down to the edge of the river, he began to pick up stones and throw them violently into the stream. It was a remedy he had long learnt to use. The physical action released the brain from the tyranny of the forms which held it. Gradually they passed away. He began to breathe more quietly, and, sitting down by the water, his head in his hands, he gave himself up to a quieter pleasure in the nature round him, and in the strength of his own faculty.

To something else also. For while he was sitting there, he found himself *praying* ardently for success —that he might do well in London, might make a name for himself, and leave his mark on English art. This was to him a very natural outlet of emotion; he was not sure what he meant by it precisely; but it calmed him.

CHAPTER II

Meanwhile Phoebe Fenwick was watching for her husband.

She had come out upon the green strip of ground in front of Green Nab Cottage, and was looking anxiously along the portion of high-road which was visible from where she stood.

The small, whitewashed house—on this May day, more than a generation ago—stood on a narrow shelf that juts out from the face of one of the eastern fells, bounding the valley of Great Langdale.

When Phoebe, seeing no one on the road, turned to look how near the sun might be to its setting, she saw it, as Wordsworth saw it of old, dropping between the peaks of those 'twin brethren' which to the northwest close in the green bareness of the vale. Between the two pikes the blaze lingered, enthroned; the far winding of the valley, hemmed in also by blue and craggy fells, was pierced by rays of sunset; on the broad side of the pikes the stream of Dungeon Ghyll shone full-fed and white; the sheep, with their new-born lambs beside them, studded the green pastures of the valley; and sounds of water came from the fell-sides. Everywhere lines of broad and flowing harmony, moulded by some subtle union of rock and climate and immemorial age into a mountain beauty which is the peculiar possession of Westmoreland and Cumberland. Neither awful, nor yet trivial; neither too soft for dignity, nor too rugged for delight. The Westmoreland hills are the remains of an infinitely older world—giants decayed, but of a great race and ancestry; they have the finish, the delicate or noble loveliness—one might almost say the *manner*—that comes of long and gentle companionship with those chief forces that make for natural beauty, with air and water, with temperate suns and too abundant rains. Beside them the Alps are inhuman; the Apennines mere forest-grown heaps—mountains in the making; while all that Scotland gains from the easy enveloping glory of its heather, Westmoreland, which is almost heatherless, must owe to an infinitude of fine strokes, tints, curves, and groupings, to touches of magic and to lines of grace, yet never losing the wild energy of precipice and rock that belongs of right to a mountain world.

To-day Langdale was in spring. The withered fern was still red on the sides of the pikes; there was not a leaf on the oaks, still less on the ashes; but the larches were green in various plantations, and the sycamores were bursting. Half a mile eastward the woods were all in soft bloom, carpeted with windflowers and bluebells. Here, but for the larches, and the few sycamores and yews that guard each lonely farm, all was naked fell and pasture. The harsh spring wind came rioting up the valley, to fling itself on the broad sides of the pikes; the lambs made a sad bleating; the water murmured in the ghyll beyond the house; the very sunshine was clear and cold.

Calculations quick and anxious passed through the young wife's brain. Debts here, and debts there; the scanty list of small commissions ahead, which she knew by heart; the uncertainty of the year before them; clothes urgently wanted for the child, for John, for herself. She drew a long and harassed breath.

Phoebe Fenwick was a tall, slender creature, very young; with a little golden head on a thin neck, features childishly cut, and eyes that made the chief adornment of a simple face. The lines of the brow, the lids and lashes, and the clear brown eye itself were indeed of a most subtle and distinguished beauty; they accounted, perhaps, for the attention with which most persons of taste and cultivation observed Fenwick's wife. For the eyes seemed to promise a character, a career; whereas the rest of the face was no more, perhaps, than a piece of agreeable pink-and-white.

She wore a dress of dark-blue cotton, showing the spring of her beautiful throat. The plain gown with its long folds, the uncovered throat, and rich simplicity of her fair hair had often reminded Fenwick and a few of his patrons of those Florentine photographs which now, since the spread of the later Pre-Raphaelites and the opening of the Grosvenor Gallery, were to be seen even in the shops of country towns. There was a literary gentleman in Kendal who said that Mrs. Fenwick was like one of Ghirlandajo's tall women in Santa Maria Novella. Phoebe had sometimes listened uncomfortably to these comparisons. She was a Cumberland girl, and had no wish at all to be like people in Italy. It seemed somehow to cut her off from her own folk.

'John is late!' said a voice beside her. An elderly woman had stepped out of the cottage porch. Miss Anna Mason, the head-mistress of an endowed girls school in Hawkshead, had come to spend a Saturday afternoon with her old pupil, Phoebe Fenwick. A masterful-looking woman—ample in figure, with a mouth of decision. She wore a grey alpaca dress, adorned with a large tatted collar, made by herself, and fastened by a brooch containing a true-lover's knot in brown hair.

'He'll have stayed on to finish,' said Phoebe, looking round. 'Where's Carrie?'

Miss Mason replied that the child wouldn't wait any longer for her supper, and that Daisy, the little servant, was feeding her. Then, slipping her arm inside Mrs. Fenwick's, Miss Mason looked at the sunset.

'It's a sweet little cottage,' she said, shading her eyes from the fast-sinking orb, and then turning them on the tiny house—'but I dare say you'll not be here long, Phoebe.'

Mrs. Fenwick started.

'John told Mr. Harrock he'd pay him rent for it till next Easter.'

Miss Mason laughed.

'Are you going to let John go wasting his time here till next Easter?'

The arm she held moved involuntarily.

'He has several commissions—people not far from here,' said Mrs. Fenwick, hurriedly. 'And if the weather's too bad, we can always go to rooms in Kendal or Ambleside.'

'Well, if that's what you're thinking of, my dear, you'd better make a clerk of him at once and have done with it! He told me his uncle would always find him work in the upholstery business.'

Phoebe's soft cheeks trembled a little.

'Some day we'll have saved some money,' she said, in a low voice—'and then we'll go to London; and —and John will get on.'

'Yes—when you stop holding him back, Mrs. Phoebe Fenwick!'

'Oh! Miss Anna, I don't hold him back!' cried the wife, suddenly, impetuously.

Miss Mason shook an incredulous head.

'I haven't heard a single word of his bettering himself—of his doing anything but muddle on here—having a "crack" with this farmer and that—and painting pictures he's a sight too good for, since I came this morning; and we've talked for hours. No—I may as well have it out—I'm a one for plain speaking; I'm a bit disappointed in you both. As for you, Phoebe, you'll be precious sorry for it some day if you don't drive him out of this.'

'Where should I drive him to?' cried Mrs. Fenwick, stifled. She had broken a sycamore twig, and was stripping it violently of its buds.

Miss Anna looked at her unmoved. The grey-haired schoolmistress was a woman of ideas and ambitions beyond her apparent scope in life. She had read her Carlyle and Ruskin, and in her calling she was an enthusiast. But, in the words of the Elizabethan poet, she was perhaps 'unacquainted still with her own soul.' She imagined herself a Radical; she was in truth a tyrant. She preached Ruskin and the simple life; no worldling ever believed more fiercely in the gospel of success. But, let it be said promptly, it was success for others, rarely or never for herself; she despised the friend who could not breast and conquer circumstance; as for her own case, there were matters much more interesting to think of. But she was the gadfly, the spur of all to whom she gave her affection. Phoebe, first her pupil, then her under-mistress, and moulded still by the old habit of subordination to her, both loved and dreaded her. It was said that she had made the match between her *protégée* and old Fenwick's rebellious and gifted son. She had certainly encouraged it, and, whether from conscience or invincible habit, she had meddled a good deal with it ever since.

In reply to Phoebe's question, Miss Anna merely inquired whether Mrs. Fenwick supposed that George Romney—the Westmoreland artist—would have had much chance with his art if he had stayed on in Westmoreland? Why, the other day a picture by Romney had been sold for three thousand pounds! And pray, would he ever have become a great painter at all if he had stuck to Kendal or Dalton-in-Furness all his life?—if he had never been brought in contact with the influences, the money, and the

sitters of London? Those were the questions that Phoebe had to answer. 'Would the beautiful Lady This and Lady That ever have come to Kendal to be painted?—would he ever have seen Lady Hamilton?'

At this Mrs. Fenwick flushed hotly from brow to chin.

'I rather wonder at you, Miss Anna!' she said, breathing fast; 'you think it was all right he should desert his wife for thirty years—so—so long as he painted pictures of that bad woman, Lady Hamilton, for you to look at!'

Miss Anna looked curiously at her companion. The schoolmistress was puzzled—and provoked.

'Well!—you don't suppose that John's going to desert you for thirty years!' said the other, with an impatient laugh. 'Don't be absurd, Phoebe.'

Phoebe said nothing. She heard a cry from the baby Carrie, and she hurried across the little garden to the house. At the same moment there was a shout of greeting from below, and Fenwick came into sight on the steep pitch of lane that led from the high-road to the cottage. Miss Anna strolled down to meet him.

In the eyes of his old friend, John Fenwick made a very handsome figure as he approached her, his painter's wallet slung over his shoulder. That something remarkable had happened to him she divined at once. In moments of excitement a certain foreign look—as some people thought, a *gypsyish* look—was apt to show itself. The roving eyes, the wild manner, the dancing step betrayed the in most man—banishing altogether the furtive or jealous reserve of the North-Countryman, which were at other times equally to be noticed. Miss Anna had often wondered how the same man could be so shy—and so vain!

However, though elation of some sort was uppermost, he was not at first inclined to reveal himself. He told Miss Anna as they walked up together that he had done with Miss Bella; that old Morrison praised the portrait, and the girl hated it; that she was a vulgar, conceited creature, and he was thankful to have finished.

'If I were to show it at Manchester next month, you'd see what the papers would say. But I suppose Miss Bella would sooner die than let her father send it. Silly goose! Powdering every time—and sucking her lips to make them red—and twisting her neck about—ugh! I've no patience with women like that! When I get on a bit, I'll paint nobody I don't want to paint.'

'All right—but get on first,' said Miss Anna, patting him on the arm.
'What next, John—what next?'

He hesitated. His look grew for a moment veiled and furtive. 'Oh, there's plenty to do,' he said, evasively.

They paused on the green ledges outside the cottage.

'What—portraits?'

He nodded uncertainly.

'You'll not grow fat on Great Langdale,' said Miss Anna, waving an ironical hand towards the green desolation of the valley.

He looked at her, walked up and down a moment, then said with an outburst, though in a low tone, and with a look over his shoulder at the open window of the cottage, 'Morrison's lent me a hundred pounds. He advises me to go to London at once.'

Miss Anna raised her eyebrows. 'Oh—oh!' she said—'*that's* news!
What do you mean by "at once"?—September?'

'Next week—I won't lose a day.'

Miss Anna pondered.

'Well, I dare say Phoebe can hurry up.'

'Oh! I can't take Phoebe,' he said, in a hasty, rather injured voice.

'Not take Phoebe!' cried the other under her breath, seeming to hear around her the ghosts of words which had but just passed between her and Phoebe—'and what on earth are you going to do with her?'

He led her away towards the edge of the little garden—arguing, prophesying, laying down the law.

While he was thus engaged came Phoebe's silver voice from the parlour:

'Is that you, John? Supper's ready.'

He and Miss Anna turned.

'Hush, please!' said Fenwick to his companion, finger on lip; and they entered.

'You'll have got the money from Mr. Morrison, John?' said Phoebe, presently, when they were settled to their meal.

'Aye,' said Fenwick, 'that's all right. Phoebe, that's a real pretty dress of yours.'

Soft colour rose in the wife's cheeks.

'I'm glad you like it,' said Phoebe, soberly. Then looking up—

'John—don't give Carrie that!—it'll make her sick.'

For Fenwick was stealthily feeding the baby beside him with morsels from his own plate. The child's face—pink mouth and blue eyes, both wide open—hung upon him in a fixed expectancy.

'She does like it so—the little greedy puss! It won't do her any harm.'

But the mother persisted. Then the child cried, and the father and mother wrangled over it, till Fenwick caught up the babe by Phoebe's peremptory directions and carried it away upstairs. At the door of the little parlour, while Phoebe was at his shoulder, wiping away the child's tears and cooing to it, Fenwick suddenly turned his head and kissed his wife's cheek, or rather her pretty ear, which presented itself. Miss Anna, still at table, laughed discreetly behind their backs—the laugh of the sweet-natured old maid.

When the child was asleep upstairs, Phoebe and the little servant cleared away while Fenwick and Miss Anna read the newspaper, and talked on generalities. In this talk Phoebe had no share, and it might have been noticed by one who knew them well, that in his conversation with Miss Mason, Fenwick became another man. He used tones and phrases that he either had never used, or used no longer, with Phoebe. He showed himself, in fact, intellectually at ease, expansive, and, at times, amazingly arrogant. For instance, in discussing a paragraph about the Academy in the London letter of the *Westmoreland Gazette*, he fired up and paced the room, haranguing his listener in a loud, eager voice. Of course she knew—every one knew—that all the best men and all the coming forces were now *outside the Academy*. Millais, Leighton, Watts—spent talents, extinct volcanoes!—Tadema a marvellous mechanic, without ideas!—the landscape men, chaotic,—no standard anywhere, no style. On the other hand, Burne-Jones and the Grosvenor Gallery group—ideas without drawing, without knowledge, feet and hands absurd, muscles anyhow. While as for Whistler and the Impressionists—a lot of maniacs, running a fad to death—but *clever*—by Jove!—

No!—there was a new art coming!—the creation of men who had learnt to draw, and could yet keep a hold on ideas—

'*Character*!—that's what we want!' He struck the table; and finally with a leap he was at the goal which Miss Anna—sitting before him, arms folded, her strong old face touched with satire—had long foreseen. 'By George, *I'd* show them!—if I only had the chance.'

He threw the pictures back into the cupboard.

'No doubt,' said Miss Anna, dryly. 'I think you *are* a great man,
John, though you say it. But you've got to prove it.'

He laughed uncomfortably.

'I've written a good many of these things to the *Gazette*,' he said, evading her direct attack. 'They'll put them in next week.'

'I wish you hadn't, John!' said Phoebe, anxiously. She was sitting under the lamp with her needlework.

He turned upon her aggressively.

'And why, please?'

'Because the last article you wrote lost you a commission. Don't you remember—that gentleman at

Grasmere—what he said?'

She nodded her fair head gravely. It struck Miss Anna that she was looking pale and depressed.

'Old fool!' said Fenwick. 'Yes, I remember. He wouldn't ask anybody to paint his children who'd written such a violent article. As if I wanted to paint his children! Besides, it was a mere excuse—to save the money.'

'I don't think so,' murmured Phoebe. 'And oh, I had counted on that five pounds!'

'What does five pounds matter, compared to speaking to one's mind?' said Fenwick, roughly.

There was a silence. Fenwick, looking at the two women, felt them unsympathetic, and abruptly changed the subject.

'I wish you'd give us some music, Phoebe.'

Phoebe rose obediently. He opened the little pianette for her, and lit the candles.

She played some Irish and Scotch airs, in poor settings, and with much stumbling. After a little, Fenwick listened restlessly, his brow frowning, his fingers drumming on the arm of his chair. They were all glad when it was over.

Phoebe, hearing a whimper from the child, went upstairs. The two others were soon in hushed but earnest conversation.

Miss Anna had gone to bed. Fenwick was sitting with a book before him—lost in anxious and exciting calculations—when Phoebe entered the room.

'Is that you?' he said, jumping up. 'That's all right. I wanted to talk to you.'

'I thought you did,' she said, with a very quiet, drooping air; then going to the window, which was open, she leaned out into the May night. 'Where shall we go? It's warmer.'

'Let's go to the ghyll,' said Fenwick; 'I'll fetch you a shawl.'

For, as both remembered, Miss Anna was upstairs, and in that tiny cottage all sounds were audible.

Fenwick wrapt a shawl round his companion, and they sallied forth.

The valley lay below them. A young moon was near its setting over the farthest pike, and the fine lines of the mountain rose dimly clear, from its base on the valley floor to the dark cliffs of Pavey Ark. Not a light was visible anywhere. Their little cottage on its shelf, with the rays of its small lamp shining through the window, seemed to be the only spectator of the fells; it talked with them in a lonely companionship.

They passed through the fence of the small garden out on to the fell-side. Dim forms of sheep rose in alarm as they came near, and bleating lambs hurried beside them. Soft sounds of wind, rising and falling along the mountain or stirring amid last year's bracken, pursued them, till they reached the edge of the ghyll, and, descending its side, found the water murmuring among the stones, the only audible thing in a deep shade and silence.

They sat down by the stream, and Fenwick, taking up some pebbles, began to drop them nervously into the water. Phoebe, beside him, clasped her hands round her knees; in a full light it would have been seen that the hands were trembling.

'Phoebe—old Morrison's offered to lend me some money.'

Phoebe started.

'I—I thought perhaps he had.'

'And he wants me to go to London at once.'

'You've *got* the money?'

'In my pocket'—he laid his hand upon it. Then he laughed: 'He didn't pay me for the portrait, though. That's like him. And of course I couldn't ask for it.'

A silence.

Fenwick turned round and took one of her hands.

'Well, little woman, what do you think? Are you going to let me go and make my fortune?—our fortune?'

'As if I could stop you!' she said, hoarsely. 'It's what you've wanted for months.'

[Illustration: *Husband and Wife*]

'Well, and if I have, where's the harm? We can't go on living like this!'

And he began to talk, with great rapidity, about the absurdity of attempting to make a living as an artist out of Westmoreland—out of any place, indeed, but London, the natural centre and clearing-house of talent.

'I could make a living out of teaching, I suppose, up here. I could get—in time—a good many lessons going round to schools. But that would be a dog's life. You wouldn't want to see me at that for ever, would you, Phoebe? Or at painting portraits at five guineas apiece? I could chuck it all, of course, and go in for business. But I can tell you, England would lose something if I did.'

And, catching up another stone, he threw it into the beck with a passion which made the clash of it, as it struck upon a rock, echo through the ghyll. There was something magnificent in the gesture, and a movement, half thrill, half shudder, ran through the wife's delicate frame. She clasped her hands round his arm, and drew close to him.

'John!—are you going to leave baby and me behind?'

Her voice, as she pressed towards him, her face upraised to his, rose from deep founts of feeling; but she kept the sob in it restrained. Fenwick felt the warmth and softness of her young body; the fresh face, the fragrant hair were close upon his lips. He threw both his arms round her and folded her to him.

'Just for a little while,' he pleaded—'till I get my footing. One year! For both our sakes—Phoebe!'

'I could live on such a little—we could get two rooms, which would be cheaper for you than lodgings.'

'It isn't that!' he said, impatiently, but kissing her. 'It is that I must be my own master—I must have nothing to think of but my art—I must slave night and day—I must live with artists—I must get to know all sorts of people who might help me on. If you and Carrie came up—just at first—I couldn't do the best for myself—I couldn't, I tell you. And of course I mean the best for *you*, in the long run. If I go, I must succeed. And if I can give all my mind, I *shall* succeed. Don't you think I shall?'

He drew away from her abruptly—holding her at arm's length, scrutinising her face almost with hostility.

'Yes,' said Phoebe, slowly, 'Yes, of course you'll succeed—if you don't quarrel with people.'

'Quarrel,' he repeated, angrily. 'You're always harping on that—you're always so *afraid* of people. It does a man no harm, I tell you, to be a bit quick-tempered. I shan't be a fool.'

'No, but—I could warn you often. And then you know,' she said, slowly, caressing his shoulder with her hand—'I could look after money. You're dreadfully bad about money, John. Directly you've got it, you spend it—and sometimes when you borrow you forget all about paying it back.'

He was struck dumb for a moment with astonishment; feeling at the same time the trembling of the form which his arm still encircled.

'Well, Phoebe,' he said, at last, 'you seem determined to say disagreeable things to me to-night. I suppose I might remind you that you're much younger than I; and that of course a man knows much more about business than a young thing like you can. How, I should like to know, could we have done any better than we have done, since we married? As far as money goes, we've had a hell of a time, from first to last!'

'It would have been much worse,' said Phoebe, softly, 'if I hadn't been there—you know it would. You know last year when we were in such straits, and all our things were nearly sold up, you let me take over things, and keep the money. And I went to see all the people we owed money to—and—and it's pretty bad—but it isn't as bad as it was—'

She hid her face on her knees, choked by the sob she could no longer repress.

'Well, of course it's better,' said Fenwick, ungraciously; 'I don't say you haven't got a head, Phoebe—why, I know you have! You did first-rate! But, after all, I had to earn the money.'

She looked up eagerly.

'That's what I say. You'd never be able to think about little things—you'd have to be painting always—and going about—and—'

He bit his lip.

'Why, I could manage for myself—for a bit,' he said, with a laugh. 'I'm not such an idiot as all that. Old Morrison's lent me a hundred pounds, Phoebe!'

He enjoyed her amazement.

'A hundred pounds!' she repeated, faintly. 'And however are we going to repay all that?'

He drew her back to him triumphantly.

'Why, you silly child, I'm going to earn it, of course—and a deal more. Don't you hinder me, Phoebe! and I shall be a rich man before we can look round, and you'll be a lady—with a big house—and your carriage, perhaps!'

He kissed her vehemently, as though to coerce her into agreeing with him.

But she released herself.

'You and I'll *never* be rich. We don't know how.'

'Speak for yourself, please.' He stretched out his right hand, laughing. 'Look at that hand. If it gets a fair chance it's got money in it—and fame—and happiness for us both! *Don't* you believe in me, Phoebe? Don't you believe I shall make a painter?'

He spoke with an imperious harshness, repeating his query. It was evident, curiously evident, that he cared for her opinion.

'Of course I believe in you,' she said, her chest heaving.
'It's—it's—other things.'

Then, coming to him again, she flung her arms piteously round him. 'Oh, John, John—for a year past—and more—you've been sorry you married me!'

'What on earth's the matter with you?' he cried, half in wrath, half astonished. 'What's come to you, Phoebe?'

'Oh! I know,' she said, withdrawing herself and speaking in a low current of speech. 'You were very fond of me when we married—and—and I dare say you're fond of me now—but it's different. You were a boy then—and you thought you'd get drawing-lessons in Kendal, and perhaps a place at a school—and you didn't seem to want anything more. And now you're so ambitious—so ambitious, John—I'—she turned her head away—'I sometimes feel when I'm with you—I can't breathe—it's just burning you away—and me too. You've found out what you can do—and people tell you you're so clever—and then you think you've thrown yourself away—and that I'm a clog on you. John'—she approached him suddenly, panting—'John, do you mean that baby and I are to stay all the winter alone in that cottage?' She motioned towards it.

He protested that he had elaborately thought out all that she must do. She must go to her father at Keswick for the summer and possibly for the winter, till he had got a footing. He would come up to see her as often as work and funds would permit. She must look after the child, make a little money perhaps by her beautiful embroidery.

'I'll not go to my father,' she said, with energy.

'But why not?'

'You seem to forget that he married a second wife, John, last year.'

'I'm sure Mrs. Gibson was most friendly when we were there last month.
And we'd *pay*, of course—we'd pay.'

'I'm not going to plant myself and Carrie down on Mrs. Gibson for six months and more, John, so don't ask me. No, we'll stay here—we'll stay here!'

She began to pluck at the grass with her hand, staring before her at the moonlit stream like one who sees visions of the future. The beauty of her faintly visible head and neck suddenly worked on John Fenwick's senses. He threw his arm round her.

'And I shall soon be back. You little silly, can't you understand that
I shall always be wanting you?'

'We'll stay here,' she repeated, slowly. 'And you'll be in London making smart friends—and dining with rich folk—and having ladies to sit to you—'

'Phoebe, you're not jealous of me?' he cried, with a great, good-humoured laugh—'that would be the last straw.'

'Yes, I am jealous of you!' she said, with low-voiced passion; 'and you know very well that I've had some cause to be.'

He was silent. Through both their minds there passed the memory of some episodes in their married life—slight, but quite sufficient to show that John Fenwick was a man of temperament inevitably attracted by womankind.

He murmured that she had made mountains out of mole-hills. She merely raised his hand and kissed it. 'The women make a fool of you, John,' she said, 'and I ought to be there to protect you—for you do love me, you know—you do!'

And then with tears she broke down and clung to him again, in a mood that was partly the love of wife for husband and partly an exquisite maternity—the same feeling she gave her child. He responded with eagerness, feeling indeed that he had won his battle.

For she lay in his arms—weak—protesting no more. The note of anguish, of deep, incalculable foreboding, which she had shown, passed away from her manner and words; while on his side he began to draw pictures of the future so full of exultation and of hope that her youth presently could but listen and believe. The sickle moon descended behind the pikes; only the stars glimmered on the great side of the fell, on solitary yews black upon the night, on lines of wall, on dim, mysterious paths, old as the hills themselves, on the softly chiding water. The May night breathed upon them, calmed them, brought out the better self of each. They returned to the cottage like children, hand in hand, talking of a hundred practical details, thankful that the jarring moment had passed away, each refraining from any word that could wound the other. Nor was it till Fenwick was sound asleep beside her that Phoebe, replunged in loneliness and dread, gave herself in the dawn-silence to a passion of unconquerable tears.

PART II

LONDON

'Was *that* the landmark? What,—the foolish well Whose wave, low down, I did not stoop to drink, But sat and flung the pebbles from its brink In sport to send its imaged skies pell-mell, (And mine own image, had I noted well!) Was that my point of turning? I had thought The stations of my course should rise unsought, As altar-stone, or ensigned citadel.'

CHAPTER III

'Why does that fellow upstairs always pass you as though he were in a passion with somebody?' said Richard Watson, stepping back as he spoke, palette on thumb, from the picture upon which he was engaged. 'He almost knocked me down this morning, and I am not conscious of having done anything to offend his worship.'

His companion in the dingy Bloomsbury studio, where they were both at work, also put down palette

and brush, examining the canvas before him with a keen, cheerful air.

'Perhaps he loathes mankind, as I did yesterday.'

'And to-day it's all right?'

'Well, come and look.'

Watson crossed over. He was a tall and splendid man, a 'black Celt' from Merionethshire, with coal-black hair, and eyes deeply sunken and lined, with fatigue or ill health. Beside him, his comrade, Philip Cuningham, had the air of a shrewd clerk or man of business—with his light alertness of frame, his reddish hair, and sharp, small features. A pleasant, serviceable ability was stamped on Cuningham's whole aspect; while Watson's large, lounging way, and dishevelled or romantic good looks suggested yet another perennial type—the dreamer entangled in the prose of life.

He looked at the picture which Cuningham turned towards him—his hands thrust into the vast pockets of his holland coat. It was a piece of charming *genre*—a crowded scene in Rotten Row, called 'Waiting for the Queen,' painted with knowledge and grace; owing more to Wilkie than to Frith, and something to influences more modern than either; a picture belonging to a familiar English tradition, and worthily representing it.

'Yes—you've got it!' he said, at last, in a voice rather colourless and forced. Then he made one or two technical comments, to which the other listened with something that was partly indulgence, partly deference; adding, finally, as he moved away, 'And it'll sell, of course—like hot potatoes!'

'Well, I hope so,' said Philip, beginning to put away his brushes and tubes with what seemed to be a characteristic orderliness—'or I shall be in Queer Street. But I think Lord Findon wants it. I shouldn't wonder if he turned up this afternoon!'

'Ah?' Watson raised his great shoulders with a gesture which might have been sarcastic, but was perhaps more than anything else languid and weary. He returned to his own picture, looking at it with a painful intensity.

'Nobody will ever want to buy that!' he said, quietly.

Cuningham stood beside him, embarrassed.

'It's full of fine things,' he said, after a moment. 'But—'

'You wish I wouldn't paint such damned depressing subjects?'

'I wish you'd sometimes condescend to think of the public, old fellow!'

'That—*never*!' said the other, under his breath. 'Starve—and please yourself! But I shan't starve—you forget that.'

'Worse luck!' laughed Cuningham. 'I believe Providence ordained the British Philistine for our good—drat him! It does no one any harm to have to hook the public. All the great men have done it. You're too squeamish, Master Dick!'

Watson went on painting in silence, his lips working. Presently Cuningham caught—half lost in the beard—'There's a public of to-day, though—and a public of to-morrow!'

'Oh, all right,' said Philip. 'So long as you take a public of some sort into consideration! I like your jester.'

He bent forward to look into the front line of the large composition crowded with life-size figures on which Watson was engaged. It was an illustration of some Chaucerian lines, describing the face of a man on his way to execution, seen among a crowd:

'a pale face
Among a press …'

so stricken that, amid all the thronging multitude, 'men might know his face that was bestead' from all the rest.

The idea—of helpless pain, in the grip of cruel and triumphant force—had been realised with a passionate wealth of detail, comparable to some of the early work of Holman Hunt. The head of the victim bound with blood-stained linen, a frightened girl hiding her eyes, a mother weeping, a jester with the laugh withered on his lip by this sudden vision of death and irremediable woe—and in the

distance a frail, fainting form, sweetheart or sister—each figure and group, rendered often with very unequal technical merit, had yet in it something harshly, intolerably true. The picture was too painful to be borne; but it was neither common nor mean.

Cuningham turned away from it with a shudder.

'Some of it's magnificent, Dick—but I couldn't live with it if you paid me!'

'Because you look at it wrongly,' said Watson, gruffly. 'You take it as an anecdote. It isn't an anecdote —it's a symbol.'

'What?—The World?—and The Victim?—from all time?—and to all time? Well, that makes it more gruesome than ever. Hullo, who's that? Come in!'

The door opened. A young man, in some embarrassment, appeared on the threshold.

'I believe these letters are yours,' he said, offering a couple to
Cuningham. 'They brought them up to me by mistake.'

Philip Cuningham took them with thanks, then scanned the newcomer as he was turning to depart.

'I think I saw you at Berners Street the other night?'

John Fenwick paused.

'Yes—' he said, awkwardly.

'Have you been attending all the summer?'

'Pretty well. There were about half a dozen fellows left in August. We clubbed together to keep the model going.'

'I don't remember you in the Academy.'

'No. I come from the North. I've painted a lot already—I couldn't be bothered with the Academy!'

Watson turned and looked at the figure in the doorway.

'Won't you come in and sit down?'

The young man hesitated. Then something in his look kindled as it fell on Watson's superb head, with its strong, tossed locks of ebon-black hair touched with grey, the penthouse brows, and the blue eyes beneath with their tragic force of expression.

Fenwick came in and shut the door. Cuningham pushed him a chair, and Watson offered him a cigarette, which he somewhat doubtfully accepted. His two hosts—men of the educated middle-class—divined at once that he was self-taught, and risen from the ranks. Both Cuningham and Watson were shabbily dressed; but it was an artistic and metropolitan shabbiness. Fenwick's country clothes were clumsy and unbecoming; and his manner seemed to fit him as awkwardly as his coat. The sympathy of both the older artists did but go out to him the more readily.

Cuningham continued the conversation, while Watson, still painting, occasionally intervened.

They discussed the *personnel* of the life-school Fenwick was attending, the opening of a new *atelier* in North London by a well-known Academician, the successes at the current 'Academy,' the fame of certain leading artists. At least Cuningham talked; Fenwick's contributions were mostly monosyllabic; he seemed to be feeling his way.

Suddenly, by a change of attitude on the painter's part, the picture on which Dick Watson was engaged became visible to Fenwick. He walked eagerly up to it.

'I say!'—his face flushed with admiration. 'That figure's wonderful.' He pointed to the terror-stricken culprit. 'But that horse there—you don't mind, do you?—that horse is wrong!'

'I know he is! I've worked at him till I'm sick. Can't work at him any more!'

'It should be like this.'

He took out a sketch-book from his pocket, caught up a piece of charcoal and rapidly sketched the horse in the attitude required. Then he handed the book to Watson, who looked first at the sketch, and then at some of the neighbouring pages, which were covered with studies of horses observed mostly on

the day of some trade-union procession, when mounted police were keeping the road.

Watson was silent a moment, then, walking up to his picture, he took his palette-knife and scraped out the whole passage. 'I see!' he said, and, laying down the knife, he threw himself into a chair, flushed and discomposed.

'Oh, you'll soon put it right!' said Fenwick, encouragingly.

Watson winced—then nodded.

'May I see that book?' He held out his hand, and Fenwick yielded it.

Watson and Cuningham turned it over together. The 'notes,' of which it was full, showed great brilliancy and facility, an accurate eye, and a very practised hand. They were the notes of a countryman artist newly come to London. The sights, and tones, and distances of London streets—the human beings, the vehicles, the horses—were all freshly seen, as though under a glamour. Cuningham examined them with care.

'Is this the sort of thing you're going to do?' he said, looking up, and involuntarily his eye glanced towards his own picture on the distant easel.

Fenwick smiled.

'That's only for practice. I want to do big things—romantic things—if I get the chance.'

'What a delightful subject!' said Cuningham, stooping suddenly over the book.

Fenwick started, made a half-movement as though to reclaim his property, and then withdrew his hand. Cuningham was looking at a charcoal study of a cottage interior. The round table of rude black oak was set for a meal, and a young woman was feeding a child in a pinafore who sat in a high-chair. The sketch might have been a mere piece of domestic prettiness; but the handling of it was so strong and free that it became a significant, typical thing. It breathed the North, a life rustic and withdrawn—the sweetness of home and motherhood.

'Are you going to make a picture of that?' said Watson, putting on his spectacles, and peering into it. 'You'd better.'

Fenwick replied that he might some day, but had too many things on hand to think of it yet a while. Then with no explanation and a rather hasty hand he turned the page. Cuningham looked at him curiously.

They were still busy with the sketch-book when a voice was heard on the stairs outside.

'Lord Findon,' said Cunningham.

He coloured a little, ran to his picture, arranged it in the best light, and removed a small fly which had stuck to one corner.

'Shall I go?' said Fenwick.

He too had been clearly fluttered by the name, which was that of one of the best-known buyers of the day.

Watson in reply beckoned him on to the leads, upon which the Georgian bow-window at the end of the room opened. They found themselves on a railed terrace looking to right and left on a row of gardens, each glorified by one of the plane-trees which even still make the charm of Bloomsbury.

Watson hung over the rail, smoking. He explained that Lord Findon had come to see Cuningham's picture, which he had commissioned, but not without leaving himself a loophole, in case he didn't like it.

'He will like it,' said Fenwick. 'It's just the kind of thing people want.'

Watson said nothing, but smoked with energy. Fenwick went on talking, letting it be clearly understood that he personally thought the picture of no account, but that he knew very well that it was of a kind to catch buyers. In a few minutes Watson resented his attitude as offensive; he fell into a cold silence; Fenwick's half-concealed contempt threw him fiercely on his friend's side.

'Well, I've done the trick!' said Cuningham, coming out jauntily, his hands in his trousers pockets; then, with a jerk of the head towards the studio, and a lowered voice, 'He's writing the cheque.'

'How much?' said Watson, without turning his head. Fenwick thought it decent to walk away, but he could not prevent himself from listening. It seemed to him that he heard the words 'Two hundred and fifty,' but he could not be sure. What a price!—for such a thing. His own blood ran warm and quick.

As he stood at the further end of the little terrace ruminating, Cuningham touched him on the shoulder.

'I say, have you got anything to show upstairs?'

Fenwick turned to see in the sparkling eyes and confident bearing of the Scotchman, success writ large, expressing itself in an impulse of generosity.

'Yes—I've got a picture nearly finished.'

'Come and be introduced to Findon. He's a crank—but a good sort—lots of money—thinks he knows everything about art—they all do—give him his head when he talks.'

Fenwick nodded, and followed Cuningham back to the studio, where Lord Findon was now examining Watson's picture with no assistance whatever from the artist, who seemed to have been struck with dumbness.

Fenwick was introduced to a remarkably tall and handsome man, with the bearing of a sportsman or a soldier, who greeted him with a cordial shake of the hand, and a look of scrutiny so human and kindly that the very sharp curiosity which was in truth the foundation of it passed without offence. Lord Findon was indeed curious about everything; interested in everything; and a dabbler in most artistic pursuits. He liked the society of artists; and he was accustomed to spend some hundreds, or even thousands, a year out of his enormous income, in the purchase of modern pictures. Possibly the sense of power over human lives which these acquisitions gave him pleased him even more than the acquisitions themselves.

He asked Fenwick a few easy questions, sitting rakishly on the edge of a tilted chair, his hat slipping back on his handsome, grizzled head. Where did he come from—with whom had he studied—what were his plans? Had he ever been abroad? No. Strange! The artists nowadays neglected travel. 'But you go! Beg your way, paint your way—but go! Go before the wife and the babies come! Matrimony is the deuce. Don't you agree with me, Philip?' He laid a familiar hand on the artist's arm.

'Take care!' said Cuningham, laughing. 'You don't know what I may have been up to this summer.'

Findon shrugged his shoulders. 'I know a wise man when I see him. But the fools there are about! Well, I take a strong line'—he waved his hand, with a kind of laughing pomposity, rolling his words —'whenever I see a young fellow marrying before he has got his training—before he has seen a foreign gallery—before he can be sure of a year's income ahead—above all, before he knows anything at all about *women*, and the different ways in which they can play the devil with you!—well, I give him up—I don't go to see his pictures—I don't bother about him any more. The man's an ass—must be an ass!—let him bray his bray! Why, you remember Perry?—Marindin?'

On which there followed a rattling catalogue of matrimonial failures in the artist world, amusing enough—perhaps a little cruel. Cuningham laughed. Watson, on whom Lord Findon's whole personality seemed to have an effect more irritating than agreeable, fidgeted with his brushes. He struck in presently with the dry remark that artists were not the only persons who made imprudent marriages.

Lord Findon sprang up at once, and changed the subject. His youngest son, the year before, had married the nurse who had pulled him through typhoid—and was still in exile, and unforgiven.

Meanwhile no one had noticed John Fenwick. He stood behind the other two while Lord Findon was talking—frowning sometimes and restless—a movement now and then in lips and body, as though he were about to speak—yet not speaking. It was one of those moments when a man feels a band about his tongue, woven by shyness or false shame, or social timidity. He knows that he ought to speak; but the moment passes and he has not spoken. And between him and the word unsaid there rises on the instant a tiny streamlet of division, which is to grow and broaden with the nights and days, till it flows, a stream of fate, not to be turned back or crossed; and all the familiar fields of life are ruined and blotted out.

Finally, as the great patron was going, Cuningham whispered a word in his ear. Lord Findon turned to Fenwick.

'You're in this house, too? Have you anything you'd let me see?'

Fenwick, flushed and stammering, begged him to walk upstairs. Cuningham's puzzled impression was

that he gave the invitation reluctantly, but could not make up his mind not to give it.

They marched upstairs, Lord Findon and Cuningham behind.

'Does he ever sell?' said Lord Findon, in Cuningham's ear, nodding towards the broad shoulders and black head of Watson just in front.

'Not often,' said Cuningham, after a pause.

'How, then, does he afford himself?' said the other, smiling.

'Oh! he has means—just enough to keep him from starving. He's a dear old fellow! He has too many ideas for this wicked world.'

Cuningham spoke with a pleasant loyalty. Lord Findon shrugged his shoulders.

'The ideas are too lugubrious! And this young fellow—this Fenwick—where did you pick him up?'

Cuningham explained.

'A character!—perhaps a genius?' said Findon. 'He has a clever, quarrelsome eye. Unmarried? Good Lord, I hope so, after the way I've been going on.'

Cuningham laughed. 'We've seen no sign of a wife. But I really know nothing about him.'

They were entering the upper room, and at sight of the large picture it contained, Lord Findon exclaimed:

'My goodness!—what an ambitious thing!'

The three men gathered in front of the picture. Fenwick lingered nervously behind them.

'What do you call it?' said Lord Findon, putting up his glasses.

'The "Genius Loci,"' said Fenwick, fumbling a little with the words.

It represented a young woman seated on the edge of a Westmoreland ghyll or ravine. Behind her the white water of the beck flowed steeply down from shelf to shelf; beyond the beck rose far-receding walls of mountain, purple on purple, blue on blue. Light, scantily nourished trees, sycamore or mountain-ash, climbed the green sides of the ghyll, and framed the woman's form. She sat on a stone, bending over a frail new-born lamb upon her lap, whereof the mother lay beside her. Against her knee leaned a fair-haired child. The pitiful concern in the woman's lovely eyes was reflected in the soft wonder of the child's. Both, it seemed, were of the people. The drawing was full of rustical suggestion, touched here and there by a harsh realism that did but heighten the general harmony. The woman's grave comeliness flowered naturally, as it were, out of the scene. She was no model posing with a Westmoreland stream for background. She seemed a part of the fells; their silences, their breezes, their pure waters, had passed into her face.

But it was the execution of the picture which perhaps specially arrested the attention of the men examining it.

'Eclectic stuff!' said Watson to himself, presently, as he turned away—'seen with other men's eyes!'

But on Lord Findon and on Cuningham the effect was of another kind. The picture seemed to them also a combination of many things, or rather of attempts at many things—Burne-Jones' mystical colour—the rustic character of a Bastien-Lepage or a Millet—with the jewelled detail of a fourteenth-century Florentine, so wonderful were the harebells in the foreground, the lichened rocks, the dabbled fleece of the lamb: but they realised that it was a combination that only a remarkable talent could have achieved.

'By Jove!' said Findon, turning on the artist with animation, 'where did you learn all this?'

'I've been painting a good many years,' said Fenwick, his cheeks aglow. 'But I've got on a lot this last six months.'

'I suppose, in the country, you couldn't get properly at the model?'

'No. I've had no chances.'

'Let's all pray to have none,' said Cuningham, good-naturedly. 'I had no notion you were such a swell.'

But his light-blue eyes as they rested on Fenwick were less friendly. His Scotch prudence was alarmed. Had he in truth introduced a genius unawares to his only profitable patron?

'Who is the model, if I may ask?' said Lord Findon, still examining the picture.

The reply came haltingly, after a pause.

'Oh!—some one I knew in Westmoreland.'

The speaker had turned red. Naturally no one asked any further questions. Cuningham noticed that the face was certainly from the same original as the face in the sketch-book, but he kept his observation to himself.

Lord Findon, with the eagerness of a Londoner discovering some new thing, fell into quick talk with Fenwick; looked him meanwhile up and down, his features, bearing, clothes; noticed his North-Country accent, and all the other signs of the plebeian. And presently Fenwick, placed at his ease, began for the first time to expand, became argumentative and explosive. In a few minutes he was laying down the law in his Westmoreland manner—attacking the Academy—denouncing certain pictures of the year—with a flushed, confident face and a gesticulating hand. Watson observed him with some astonishment; Lord Findon looked amused—and pulled out his watch.

'Oh, well, everybody kicks the Academy—but it's pretty strong, as you'll find when you have to do with it.'

'Have you been writing those articles in the *Mirror*?' said Watson, abruptly.

'I'm not a journalist.' The young man's tone was sulky. He got up and his loquacity disappeared.

'Well, I must be off,' said Lord Findon. 'But you're coming to dinner with me to-morrow night, Cuningham, aren't you? Will you excuse a short invitation'—he turned, after a moment's pause, to Fenwick—'and accompany him? Lady Findon would, I'm sure, be glad to make your acquaintance. St. James's Square—102. All right'—as Fenwick, colouring violently, stammered an acceptance—'we shall expect you. Aurevoir! I'm afraid it's no good to ask *you*!' The last words were addressed smilingly to Watson, as Lord Findon, with outstretched hand, passed through the door, which Cuningham opened for him.

'Thank you,' said Watson, with a grave inclination—'I'm a hermit.'

The door closed on a gay and handsome presence. Lord Findon could not possibly have been accused of anything so ill-mannered as patronage. But there was in his manner a certain consciousness of power—of vantage-ground; a certain breath of autocracy. The face of Watson showed it as he returned to look closely into Fenwick's picture.

A few minutes later Fenwick found himself alone. He stood in front of the picture, staring into Phoebe's eyes. A wave of passionate remorse broke upon him. He had as good as denied her; and she sat there before him like some wronged, helpless thing. He seemed to hear her voice, to see her lips moving.

Hastily he took her last letter out of his pocket.

'I *am* glad you're getting on so well, and I'm counting the weeks to Christmas. Carrie kisses your photograph morning and night, but I'm afraid she'll have forgotten you a good deal. Sometimes I'm very weary here—but I don't mind if you're getting on, and if it won't be much longer. Miss Anna has sent me some new patterns for my tatting, and I'm getting a fine lot done. All the visitors are quite gone now, and it's that quiet at nights! Sometimes when it's been raining I think I can hear the Dungeon Ghyll stream, though it's more than a mile away.'

Fenwick put up the letter. He had a sudden vision of Phoebe in her white night-dress, opening the casement-window of the little cottage on a starry night, and listening to the sounds of distant water. Behind her was the small room with its candle—the baby's cot—the white bed, with his vacant place. A pang of longing—of homesickness—stirred him.

Then he began to pace his room, driven by the stress of feeling to take stock of his whole position. He had reached London in May; it was now November. Six months—of the hardest effort, the most strenuous labour he had ever passed through. He looked back upon it with exultation. Never had he been so conscious of expanding power and justified ambition. Through the Berners Street life-school he had obtained some valuable coaching and advice which had corrected faults and put him on the track of new methods. But it was his own right hand and his own brain he had mostly to thank, together with the opportunities of London. Up early, and to bed late—drawing from the model, the antique, still life,

drapery, landscape; studying pictures, old and new, and filling his sketch-book in every moment of so-called leisure with the figures and actions of the great city—he had made magnificent use of his time; Phoebe could find no fault with him there.

Had he forgotten her and the babe?—found letters to her sometimes a burden, and his heart towards her dry often and barren? Well, he *had* written regularly; and she had never complained. Men cannot be like women, absorbed for ever in the personal affections. For him it was the day of battle, in which a man must strain all his powers to the uttermost if any laurels are to be won before evening. His whole soul was absorbed in the stress of it, in the hungry eagerness for fame, and—though in a lesser degree—for money.

Money! The very thought of it filled him with impatient worry. Morrison's hundred was nearly gone. He knew well enough that Phoebe was right when she accused him of managing his money badly. It ran through his fingers loosely, incessantly. He hardly knew now where the next remittances to Phoebe were to come from. At first he had done a certain amount of illustrating work and had generally sent her the proceeds of it. But of late he had been absorbed in his big picture, and there had been few or no small earnings. Perhaps, if he hadn't written those articles to the *Mirror*, there would have been time for some? Well, why shouldn't he write them? His irritable pride took fire at once at the thought of blame.

No one could say, anyway, that he had spent money in amusement. Why, he had scarcely been out of Bloomsbury!—the rest of London might not have existed for him. A gallery-seat at the Lyceum Theatre, then in its early fame, and hot discussions of Irving and Ellen Terry with such artistic or literary acquaintance as he had made through the life-school or elsewhere—these had been his only distractions. He stood amazed before his own virtues. He drank little—smoked little. As for women—he thought with laughter or wrath of Phoebe's touch of jealousy! There was an extremely pretty girl—a fair-haired, conscious minx—drawing in the same room with him at the British Museum. Evidently she would have been glad to capture him; and he had loftily denied her. If he had ever been as susceptible as Phoebe thought him, he was susceptible no more. Life burned with sterner fire!

And yet, for all these self-denials, Morrison's money and his own savings were nearly gone. Funds might hold out till after Christmas. What then?

He had heard once or twice from Morrison, asking for news of the pictures promised. Lately he had left the letters unanswered; but he lived in terror of a visit. For he had nothing to offer him—neither money nor pictures. His only picture so far—as distinguished from exercises—was the 'Genius Loci.' He had begun that in a moment of weariness with his student work, basing it on a number of studies of Phoebe's head and face he had brought South with him. He had been lucky enough to find a model very much resembling Phoebe in figure; and now, suddenly, the picture had become his passion, the centre of all his hopes. It astonished himself; he saw his artistic advance in it writ large; of late he had been devoting himself entirely to it, wrapt, like the body of Hector, in a heavenly cloud that lifted him from the earth! If the picture sold—and it would surely sell—then all paths were clear. Morrison should be paid; and Phoebe have her rights. Let it only be well hung at the Academy, and well sold to some discriminating buyer—and John Fenwick henceforward would owe no man anything—whether money or favour.

At this point he returned to his picture, grappling with it afresh in a feverish pleasure. He caught up a mirror and looked at it reversed; he put in a bold accent or two; fumed over the lack of brilliancy in some colour he had bought the day before; and ended in a fresh burst of satisfaction. By Jove, it was good! Lord Findon had been evidently 'bowled over' by it—Cuningham too. As for that sour-faced fellow, Watson, what did it matter what he thought?

It *must* succeed! Suddenly he found himself on his knees beside his picture, praying that he might finish it prosperously, that it might be given a good place in the Academy, and bring him fame and fortune.

Then he got up sheepishly, looking furtively round the room to be sure that the door was shut, and no one had seen him. He was a good deal ashamed of himself, for he was not in truth of a religious mind, and he had, by now, few or no orthodox beliefs. But in all matters connected with his pictures the Evangelical tradition of his youth still held him. He was the descendant of generations of men and women who had prayed on all possible occasions—that customers might be plentiful and business good—that the young cattle might do well, and the hay be got in dry—that their children might prosper—and they themselves be delivered from rheumatism, or toothache, or indigestion. Fenwick's prayer to some 'magnified non-natural man' afar off, to come and help him with his picture, was of the same kind. Only he was no longer whole-hearted and simple about it, as he had been when Phoebe married him, as she was still.

He put on his studio coat and sat down to his work again, in a very tender, repentant mood. What on earth had possessed him to make that answer to Lord Findon—to let him and those other fellows take him for unmarried? He protested, in excuse, that Westmoreland folk are 'close,' and don't like talking about their own affairs. He came of a secretive, suspicious stock; and had no mind at any time to part with unnecessary facts about himself. As talkative as you please about art and opinion; of his own concerns not a word! London had made him all the more cautious and reticent. No one knew anything about him except as an artist. He always posted his letters himself; and he believed that neither his landlady nor anybody else suspected him of a wife.

But to-day he had carried things too far—and a guilty discomfort weighed upon him. What was to be done? Should he on the first opportunity set himself right with Lord Findon—speak easily and unexpectedly of Phoebe and the child? Clearly what would have been simplicity itself at first was now an awkwardness. Lord Findon would be puzzled—chilled. He would suppose there was something to be ashamed of—some skeleton in the cupboard. And especially would he take it ill that Fenwick had allowed him to run on with his diatribes against matrimony as though he were talking to a bachelor. Then the lie about the picture. It had been the shy, foolish impulse of a moment. But how explain it to Lord Findon?

Fenwick stood there tortured by an intense and morbid distress; realising how much this rich and illustrious person had already entered into his day dream. For all his pride as an artist—and he was full of it—his trembling, crude ambition had already seized on Lord Findon as a stepping-stone. He did not know whether he could stoop to court a patron. His own temper had to be reckoned with. But to lose him at the outset by a silly falsehood would be galling. A man who has to live in the world as a married man must not begin by making a mystery of his wife. He felt the social stupidity of what he had done, yet could not find in himself the courage to set it right.

Well, well, let him only make a hit in the Academy, sell his picture, and get some commissions. Then Phoebe should appear, and smile down astonishment. His *gaucherie* should be lost in his success.

He tossed about that night, sleepless, and thinking of Cuningham's two hundred and fifty pounds—for a picture so cheaply, commonly clever. It filled him with the thirst to *arrive*. He had more brains, more drawing, more execution—more everything!—than Cuningham. No doubt a certain prudence and tact were wanted—tact in managing yourself and your gifts.

Well!—in spite of Watson's rude remark, what human being *knew* he was writing those articles in the *Mirror*? He threw out his challenge to the darkness, and so fell asleep.

CHAPTER IV

Fenwick had never spent a more arduous hour than that which he devoted to the business of dressing for Lord Findon's dinner-party. It was his first acquaintance with dress-clothes. He had, indeed, dined once or twice at the tables of the Westmoreland gentry in the course of his portrait-painting experiences. But there had been no 'party,' and it had been perfectly understood that for the Kendal bookseller's son a black Sunday coat was sufficient. Now, however, he was to meet the great world on its own terms; and though he tried hard to disguise his nervousness from his sponsor, Philip Cuningham, he did not succeed. Cuningham instructed him where to buy a second-hand dress-suit that very nearly fitted him, and he had duly provided himself with gloves and tie. When all was done he put his infinitesimal looking-glass on the floor of his attic, flanked it with two guttering candles, and walked up and down before it in a torment, observing his own demeanour and his coat's, saying 'How d'ye do?' and 'Good-bye' to an imaginary host, or bending affably to address some phantom lady across the table.

When at last he descended the stairs, he felt as though he were just escaped from a wrestling-match. He followed Cuningham into the omnibus with nerves all on edge. He hated the notion, too, of taking an omnibus to go and dine in St. James's Square. But Cuningham's Scotch thriftiness scouted the proposal of a hansom.

On the way Fenwick suddenly asked his companion whether there was a Lady Findon. Cuningham, startled by the ignorance of his *protégé*, drew out as quickly as he could *la carte du pays*.

Lady Findon, the second wife, fat, despotic, and rich, rather noisy, and something of a character, a political hostess, a good friend, and a still better hater; two sons, silent, good-looking and clever, one in the brewery that provided his mother with her money, the other in the Hussars; two daughters not long

'introduced'—one pretty—the other bookish and rather plain; so ran the catalogue.

'I believe there is another daughter by the first wife—married—something queer about the husband. But I've never seen her. She doesn't often appear—Hullo—here we are.'

They alighted at the Haymarket, and as they walked down the street Fenwick found himself in the midst of the evening whirl of the West End. The clubs were at their busiest; men passed them in dress-suits and overcoats like themselves, and the street was full of hansoms, whence the faces of well-dressed women, enveloped in soft silks and furs, looked out.

Fenwick felt himself treading a new earth. At such an hour he was generally wending his way to a Bloomsbury eating-house, where he dined for eighteenpence; he was a part of the striving, moneyless student-world.

But here, from this bustling Haymarket with its gay, hurrying figures, there breathed new forces, new passions which bewildered him. As he was looking at the faces in the carriages, the jewels and feathers and shining stuffs, he thought suddenly and sharply of Phoebe sitting alone at her supper in the tiny cottage room. His heart smote him a little. But, after all, was he not on her business as well as his own?

The door of Lord Findon's house opened before them. At sight of the liveried servants within, Fenwick's pride asserted itself. He walked in, head erect, as though the place belonged to him.

Lord Findon came pleasantly to greet them as they entered the drawing-room, and took them up to Lady Findon. Cuningham she already knew, and she gave a careless glance and a touch of the hand to his companion. It was her husband's will to ask these raw, artistic youths to dinner, and she had to put up with it; but really the difficulty of knowing whom to send them in with was enormous.

'I am glad to make your acquaintance,' she said, mechanically, to Fenwick, as he stood awkwardly beside her, while her eyes searched the door for a Cabinet Minister and his wife who were the latest guests.

'Thank you; I too am pleased to make yours,' said Fenwick, nervously pulling at his gloves, and furious with his own *malaise*.

Lady Findon's eyebrows lifted in amusement. She threw him another glance.

Good-looking!—but really Findon should wait till they were a little *décrotté*.

'I hear your picture is charming,' she said, distractedly; and then, suddenly perceiving the expected figures, she swept forward to receive them.

'Very sorry, my dear fellow, we have no lady for you; but you will be next my daughter, Madame de Pastourelles,' said Lord Findon, a few minutes later, in his ear, passing him with a nod and a smile. His gay, half-fatherly ways with these rising talents were well known. They made part of his fame with his contemporaries; a picturesque element in his dinner-parties which the world appreciated.

Fenwick found his way rather sulkily to the dining-room. It annoyed him that Cuningham had a lady and he had none. His companion on the road downstairs was the private secretary, who tried good-naturedly to point out the family portraits on the staircase wall. But Fenwick scarcely replied. He stalked on, his great black eyes glancing restlessly from side to side; and the private secretary thought him a boor.

As he was standing bewildered inside the dining-room a servant caught hold of him and piloted him to his seat. A lady in white, who was already seated in the next chair, looked up and smiled.

'My father told me we were to be neighbours. I must introduce myself.'

She held out a small hand, which, in his sudden pleasure, Fenwick grasped more cordially than was necessary. She withdrew it smiling, and he sat down, feeling himself an impulsive ass, intimidated by the lights, the flowers, the multitude of his knives and forks, and most of all, perhaps, by this striking and brilliant creature beside him.

Madame de Pastourelles was of middle height, slenderly built, with pale-brown hair, and a delicately white face, of a very perfect oval. She had large, quiet eyes, darker than her hair; features small, yet of a noble outline—strength in refinement. The proud cutting of the nose and mouth gave delight; it was a pride so unconscious, so masked in sweetness, that it challenged without wounding. The short upper lip was sensitive and gay; the eyes ranged in a smiling freedom; the neck and arms were beautiful. Her dress, according to the Whistlerian phrase just coming into vogue, might have been called an 'arrangement in white.' The basis of it seemed to be white velvet; and breast and hair were powdered

with diamonds delicately set in old flower-like shapes.

'You are in the same house with Mr. Cuningham?' she asked, when a dean had said grace and the soup was served. Her voice was soft and courteous; the irritation in Fenwick felt the soothing of it.

'I am on the floor above.'

'He paints charming things.'

Fenwick hesitated.

'You think so?' he said, bluntly, turning to look at her.

She coloured slightly and laughed.

'Do you mean to put me in the Palace of Truth?'

'Of course I would if I could,' said Fenwick, also laughing. 'But I suppose ladies never say quite what they mean.'

'Oh yes, they do. Well, then, I am not much enamoured of Mr.
Cuningham's pictures. I like *him*, and my father likes his painting.'

'Lord Findon admires that kind of thing?'

'Besides a good many other kinds. Oh! my father has a dreadfully catholic taste. He tells me you haven't been abroad yet?'

Fenwick acknowledged it.

'Ah, well; of course you'll go. All artists do—except'—she dropped her voice—'the gentleman opposite.'

Fenwick looked, and beheld a personage scarcely, indeed, to be seen at all for his very bushy hair, whiskers, and moustache, from which emerged merely the tip of a nose and a pair of round eyes in spectacles. As, however, the hair was of an orange colour and the eyes of a piercing and pinlike sharpness, the eclipse of feature was not a loss of effect. And as the flamboyant head was a tolerably familiar object in the shop-windows of the photographers and in the illustrated papers, Fenwick recognised almost immediately one of the most popular artists of the day—Mr. Herbert Sherratt.

Fenwick flushed hotly.

'Lord Findon doesn't admire *his* work?' he said, almost with fierceness, turning to his companion.

'He hates his pictures and collects his drawings.'

'Drawings!' Fenwick shrugged his shoulders. 'Anybody can make a clever drawing. It's putting on the paint that counts. Why doesn't he go abroad?'

'Oh, well, he does go to Holland. But he thinks Italian painting all stuff, and that so many Madonnas and saints encourage superstition. But what's the use of talking? They have to station a policeman beside his picture in the Academy to keep off the crowd. Hush-sh! He is looking this way.'

She turned her head, and Fenwick feared she was lost to him. He managed to get in another question. 'Are there any other painters here?'

She pointed out the president of the Academy, a sculptor, and an art-critic, at whose name Fenwick curled his lip, full of the natural animosity of the painter to the writer.

'And, of course, you know my neighbour?'

Fenwick looked hastily, and saw a very handsome youth bending forward to answer a question which Lord Findon had addressed to him from across the table; a face in the 'grand style'—almost the face of a Greek—pure in outline, bronzed by foreign suns, and lit by eyes expressing so strong a force of personality that, but for the sweetness with which it was tempered, the spectator might have been rather repelled than won. When the young man answered Lord Findon, the voice was, like the face, charged—perhaps over-charged—with meaning and sensibility.

'I took Madame de Pastourelles to see it to-day,' the youth was saying. 'She thought it as glorious as I did.'

'Oh! you are a pair of enthusiasts,' said Lord Findon. 'I keep my head.'

The 'it' turned out to be a Titian portrait from the collection of an old Roman family, lately brought to London and under offer to the National Gallery, of which Lord Findon was a trustee.

Madame de Pastourelles looked towards her father, confirming what the unknown youth had said. Her eyes had kindled. She began to talk rapidly in defence of her opinion. Between her, Lord Findon, and her neighbour there arose a conversation which made Fenwick's ears tingle. How many things and persons and places it touched upon that were wholly unknown to him! Pictures in foreign museums—Vienna, Berlin, St. Petersburg—the names of French or German experts—quotations from Italian books or newspapers—the three dealt lightly and familiarly with a world in which Fenwick had scarcely a single landmark. How clever she was! how charming! What knowledge without a touch of pedantry! And how the handsome youth kept up with her—nay, rather, led her, with a mastery, a resource, to which she always yielded in case of any serious difference of opinion! It seemed that they had been abroad together—had seen many sights in each other's company—had many common friends.

Fenwick felt himself strangely sore and jealous as he listened. Who was this man? Some young aristocrat, no doubt, born silver spoon in mouth—one of your idle, insolent rich, with nothing to do but make a hobby of art, and patronise artists. He loathed the breed.

Her voice startled him back from these unspoken tirades, and once more he found her eyes fixed upon him. It provoked him to feel that their scrutiny made him self-conscious—anxious to please. They were so gentle, so gay!—and yet behind the first expression there sat what seemed to him the real personality, shrewd, critical, and remote.

'You must see this picture,' she said, kindly. 'It's glorious!'

'Where is it?'

'In a house near here. But father could get you in.'

He hesitated, then laughed, ungraciously.

'I don't seem to have finished yet with the National Gallery.
Who—please—is the gentleman on your right?'

She smiled.

'Oh! don't you know him? You must let me introduce him. It is Mr.
Arthur Welby. Doesn't he talk well?'

She introduced them. Welby received the introduction with a readiness—a touch of eagerness indeed—which seemed to show a mind favourably prepared for it.

'Lord Findon tells me you're sending in a most awfully jolly thing to the Academy!' he said, bending across Madame de Pastourelles, his musical voice full of cordiality. Fenwick made a muttered reply. It might have been thought he disliked being talked to about his own work. Welby accordingly changed the subject at once; he returned to the picture he had been pressing on Lord Findon.

'Haven't you seen it? You really should.' But this elicited even less response. Fenwick glared at him—apparently tongue-tied. Then Madame de Pastourelles and her neighbour talked to each other, endeavouring to draw in the stranger. In vain. They fell back, naturally, into the talk of intimates, implying a thousand common memories and experiences; and Fenwick found himself left alone.

His mind burned with annoyance and self-disgust. Why did he let these people intimidate him? Why was he so ridiculously self-conscious?—so incapable of holding his own? He knew all about Arthur Welby; his name and fame were in all the studios. The author of the picture of the year—in the opinion, at least, of the cultivated minority for whom rails and policemen were not the final arbiters of merit; glorified in the speeches at the Academy banquet; and already overwhelmed with more commissions than he could take—Welby should have been one of the best hated of men. On the contrary, his mere temperament had drawn the teeth of that wild beast, Success. Well-born, rich, a social favourite, trained in Paris and Italy, an archaeologist and student as well as a painter, he commanded the world as he pleased. Society asked him to dinners, and he gave himself no professional airs and went when he could. But among his fellows he lived a happy comrade's life, spending his gifts and his knowledge without reserve, always ready to help a man in a tight place, to praise a friend's picture, to take up a friend's quarrel. He took his talent and his good-fortune so simply that the world must needs insist upon them, instead of contesting them.

As for his pictures, they were based on the Italian tradition—rich, accurate, learned, full of literary

allusion and reminiscence. In Fenwick's eyes, young as was their author, they were of the past rather than of the future. He contemptuously thought of them as belonging to a dead *genre*. But the man who painted them could *draw*.

Meanwhile he seemed to have lost Madame de Pastourelles, and must needs fall back on the private secretary beside him. This gentleman, who had already entered him on the tablets of the mind as a mannerless outsider, was not particularly communicative. But at least Fenwick learned the names of the other guests. The well-known Ambassador beside Lady Findon, with a shrewd, thin, sulky face, and very black eyes under whitish hair—eyes turned much more frequently on the pretty actress to his right than upon his hostess; a financier opposite, much concerned with great colonial projects; the Cabinet Minister—of no account, it seemed, either in the House or the Cabinet—and his wife, abnormally thin, and far too discreet for the importance of her husband's position; a little farther, the wife of the red-haired Academician, a pale, frightened creature who looked like her husband's apology, and was in truth his slave;—all these he learned gradually to discriminate.

So this was the great world. He was stormily pleased to be in it, and at the same time scornful of it. It seemed to contain not a few ancient shams and hollow pretenders—

Ah! once more the soft, ingratiating voice beside him. Madame de Pastourelles was expressing a flattering wish to see his picture, of which her father had talked so much.

'And he says you have found such a beautiful model—or, rather, better than beautiful—characteristic.'

Fenwick stared at her. It was on the tip of his tongue to say 'She is my wife.' But he did not say it. He imagined her look of surprise—'Ah, my father had no idea!'—imagined it with a morbid intensity, and saw no way of confronting or getting round it; not at the dinner-table, anyway—with all these eyes and ears about him—above all, with Lord Findon opposite. Why, they might think he had been ashamed of Phoebe!—that there was some reason for hiding her away. It was ridiculous—most annoying and absurd; but now that the thing had happened, he must really choose his own moment for unravelling the coil.

So he stammered something unintelligible about a 'Westmoreland type,' and then hastily led the talk to some other schemes he had in mind. With the sense of having escaped a danger he found his tongue for the first time, and the power of expressing himself.

Madame de Pastourelles listened attentively—drew him out, indeed—made him show himself to the best advantage. And presently, at a moment of pause, she said, with a smile and a shrug, 'How happy you are to have an art! Now I—'

She let her hand fall with a little plaintive movement.

'I am sure you paint,' said Fenwick, eagerly.

'No.'

'Then you are musical?'

'Not at all. I embroider—'

'All women should,' said Fenwick, trying for a free and careless air.

'I read—'

'You do not need to say it.'

She opened her eyes at this readiness of reply; but still pursued:

'And I have a Chinese pug.'

'And no children?' The words rose to Fenwick's lips, but remained unspoken. Perhaps she divined them, for she began hastily to describe her dog—its tricks and fidelities. Fenwick could meet her here; for a mongrel fox-terrier—taken, a starving waif, out of the streets—had been his companion since almost the first month of his solitude. Each stimulated the other, and they fell into those legends of dog-life in which every dog-lover believes, however sceptical he may be in other directions. Till presently she said, with a sigh and a stiffening of her delicate features:

'But mine shows some symptoms of paralysis. He was run over last summer. I'm afraid it will be long and painful.'

Fenwick replied that she should send for the vet. and have the dog painlessly killed.

'No. I shall nurse him.'

'Why should you look on at suffering?'

'Why not—if sometimes he enjoys life?'

'I am thinking of the mistress.'

'Oh, for us,' she said, quickly, 'for me—it is good to be with suffering.'

As she spoke, she drew herself slightly more erect. Neither tone nor manner showed softness, made any appeal. The words seemed to have dropped from her, and the strange pride and dignity she at once threw around them made a veiling cloud through which only a man entirely without the finer perceptions would have tried to penetrate. Fenwick, for all his surface *gaucherie*, did not attempt it. But he attacked her generalisation. With some vehemence he developed against it a Neo-pagan doctrine of joy—love of the earth and its natural pleasures—courage to take and dare—avoidance of suffering—and war on asceticism. He poured out a number of undigested thoughts, which showed a great deal of reading, and at least betrayed a personality, whatever value they might have as a philosophy.

She listened with a charming kindness, laughing now and then, putting in a humorous comment or two, and never by another word betraying her own position. But he was more and more conscious of the double self in her—of the cultivated, social self she was bringing into play for his benefit, and of something behind—a spirit watchful and still—wrapt in a great melancholy—or perhaps a great rebellion? And by this sense of something concealed or strongly restrained, she began to affect his imagination, and so, presently, to absorb his attention. Something exquisite in her movements and looks, also in the quality of her voice and the turn of her phrases, drew from his own crude yet sensitive nature an excited response. He began to envisage what these highly trained women of the upper class, these *raffinées* of the world, may be for those who understand them—a stimulus, an enigma, an education.

It flashed on him that women of this type could teach him much that he wanted to know; and his ambition seized on the idea. But what chance that she would ever give another thought to the raw artist to whom her father had flung a passing invitation?

He made haste, indeed, to prove his need of her or some other Egeria; for she was no sooner departed with the other ladies than he came to mischief. Left alone with the gentlemen, his temperament asserted itself. He had no mind in any company to be merely a listener. Moreover, that slight, as he regarded it, of sending him down without a lady, still rankled; and last, but not least, he had drunk a good deal of champagne, to which he was quite unaccustomed. So that when Lord Findon fell into a discussion with the Ambassador of Irving's *Hamlet* and *Othello*, then among the leading topics of London—when the foreigner politely but emphatically disparaged the English actor and Lord Findon with zeal defended him—who should break into the august debate but this strong-browed, black-eyed fellow, from no one knew where, whose lack of some of the smaller conventions had already been noticed by a few of the company.

At first all looked well. A London dinner-party loves novelty, and is always ready to test the stranger within its gates. Fenwick slipped into the battle as a supporter of Lord Findon's argument, and his host with smiling urbanity welcomed him to the field. But in a few minutes the newcomer had ravaged the whole of it. The older men were silenced, and Fenwick was leaning across the table, gesticulating with one hand, and lifting his port-wine with the other, addressing now Lord Findon and now the Ambassador—who stared at him in amazement—with an assurance that the world only allows to its oldest favourites. Lord Findon in vain tried to stop him.

'Didn't know this was to be a dinner with speeches,' murmured the financier, after a few minutes, in his neighbour's ear. 'Think I'll get up and propose a vote of thanks to the chairman.'

'There ought, at least, to be a time-limit,' said the neighbour, with a shrug. 'Where on earth did Findon pick him up?'

'I say, what an awfully rum chap!' said the young son of the house—wondering—to Arthur Welby. 'What does he talk like that for?'

'He doesn't talk badly,' said Welby, whose mouth showed the laughter within.

Meanwhile Fenwick—loud-voiced, excited—had brought his raid to a climax by an actual attack upon the stately Frenchman opposite, whose slight sarcastic look pricked him intolerably. All other conversation at the table fell dumb.

Lord Findon coloured, and rose.

'You are a great deal more sure of my own opinion than I am myself,' he said, coldly. 'I am much obliged to you, but—shall we adjourn this conversation?'

As the men walked upstairs, Fenwick realised that he had blundered; he felt himself isolated and in disfavour. Arthur Welby had approached him, but Lord Findon had rather pointedly drawn an arm through Welby's and swept him away. No one else spoke to him, and even the private secretary, who had before befriended him, left him severely alone. None of the ladies in the drawing-room upstairs showed, as it seemed to him, any desire for his company, and he was reduced to looking at a stand of miniatures near the door, while his heart swelled fiercely. So this was what society meant?—a wretched pleasure purchased on degrading terms! A poor dependant like himself, he supposed, was to be seen and not heard—must speak when he was spoken to, play chorus, and whisper humbleness. As to meeting these big-wigs on equal terms, that clearly was not expected. An artist may be allowed to know something about art; on any other subject let him listen to his betters.

He said to himself that he was sick of the whole business; and he would gladly have slipt through the open door down the stairs, and out of the house. He was restrained, however, by the protest of a sore ambition which would not yet admit defeat. Had he set Lord Findon against him?—ruined the chance of a purchaser for his picture and of a patron for the future? Out of the corner of his eye he saw Cuningham, neat, amiable, and self-possessed, sitting in a corner by Lady Findon, who smiled and chatted incessantly. And it was clear to him that Welby was the spoilt child of the room. Wherever he went men and women grouped themselves about him; there was a constant eagerness to capture him, an equal reluctance to let him go.

'Well, I'm as good as he—as either of them,' thought Fenwick fiercely, as he handled a Cosway. 'Only they can talk these people's lingo, and I can't. I can paint as well as they any day—and I'll be bound, if they let me alone, I could talk as well. Why do people ask you to their houses and then ill-treat you? Damn them!'

Meanwhile, Lord Findon had had a few whispered words with his daughter in an inner room.

'My dear!'—throwing up his hands—'a *barbarian*! Can't have him here again.'

'Mr. Fenwick, papa?'

'Of course. Cuningham ought to have warned me. However, I suppose I brought it on myself. I do these rash things, and must pay for them. He was so rude to De Chailles that I have had to apologise.'

'Poor papa! Where is he?'

'In the other room—looking at things. Better leave him alone.'

'Oh no; he'll feel himself neglected.'

'Well, let him. A man ought to be made to understand that he can't behave like that.'

'What did he do?'

'My dear, he spoiled the whole business after dinner—harangued the table!—as good as told De Chailles he had no right to talk about Irving or Shakespeare, being a foreigner. You never saw such an exhibition!'

'Poor Mr. Fenwick. I must go and talk to him.'

'Eugénie, don't be a goose. Why should you take any trouble about him?'

'He's wonderfully clever, papa. And clever people are always getting into scrapes. Somebody must take him in hand.'

And, rising, she threw her father a whimsical backward look as she departed. Lord Findon watched her with mingled smiles and chagrin. How charmingly she was dressed to-night—his poor Eugénie! And how beautifully she moved!—with what grace and sweetness! As he turned to do his duty by an elderly countess near him, he stifled a sigh—that was also an imprecation.

It had often been said of Eugénie de Pastourelles that she possessed a social magic. She certainly displayed it on this occasion. Half an hour later Lord Findon, who was traversing the drawing-rooms after having taken the Ambassadress to her carriage, found a regenerate and humanised Fenwick sitting beside his daughter; the centre, indeed, of a circle no less friendly to untutored talent than the circle of the dinner-table had been hostile. Lord Findon stopped to listen. Really the young man was

now talking decently!—about matters he understood; Burne-Jones, Rossetti—some French pictures in Bond Street—and so forth. The ruffled host was half appeased, half wroth. For if he *could* make this agreeable impression, why such a superfluity of naughtiness downstairs? And the fellow had really some general cultivation; nothing like Welby, of course—where would you find another Arthur Welby?—but enough to lift him above the mere journeyman. After all, one must be indulgent to these novices—with no traditions behind them—and no—well, to put it plainly—no grandfathers! And so, with reflexions of this kind, the annoyance of a good-natured man subsided.

It was all Eugénie's doing, of course. She and Welby between them had caught the bear, tamed him, and set him to show whatever parlour tricks he possessed. Just like her! He hoped the young man understood her condescension—and that to see her and talk with her was a privilege. Involuntarily Lord Findon glanced across the room, at the *décolleté* shoulders and buxom good looks of his wife. When Eugénie was in the house the second Lady Findon never seemed to him well dressed.

When Fenwick and Cuningham had departed—Fenwick in a glow of grateful good-humour, expressing himself effusively to his host—Madame de Pastourelles approached her father, smiling.

'That youth has asked me to sit to him.'

'The audacious rascal!' cried Lord Findon, fuming. 'He has never seen you before—and, besides, how does any one know what he can do?'

'Why, you said yourself his picture was remarkable.'

'So it is. But what's one picture? What do you think, Welby?' he said, impulsively addressing the man beside him. 'Wasn't it like his impudence?'

Welby smiled.

'Like Eugénie's kindness! It was rather charming to see his look when she said "Yes"!'

'You said "*Yes*"!' Lord Findon stared at her.

'Come with me and see what he can do in a morning.' She laid a quieting hand on her father's arm. 'You know that always amuses you. And I want to see his picture.'

'His picture is not bad,' said Lord Findon, with decision.

'I think you will have to buy it, papa.'

'There you go,' said Lord Findon—'letting me in!'

'Well, I'm off to bed.' Smiling, she gave her hand to each, knowing that she had gained her point, or would gain it. Arthur Welby, turning, watched her move away, say 'Good-night' to Lady Findon, and disappear through a distant door. Then for him, though the room was still full of people, it was vacant. He slipped away without any more 'Good-byes.'

CHAPTER V

It was Christmas Eve, and the dark had fallen. The train from Euston had just drawn up in Windermere Station, and John Fenwick, carrying his bag, was making his way among the vehicles outside the station, inquiring whether any one was going in the direction of Great Langdale, who could give him a lift. He presently found a farmer's cart bound for a village on the road, and made a bargain with the lad driving it to carry him to his destination.

They set off in bitter weather. The driver was a farmer's son who had come to the station to fetch his small brother. Fenwick and he took the little school-boy between them, to protect him as best they could from the wind and sleet. They piled some empty sacks, from the back of the cart, on their knees and shoulders; and the old grey horse set forward cautiously, feeling its way down the many hills of the Ambleside road.

The night was not yet wholly in possession. The limestone road shone dimly white, the forms of the leafless trees passed them in a windy procession, and afar on the horizon, beyond the dark gulf of the lake, there was visible at intervals a persistent dimness, something less black than the sky above and

the veiled earth below, which Fenwick knew must be the snowy tops of the mountains. But it was a twilight more mournful than a total darkness; the damp air was nipping cold, and every few minutes gusts of sleet drove in their faces.

The two brothers talked to each other sometimes, in a broad Westmoreland speech. To Fenwick the dialect of his childhood was already strange and disagreeable. So, too, was the wild roughness of the Northern night, the length of the road, the sense of increasing distance from all that most held his mind. He longed, indeed, to see Phoebe and the child, but it was as though he had wilfully set up some barrier between himself and them, which spoiled his natural pleasure. Moreover, he was afraid of Phoebe, of her quick jealous love, and of certain passionate possibilities in her character that he had long ago discerned. If she discovered that he had made a mystery of his marriage—that he had passed in London as unmarried? It was an ugly and uncomfortable 'if.' Did he shrink from the possible blow to her—or the possible trouble to himself? Well, she must not find it out! It had been a wretched sort of accident, and before it could do any harm it should be amended.

Suddenly, a sound of angry water. They were close on the lake, and waves driven by the wind were plashing on the shore. Across the lake, a light in a house-window shone through the storm, the only reminder of human life amid a dark wilderness of mountains. Wild sounds crashed through the trees; and accompanying the tumult of water came the rattle of a bitter rain lashing the road, the cart, and their bent shoulders.

'There'll not be a dry stitch on us soon,' said Fenwick, presently, to the young man beside him.

'Aye, it's dampish,' said his companion, cheerfully.

The caution of the adjective set Fenwick grinning. The North found and gripped him; these are not the ways of the South.

And in a moment the sense of contrast, thus provoked, had carried him far—out of the Westmoreland night, back to London, and his shabby studio in Bernard Street. There, throned on a low platform, sat Madame de Pastourelles; and to her right, himself, sitting crouched before his easel, working with all his eyes and all his mind. The memory of her was, as it were, physically stamped upon his sight, his hands; such an intensity of study had he given to every detail of her face and form. Did he like her? He didn't know. There were a number of curious resentments in his mind with regard to her. Several times in the course of their acquaintance she had cheapened or humiliated him in his own eyes; and the sensation had been of a sharpness as yet unknown to him.

Of course, there was in it, one way or another, an aristocratic insolence! There must be: to move so delicately and immaculately through life, with such superfine perceptions, must mean that you were brought up to scorn the common way, and those who walk in it. 'The poor in a lump are bad'—coarse and ill-mannered at any rate—that must be the real meaning of her soft dignity, so friendly yet so remote, her impossibly ethereal standards, her light words that so often abashed a man for no reasonable cause.

She had been sitting to him, off and on, for about six weeks. Originally she had meant him to make a three-hour sketch of her. He triumphed in the remembrance that she and Lord Findon had found the sketch so remarkable that, when he had timidly proposed a portrait in oils, Lord Findon himself had persuaded her to sit. Since that moment his work on the portrait, immediately begun, had absorbed him to such a degree that the 'Genius Loci,' still unfinished, had been put aside, and must have its last touches when he returned to town.

But in the middle of the sittings, Madame de Pastourelles being away, and he in a mood to destroy all that he had done, he had suddenly spent a stray earning on a railway ticket to Paris.

There—excitement!—illumination!—and a whole fresh growth of ambition! Some of the mid-century portraits in the Luxembourg, and in a loan exhibition then open in the Rue Royale, excited him so that he lost sleep and appetite. The work of Bastien-Lepage was also to be seen; and the air rang with the cries of Impressionism. But the beautiful surface of the older men held him. How to combine the breadth of the new with the keeping, the sheer *pleasure* of the old! He rushed home—aflame!—and fell to work again.

And now he found himself a little more able to cope with his sitter. He was in possession, at any rate, of fresh topics—need not feel himself so tongue-tied in the presence of this cosmopolitan culture of hers, which she did her feminine best to disguise—which nevertheless made the atmosphere of her personality. She had lived some six years in Paris, it appeared; and had known most of the chief artists and men of letters. Fenwick writhed under his ignorance of the French language; it was a disadvantage not to be made up.

However, he talked much, and sometimes arrogantly; he gave his views, compared one man with another; if he felt any diffidence, he showed little. And indeed she led him on. Upon his art he had a right to speak, and the keen intellectual interest she betrayed in his impressions—the three days impressions of a painter—stirred and flattered him.

But he made a great many rather ludicrous mistakes, inevitable to one who had just taken a first canter through the vast field of French art; mistakes in names and dates, in the order of men and generations. And when he made a blunder he was apt to stick to it absurdly, or excuse it elaborately. She soon gave up correcting him, even in the gentle, hesitating way she at first made use of. She said nothing; but there was sometimes mischief, perhaps mockery, in her eyes. Fenwick knew it; and would either make fresh plunges, or paint on in a sulky silence.

How on earth had she guessed the authorship of those articles in the *Mirror*? He supposed he must have talked the same kind of stuff to her. At any rate, she had made him feel in some intangible way that it seemed to her a dishonourable thing to be writing anonymous attacks upon a body from whom you were asking, or intending to ask, exhibition space for your pictures and the chance of selling your work. His authorship was never avowed between them. Nevertheless this criticism annoyed and pricked him. He said to himself that it was just like a woman—who always took the personal view. But he had not yet begun on his last two articles, which were overdue.

On one occasion, encouraged perhaps by some kindness of expression on her part, he had ventured an indirect question or two, meant to procure him some information about her past history and present way of life. She had rebuffed him at once; and he had said to himself fiercely that it was of course because he was a man of the people and she one of 'the upper ten.' He might paint her; but he must not presume to know her!

On the other hand, his mind was still warm with memories of her encouragement, her praise. Sometimes in their talks he would put the portrait aside, and fall to sketching for her—either to illustrate his memories of pictures, or things noticed in French life and landscapes. And as the charcoal worked; as he forgot himself in hurried speech, and those remarks fell from him which are the natural outcome of a painter's experience, vivacious also and touched with literature; then her brown eyes would lighten and soften, and for once his mind would feel exultant that it moved with hers on equal terms—nay, that he was teacher and she taught. Whenever there emerged in him the signs of that demonic something that makes greatness she would be receptive, eager, humble even. But again his commoner, coarser side, his mere lack of breeding, would reappear; and she would fall back on her cold or gentle defensiveness. Thus protected by what his wrath called 'airs,' she was a mystery to him, yet a mystery that tamed and curbed him. He had never dreamt that such women existed. His own views of women were those of the shopkeeping middle class, practical, selfish, or sensual. But he had been a reader of books; and through Madame de Pastourelles certain sublimities or delicacies of poetry began to seem to him either less fantastic or more real.

All the same:—he was not sure that he liked her, and while one hour he was all restlessness to resume his task, the next it was a relief to be temporarily quit of it. As for Lord Findon, except for a certain teasing vagueness on the business side of things, he had shown himself a good friend. Several times since the first variegated evening had Fenwick dined with them, mostly *en famille*. Lady Findon, indeed, had been away, nursing an invalid father; Madame de Pastourelles filled her place. The old fellow would talk freely—politics, connoisseurship, art. Fenwick too was allowed his head, and said his say; though always surrounded and sometimes chafing under that discipline of good society which is its only or its best justification. It flattered his vanity enormously, however, to be thus within touch of the inner circle in politics and art; for the Findons had relations and friends in all the foremost groups of both; and incidentally Fenwick, who had the grudges and some of the dreams of the democrat, was beginning to have a glimpse of the hidden springs and powers of English society—to his no small bewilderment often!

Great luck—he admitted—all this—for a nameless artist of the people, only six months in London. He owed it to Cuningham, and believed himself grateful. Cuningham was often at the Findons, made a point, indeed, of going. Was it to maintain his place with them, and to keep Fenwick under observation? Fenwick triumphantly believed that Lord Findon greatly preferred his work—and even, by now, his conversation—to Cuningham's. But he was still envious of Cuningham's smooth tact, and agreeable, serviceable ways.

As to Welby and his place in the Findon circle, that was another matter altogether. He came and went as he pleased, on brotherly terms with the son and the younger daughters, clearly an object of great affection to Lord Findon, and often made use of by her ladyship. What was the degree of friendship between him and Madame de Pastourelles?—that had been already the subject of many meditations on Fenwick's part.

The cart deposited the school-boy in Brathay and started again for Langdale.

'Yo couldna get at Langdale for t' snaw lasst week,' said the young farmer, as they turned a corner into the Skelwith Valley. 'T' roads were fair choked wi't.'

'It's been an early winter,' said Fenwick.

'Aye, and t' Langdales get t' brunt o't. It's wild livin there, soomtimes, i' winter.'

They began to climb the first steep hill of the old road to Langdale. The snow lay piled on either side of the road, the rain beat down, and the trees clashed and moaned overhead. Not a house, not a light, upon their path—only swirling darkness, opening now and then on that high glimmer of the snow. Fresh from London streets, where winter, even if it attack in force, is so soon tamed and conquered, Fenwick was for the first time conscious of the harsher, wilder aspects of his native land. Poor Phoebe! Had she been a bit lonesome in the snow and rain?

The steep lane to the cottage was still deep in snow. The cart could not attempt it. Fenwick made his way up, fighting the eddying sleet. As he let fall the latch of the outer gate, the cottage door opened, and Phoebe, with the child in her arms, stood on the threshold.

'John!'

'Yes! God bless my soul, what a night!' He reached the door, put down his umbrella with difficulty, and dragged his bag into the passage. Then, in a moment, his coat was off and he had thrown his arm round her and the child. It seemed to him that she was curiously quiet and restrained. But she kissed him in return, drew him further within the little passage, and shut the outer door, shivering.

'The kitchen's warm,' she said, at last.

She led him in, and he found the low-ceiled room bright with fire and lamp, the table spread, and his chair beside the blaze. Kneeling down, she tried to unlace his wet boots.

'No, no!' he said, holding her away—'I'll do that, Phoebe. What's wrong with you?—you look so—so queer!'

She straightened herself, and with a laugh put back her fair hair. Her face was very pale—a greyish pallor—and her wonderful eyes stared from it in an odd, strained way.

'Oh, I'm all right,' she said; and she turned away from him to the fire, opening the oven-door to see whether the meat-pie was done.

'How have you kept in this weather?' he said, watching her. 'I'd no notion you'd had it so bad.'

'Oh, I don't know. I suppose I've had a chill or something. It's been rather weariful.'

'You didn't tell me anything about your chill.'

'Didn't I? It seems hardly worth while telling such things, from such a distance. Will you have supper at once?'

He drew up to the table, and she fed him and hovered round him, asking the while about his work, in a rather perfunctory way, about his rooms and the price of them, inquiring after the state of his clothes. But her tone and manner were unlike herself, and there was in his mind a protesting consciousness that she had not welcomed him as a young wife should after a long separation. Her manner too was extraordinarily nervous; her hand shook as she touched a plate; her movements were full of starts, and checks, as though, often, she intended a thing and then forgot it.

They avoided talking about money, and he did not mention the name of Madame de Pastourelles; though of course his letters had reported the external history of the portrait. But Phoebe presently inquired after it.

'Have you nearly done painting that lady, John?—I don't know how to say her name.'

As she spoke, she lifted a bit of bread-and-butter to her mouth and put it down untasted. In the same way she had tried to drink some tea, and had not apparently succeeded. Fenwick rose and went over to her.

'Look here, Phoebe,' he said, putting his hand on her beautiful hair and turning her face to him —'what's the matter?'

Her eyelids closed, and a quiver went through the face.

'I don't know. I—I had a fright a few days ago—at night—and I suppose I haven't got over it.'

'A fright?'

'Yes. There was a tramp one night came to the door. I half-opened it—and his face was so horrible I tried to shut it again at once. And he struggled with me, but I was strongest. Then he tried to get in at the window, but luckily I had fastened the iron bar across the shutter—and the back door. But it all held, mercifully. He couldn't get in. Then he abused me through the door, and said he would have killed me and the child, if he could have got in—and some day he would come again.' She shuddered.

Fenwick had turned pale. With his painter's imagination he saw the thing—the bestial man outside, the winter night, the slender form within pressing against the door and the bolt—

'Look here,' he said, abruptly. 'We can't have this. Somebody must sleep here. Did you tell the police?'

'Yes, I wrote—to Ambleside. They sent a man over to see me. But they couldn't catch him. He's probably left the country. I got a bell'—she opened her eyes, and pointed to it. 'If I rang it, they might hear it down at Brow Farm. They *might*—if the wind was that way.'

There was silence a moment. Then Fenwick stooped and kissed her.

'Poor old girl!' he said, softly. She made but slight response. He returned to his place, repeating with a frowning energy—'You must have some one to sleep here.'

'Daisy would come—if I'd pay her.'

Daisy was their little servant of the summer, the daughter of a quarryman near by.

'Well, pay her!'

She drew herself up sharply. 'I haven't got the money—and you always say, when you write, you haven't any either.'

'I'll find some for that. I can't have you scared like this.'

But, though his tone was vehement, it was not particularly affectionate. He was horribly discomposed indeed, could not get the terrible image out of his mind. But as he went on with his supper, the shock of it mingled with a good many critical or reproachful thoughts. Why had she persisted in staying on in Langdale, instead of going to her father? All that foolish dislike of her stepmother! It had been open to her to stay in her father's farm, with plenty of company. If she wouldn't, was *he* to blame if the cottage was lonesome?

But as though she divined this secret debate she presently said:

'I went to Keswick last week.'

He looked up, startled. 'Well?'

'Father's ill—he's got a bad chest, and the doctor says he may be going into a consumption.'

'Doctors'll say anything!' cried Fenwick, wrathfully. 'If ever there was a strong man, it's your father. Don't you believe any croaking of that sort, Phoebe.'

She shook her head.

'He looks so changed,' she said; and began drawing with her finger on the tablecloth. He saw that her lips were trembling. A strong impulse worked in him, bidding him go to her again, kiss away her tears, and say—'Hang everything! Come with me to London, and let's sink or swim together.'

Instead of which some perverse cross-current hurried him into the words:

'He'd be all right if you'd go and nurse him, Phoebe.'

'No, not at all. They didn't want me—and Mrs. Gibson, poor creature, was real glad when I said I was going. She was jealous of me all the time.'

'I expect you imagined that.'

Phoebe's face flushed angrily.

'I didn't!' she said, shortly. 'Everybody in the house knew it.'

The meal went on rather silently. Fenwick's conscience said to him, 'Take her back with you!—whatever happens, take her to London—she's moping her life out here.' And an inner voice clamoured in reply—'Take her to those rooms?—in the very middle of the struggle with those two pictures?—go through all the agitation and discomfort of explanations with Lord Findon and Madame de Pastourelles?—run the risk of estranging them, and of distracting your own mind from your work at this critical moment?—the further risk, moreover, of Phoebe's jealousy?'

For in her present nervous and fidgety state she would very likely be jealous of his sitter, and of the way in which Madame de Pastourelles' portrait possessed his mind. No, it really couldn't be done!—it really *couldn't!* He must finish the two pictures—persuade Lord Findon to buy the 'Genius Loci,' and make the portrait such a success that he must needs buy that too. Then let discovery come on; it should find him steeled.

Meanwhile, Phoebe must have a servant, and not any mere slip of a girl, but some one who would be a companion and comfort. He began to talk of it, eagerly, only to find that Phoebe took but a languid interest in the idea.

She could think of no one—wanted no one, but Daisy. Again his secret ill-humour waxed and justified itself. It was unreasonable and selfish that she should not be able to think for herself and the child better; after all, he was slaving for her as much as for himself.

Meanwhile, Carrie sat very silent beside her father, observing him, and every now and then applying her pink lips to some morsel he held out to her on his fork. He had kissed her, and tossed her, and she was now sitting in his pocket. But after these eight months the child of four was shy and timid with this unfamiliar father. He on his side saw that she was prettier than before; his eye delighted in some of the rarer and lovelier lines of her little face; and he felt a fatherly pride. He must make some fresh studies of her; the child in the 'Genius Loci' might be improved.

After supper, Phoebe seemed to him so pale and tottering that he made her rest beside the fire, while he himself cleared the supper-things away. She lay back in her chair, laughing at his awkwardness, or starting up when china clashed.

Meanwhile, as in their farewell talk beside the ghyll eight months before, her mood gradually and insensibly changed. Whatever unloving thoughts or resentments had held her in the first hour of their meeting, however strong had been the wish to show him that she had been lonely and suffering, she could not resist what to her was the magic of his presence. As he moved about in the low, firelit room, and she watched him, her whole nature melted; and he knew it.

Presently she took the child upstairs. He waited for her, hanging over the fire—listening to the storm outside—and thinking, thinking—

When she reappeared, and he, looking round, saw her standing in the doorway, so tall and slender, her pale face and hair coloured by the glow of the fire, passion and youth spoke in him once more.

He sprang up and caught her in his arms. Presently, sitting in the old armchair beside the blaze, he had gathered her on his knee, and she had clasped her hands round his neck, and buried her face against him. All things were forgotten, save that they were man and wife together, within this 'wind-warm space'—ringed by night, and pattering sleet, and gusts that rushed in vain upon the roof that sheltered them.

But next morning, within the little cottage—beating rain on the windows, and a cheerless storm-light in the tiny rooms—the hard facts of the situation resumed their sway. In the first place money questions had to be faced. Fenwick made the most of his expectations; but at best they were no more, and how to live till they became certainties was the problem. If Lord Findon had commissioned the portrait, or definitely said he would purchase the 'Genius Loci,' some advance might have been asked for. As it was, how could money be mentioned yet a while? Phoebe had a fine and costly piece of embroidery on hand, commissioned through an 'Art Industry' started at Windermere the summer before; but it could not be finished for some weeks, possibly months, and the money Fenwick proposed to earn during his fortnight in the North by some illustrations long overdue had been already largely forestalled. He gloomily made up his mind to appeal to an old cousin in Kendal, the widow of a grocer, said to be richly left, who had once in his boyhood given him five shillings. With much distaste he wrote the letter and walked to Elterwater in the rain to post it. Then he tried to work; but little Carrie, fractious from confinement indoors, was troublesome and disturbed him. Phoebe, too, would make remarks on his drawing which seemed to him inept. In old days he would have laughed at her for pretending to know, and turned it off with a kiss. Now what she said set him on edge. The talk he had been living amongst

had spoilt him for silly criticisms. Moreover, for the first time he detected in her a slight tone of the 'schoolmarm'—didactic and self-satisfied, without knowledge. The measure Madame de Pastourelles had dealt out to him, he in some sort avenged on Phoebe.

At the same time there were much more serious causes of difference. Each had a secret from the other. Fenwick's secret was that he had foolishly passed in London as an unmarried man, and that he could not take Phoebe back with him, because of the discomforts and risks in which a too early avowal of her would involve him. He was morbidly conscious of this; brooded over it, and magnified it.

She on the other hand was tormented by a fixed idea—already in existence at the time of their first parting, but much strengthened by loneliness and fretting—that he was tired of her and not unwilling to be without her. The joy of their meeting banished it for a time, but it soon came back. She had never acquiesced in the wisdom of their separation; and to question it was to resent it more and more deeply—to feel his persistence in it a more cruel offence, month by month. Her pride prevented her from talking of it; but the soreness of her grievance invaded their whole relation. And in her moral unrest she showed faults which had been scarcely visible in their early married years—impatience, temper, suspicion, a readiness to magnify small troubles whether of health or circumstance.

During her months alone she had been reading many novels of an indifferent sort, which the carrier brought her from the lending library at Windermere. She talked excitedly of some of them, had 'cried her eyes out' over this or that. Fenwick picked up one or two, and threw them away for 'trash.' He scornfully thought that they had done her harm, made her more nervous and difficult. But at night, when he had done his work, he never took any trouble to read to her, or to talk to her about other than household things. He smoked or drew in silence; and she sat over her embroidery, lost in morbid reverie.

One morning he discovered amongst her books a paper-covered 'Life of Romney'—a short compilation issued by a local bookseller.

'Why, whatever did you get this for, Phoebe?' he said, holding it up.

She looked up from her mending, and coloured. 'I wanted to read it.'

'But why?'

'Well'—she hesitated—'I thought it was like you.'

'Like me?—you little goose!'

'I don't know,' she said, doggedly, looking hard at her work—'there was the hundred pounds that he got to go to London with—and then, marrying a wife in Kendal—and'—she looked up with a half-defiant smile—'and leaving her behind!'

'Oh! so you think that's like me?' he said, seating himself again at his drawing.

'It's rather like.'

'You suppose you're going to be left here for thirty years?' He laughed as he spoke.

She laughed too, but not gaily—with a kind of defiance.

'Well, it wouldn't be quite as easy now, would it?—with trains, and all that. There were only coaches then, I suppose. Now, London's so near.'

'I wish you'd always think so!' he cried. 'Why, of course it's near. I'm only seven hours away. What's that, in these days? And in three months' time, things will be all right and square again.'

'I dare say,' she said, sighing.

'Why can't you wait cheerfully?' he asked, rather exasperated—'instead of being so down.'

'Because'—she broke out—'I don't see the reason of it—there! No, I don't!—However!'—she pressed back her hair from her eyes and drew herself together. 'You've never shown me your studies of that—that lady—John; you said you would.'

Relieved at the change of subject, he took a sketch-book out of his pocket and gave it to her. It contained a number of 'notes' for his portrait of Madame de Pastourelles—sketches of various poses, aspects of the head and face, arrangements of the hands, and so forth. Phoebe pondered it in silence.

'She's pretty—I think,' she said, at last, doubtfully.

'I'm not sure that she is,' said Fenwick. 'She's very pale.'

'That doesn't matter. The shape of her face is awfully pretty—and her eyes. Is her hair like mine?'

'No, not nearly so good.'

'Ah, if I could only do it as prettily as she does!' said Phoebe, faintly smiling. 'I suppose, John, she's very smart and fashionable?'

'Well, she's Lord Findon's daughter—that tells you. They're pretty well at the top.'

Phoebe asked various other questions, then fell silent, still pondering the sketches. After a while she put down her work and came to sit on a stool beside Fenwick, sometimes laying her golden head against his knee, or stretching out her hand to touch his. He responded affectionately enough; but as the winter twilight deepened in the little room, Phoebe's eyes, fixed upon the fire, resumed their melancholy discontent. She was less necessary to him even than before; she knew by a thousand small signs that the forces which possessed his mind—perhaps his heart!—were not now much concerned with her.

She tried to control, to school herself. But the flame within was not to be quenched—was, indeed, perpetually finding fresh fuel. How quietly he had taken the story of the tramp's attack upon her!—which still, whenever she thought of it, thrilled her own veins with horror. No doubt he had been over to Ambleside to speak to the police; and he had arranged that the little servant, Daisy, should come to her when he left. But if he had merely caught her to him with one shuddering cry of love and rage—that would have been worth all his precautions!—would have effaced the nightmare, and filled her heart.

As to his intellectual life, she was now much more conscious of her exclusion from it than she ever had been in their old life together.

For it was a consciousness quickened by jealousy. Little as Fenwick talked about Madame de Pastourelles, Phoebe understood perfectly that she was a woman of high education and refinement, and that her stored and subtle mind was at once an attraction and a cause of humiliation to John. And through his rare stories of the Findon household and the Findon dinner-parties, the wife dimly perceived a formidable world, bristling with strange acquirements and accomplishments, in which he, perhaps, was beginning to find a place, thanks to his art; while she, his obscure and ignorant wife, must resign herself to being for ever shut out from it—to knowing it from his report only. How could she ever hold her own with such people? He would talk with them, paint them, dine with them, while she sat at home—Carrie's nurse, and the domestic drudge.

And yet she was of that type which represents perhaps the most ambitious element in the lower middle class. It had been a great matter that she, a small farmer's daughter, should pass her examinations and rise to be a teacher in Miss Mason's school. She had had her triumphs and conceits; had been accustomed to think herself clever and successful, to hold her head high amongst her schoolmates. Whereas now, if she tried to talk of art or books, she was hotly aware that everything she said was, in John's eyes, pretentious or absurd. He was comparing her with others all the time, with men and women—women especially—in whose presence he felt himself as diffident as she did in his. He was thinking of ladies in velvet dresses and diamonds, who could talk wittily of pictures and theatres and books, who could amuse him and distract him. And meanwhile *she* went about in her old stuff dress, her cotton apron and rolled-up sleeves, cooking and washing and cleaning—for her child and for him. She felt through every nerve that he was constantly aware of details of dress or *ménage* that jarred upon him; she suspected miserably that all her little personal ways and habits seemed to him ugly and common; and the suspicion showed itself in pride or *brusquerie*.

Meanwhile, if she had been *restful*, if he could only have forgotten his cares in her mere youth and prettiness, Fenwick would have been easily master of his discontents. For he was naturally of a warm, sensuous temper. Had the woman understood her own arts, she could have held him.

But she was not restful, she was exacting and self-conscious; and, moreover, a certain new growth of Puritanism in her repelled him. While he had been passing under the transforming influences of an all-questioning thought and culture, she had been turning to Evangelical religion for consolation. There was a new minister in a Baptist chapel a mile or two away, of whom she talked, whose services she attended. The very mention of him presently became a boredom to Fenwick. The new influence had no effect upon her jealousies and discontents; but it re-enforced a natural asceticism, and weakened whatever power she possessed of playing on a husband's passion. Meanwhile, Fenwick was partly aware of her state of mind, and far from happy himself. His conscience pricked him; but such prickings are small help to love. Often he found himself guiltily brooding over Lord Findon's tirades against the early marriages of artists. There was a horrid truth in them. No doubt an artist should wait till his

circumstances were worthy of his gifts; and then marry a woman who could understand and help him on.

Nor was even the child a binding influence. Fenwick in this visit became for the first time a fond father. A certain magic in the little Carrie flattered his vanity and excited his hopes. He drew her many times, and prophesied confidently that she would be a beauty. But, in his secret opinion, she was spoilt and mismanaged; and he talked a good deal to Phoebe about her bringing-up, theorising and haranguing in his usual way. Phoebe listened generally with impatience, resenting interference with her special domain. And often, when she saw the father and child together, a fresh and ugly misery would raise its head. Would he in time set even Carrie against her—teach the child to look down upon its mother?

One day he returned from Ambleside, pale and excited—bringing a Manchester paper.

'Phoebe!' he called, from the gate.

Startled by something in his voice, Phoebe ran out to him.

'Phoebe, an awful thing's happened! Old Morrison's—dead! Look here!'

And he showed her a paragraph headed 'Defalcations and suicide.' It described how Mr. James Morrison, the chief cashier of the Bartonbury Bank, had committed suicide immediately after the discovery by the bank authorities of large falsifications in the bank accounts. Mr. Morrison had shot himself, leaving a statement acknowledging a long course of fraudulent dealings with the funds entrusted to him, and pleading with his employers for his wife and daughter. 'Great sympathy,' said the *Guardian* reporter, 'is felt in Bartonbury with Mrs. Morrison, whose character has always been highly respected. But, indeed, the whole family occupied a high position, and the shock to the locality has been great.' On which followed particulars of the frauds and a long report of the inquest.

Phoebe was struck with horror. She lingered over the paper, commenting, exclaiming; while Fenwick sat staring into the fire, his hands on his knees.

Presently she came to him and said in a low voice:

'And what about the money, John—the loan?'

'I am not obliged to return it in money,' he said, sharply.

'Well, the pictures?'

'That'll be all right. I must think about it. There'll be no hurry.'

'Did Mrs. Morrison know—about the loan?'

'I dare say. I never heard.'

'I suppose she and the daughter'll have nothing?'

'That doesn't follow at all. Very likely he'd settled something on them, which can't be touched. A man like that generally does.'

'Poor things!' she said, shuddering. 'But, John—you'll pay it back to Mrs. Morrison?'

'Of course I shall,' he said, impatiently—'in due time. But please remember, Phoebe, that's my affair. Don't you talk of it—*to any one*.'

He looked up to emphasise his words.

Phoebe flushed.

'I wasn't going to talk of it to any one,' she said, proudly, as she moved away.

Presently he took up his hat again and went out, that he might be alone with his thoughts. The rain had vanished; and a frosty sunshine sparkled on the fells, on the red bracken and the foaming becks. He took the mountain-path which led past the ghyll, up to the ridge which separates Langdale from Grasmere and Easedale. Morrison's finely wrinkled face, with its blue, complacent eyes and thin nose, hovered before him—now as he remembered it in life, and now as he imagined it in death. Hard fate! There had been an adventurous, poetic element in Morrison—something beyond the ken of the ordinary

Philistine—and it had come to this. Fenwick remembered him among the drawings he had collected. Real taste—real sense of beauty—combined no doubt with the bargaining instinct and a natural love of chicanery. Moreover, Fenwick believed that, so far as a grasping temper would allow, there had been a genuine wish to help undiscovered talent. He thought of the hand which had given him the check, and had a vision of it holding the revolver—of the ghastly, solitary end. And no one had guessed—unless, indeed, it were his wife? Perhaps that look of hers—as of a creature hunted by secret fears—was now explained.

How common such things are!—and probably, so ran his thoughts, will always be. We are all acting. Each man or woman carries this potentiality of a double life—it is only a question of less or more.

Suddenly he coloured, as he saw *himself* thus writ double—first as he appeared to Madame de Pastourelles, and then as he appeared to Phoebe. Masquerading was easy, it seemed; and conscience made little fuss! Instantly, however, the inner man rebelled against the implied comparison of himself with Morrison. An accidental concealment, acquiesced in temporarily, for business reasons—what had that in common with villainy like Morrison's? An awkward affair, no doubt; and he had been a fool to slip into it. But in a few weeks he would put it right—come what would.

As to the debt—he tried to fight against a feeling of deliverance—but clearly he need be in no hurry to pay it. He had been living in dread of Morrison's appearing in Bernard Street to claim his bond—revealing Phoebe's existence perhaps to ears unprepared—and laying greedy hands upon the 'Genius Loci.' It would have been hard to keep him off it—unless Lord Findon had promptly come forward—and it would have been odious to yield it to him. 'Now I shall take my time.' Of course, ultimately, he would repay the money to Mrs. Morrison and Bella. But better, even in their interests, to wait a while, till there could be no question of any other claim to it.

So from horror he passed to a personal relief, of which he was rather ashamed, and then again to a real uneasy pity for the wife and for the vulgar daughter who had so bitterly resented his handling of her charms. He remembered the note in which she had acknowledged the final delivery of her portrait. In obedience to Morrison's suggestion, he had kept it by him a few days; and then, either unable or proudly unwilling to alter it, he had returned it to its owner. Whereupon a furious note from Miss Bella, which—knowing that her father took no account of her tempers—Fenwick had torn up with a laugh. It was clear that she had heard of her father's invitation to him to 'beautify' it, and when the picture reappeared unaltered she took it as a direct and personal insult—a sign that he disliked her and meant to humiliate her. It was an odd variety of the *spretae injuria formae*. Fenwick had never been in the least penitent for his behaviour. The picture was true, clever—and the best he could do. It was no painter's business to endow Miss Bella with beauty, if she did not possess it. As a piece of paint, the picture *had* beauty—if she had only eyes to find it out.

Poor girl!—what husband now would venture on such a termagant wife?—penniless too, and disgraced! He would like to help her, and her mother—for Morrison's sake. Stirred by a fleeting impulse, he began to scheme how he might become their benefactor, as Morrison had been his.

Then, as he raised his eyes from the path—with a rush of delight he noticed the flood of afternoon sunlight pouring on the steep fell-side, the sharp black shadows thrown by wall and tree, the brilliance of the snow along the topmost ridge. He raced along, casting the Morrisons out of his thoughts, forgetting everything but the joy of atmosphere and light—the pleasure of his physical strength. Near one of the highest crags he came upon a shepherd-boy and his dog collecting some sheep. The collie ran hither and thither with the marvellous shrewdness of his breed, circling, heading, driving; the stampede of the sheep, as they fled before him, could be heard along the fell. The sun played upon the flock, turning its dirty grey to white, caught the little figure of the shepherd-boy, as he stood shouting and waving, or glittered on the foaming stream beside him. Purple shadows bathed the fell beyond—and on its bosom the rustic scene emerged—a winter idyl.

Fenwick sat down upon a rock, ransacked his pockets for sketch-book and paints, and began to sketch. When he had made his 'note,' he sat lost a while in the pleasure of his own growing skill and sharpening perceptions, and dreaming of future 'subjects.' A series of 'Westmoreland months,' illustrating the seasons among the fells and the life of the dalesmen, ran through his mind. Nature appeared to his exultant sense as a vast treasure-house stored for him only—a mine inexhaustible offered to his craftsman's hand. For him the sweeping hues, the intricate broideries—green or russet, red or purple—of this winter world!—for him the delicacy of the snow, the pale azure of the sky, the cloud-shadows, the white becks, the winding river in the valley floor, the purple crags, the lovely accents of light and shade, the hints of composition that wooed his eager eye. Who was it that said 'Composition is the art of preserving the accidental look'? Clever fellow!—there was the right thing said, for once! And so he slipped into a reverie, which was really one of those moments—plastic and fruitful—by which the artist makes good his kinship with 'the great of old,' his right to his own place in

the unending chain.

Strange!—from that poverty of feeling in which he had considered the Morrison tragedy—from his growing barrenness of heart towards Phoebe—he had sprung at a bound into this ecstasy, this expansion of the whole man. It brought with it a vivid memory of the pictures he was engaged upon. By the time he turned homeward, and the light was failing, he was counting the days till he could return to London—and to work.

* * * * *

There was still, however, another week of his holiday to run. He wrote to Mrs. Morrison a letter which cost him much pains, expressing a sympathy that he really felt. He got on with his illustration work, and extracted a further advance upon it. And the old cousin in Kendal proved unexpectedly generous. She wrote him a long Scriptural letter, rating him for disobedience to his father, and warning him against debt; but she lent him twenty pounds, so that, for the present, Phoebe could be left in comparative comfort, and he had something in his pocket.

Yet with this easing of circumstance, the relation between husband and wife did not improve. During this last week, indeed, Phoebe teased him to make a sketch of himself to leave with her. He began it unwillingly, then got interested, and finally made a vigorous sketch, as ample as their largest looking-glass would allow, with which he was extremely pleased. Phoebe delighted in it, hung it up proudly in the parlour, and repaid him with smiles and kisses.

Yet the very next day, under the cloud of his impending departure, she went about pale and woe-begone, on the verge of tears or temper. He was provoked into various harsh speeches, and Phoebe felt that despair which weak and loving women know, when parting is near, and they foresee the hour beyond parting—when each unkind word and look, too well remembered, will gnaw and creep about the heart.

But she could not restrain herself. Nervous tension, doubt of her husband, and condemnation of herself drove her on. The very last night there was a quarrel—about the child—whom Fenwick had punished for some small offence. Phoebe hotly defended her—first with tears, then with passion. For the first time these two people found themselves looking into each other's eyes with rage, almost with hate. Then they kissed and made up, terrified at the abyss which had yawned between them; and when the moment came, Phoebe went through the parting bravely.

But when Fenwick had gone, and the young wife sat alone beside the cottage fire, the January darkness outside seemed to her the natural symbol of her own bitter foreboding. Why had he left her? There was no reason in it, as she had said. But there must be some reason behind it. And slowly, in the firelight, she fell to brooding over the image of that pale classical face, as she had seen it in the sketch-book. John had talked quite frankly about Madame de Pastourelles—not like a man beguiled; making no mystery of her at all, answering all questions. But his restlessness to get back to London had been extraordinary. Was it merely the restlessness of the artist?

This was Tuesday. To-morrow Madame de Pastourelles was to come to a sitting. Phoebe sat picturing it; while the curtain of rain descended once more upon the cottage, blotting out the pikes, and washing down the sodden fields.

CHAPTER VI

'I must alter that fold over the arm,' murmured Fenwick, stepping back, with a frown, and gazing hard at the picture on his easel—'it's too strong.'

Madame de Pastourelles gave a little shiver.

The big bare room, with its Northern aspect and its smouldering fire, had been of a polar temperature this March afternoon. She had been sitting for an hour and a half. Her hands and feet were frozen, and the fur cloak which she wore over her white dress had to be thrown back for the convenience of the painter, who was at work on the velvet folds.

Meanwhile, on the further side of the room sat 'propriety'—also shivering—an elderly governess of the Findon family, busily knitting.

'The dress is coming!' said Fenwick, after another minute or two.
'Yes, it's coming.'

And with a flushed face and dishevelled hair he stood back again, staring first at his canvas and then at his sitter.

Madame de Pastourelles sat as still as she could, her thin, numbed fingers lightly crossed on her lap. Her wonderful velvet dress, of ivory-white, fell about her austerely in long folds, which, as they bent or overlapped, made beautiful convolutions, firm yet subtle, on the side turned towards the painter, and over her feet. The classical head, with its small ear, the pale yet shining face, combined with the dress to suggest a study in ivory, wrought to a great delicacy and purity. Only the eyes, much darker than the hair, and the rich brown of the sable cloak where it touched the white, gave accent and force to the ethereal pallor, the supreme refinement, of the rest—face, dress, hands. Nothing but civilisation in its most complex workings could have produced such a type; that was what prevailed dimly in Fenwick's mind as he wrestled with his picture. Sometimes his day's work left him exultant, sometimes in a hell of despair.

'I went to see Mr. Welby's studio yesterday,' he said, hastily, after another minute or two, seeing her droop with fatigue.

Her face changed and lit up.

'Well, what did you see?'

'The two Academy pictures—several portraits—and a lot of studies.'

'Isn't it fine—the "Polyxena"?'

Fenwick twisted his mouth in a trick he had.

'Yes,' he said, perfunctorily.

She coloured slightly, as though in antagonism.

'That means that you don't admire it at all?'

'Well, it doesn't say anything to me,' said Fenwick, after a pause.

'What do you dislike?'

'Why doesn't he paint flesh?' he said, abruptly—'not coloured wax.'

'Of course there is a decorative convention in his painting'—her tone was a little stiff—'but so there is in all painting.'

Fenwick shrugged his shoulders.

'Go and look at Rubens—or Velasquez.'

[Illustration: *Eugénie*]

'Why not at Leonardo—and Raphael?'

'Because they are not *moderns*—and we can't get back into their skins. Rubens and Velasquez *are* moderns,' he protested, stoutly.

'What is a "modern"?' she asked, laughing.

It was on the tip of his tongue to say, 'You are—and it is only fashion—or something else—that makes you like this archaistic stuff!' But he restrained himself, and they fell into a skirmish, in which, as usual, he came off badly. As soon as he perceived it, he became rather heated and noisy, trying to talk her down. Whereupon she sprang up, came down from her pedestal to look at the picture, called mademoiselle to see—praised—laughed—and all was calm again. Only Fenwick was left once more reflecting that she was Welby's champion through thick and thin. And this ruffled him.

'Did Mr. Welby study mostly in Italy?' he asked her presently, as he fetched a hand-glass, in which to examine his morning's work.

'Mostly—but also in Vienna.'

And, to keep the ball rolling, she described a travel-year—apparently before her marriage—which

she, Lord Findon, a girl friend of hers, and Welby had spent abroad together—mainly in Rome, Munich, and Vienna—for the purpose, it seemed, of Welby's studies. The experiences she described roused a kind of secret exasperation in Fenwick. And what was really resentment against the meagreness of his own lot showed itself, as usual, in jealousy. He said something contemptuous of this foreign training for an artist—so much concerned with galleries and Old Masters. Much better that he should use his eyes upon his own country and its types; that had been enough for all the best men.

Madame de Pastourelles politely disagreed with him; then, to change the subject, she talked of some of the humours and incidents of their stay in Vienna—the types of Viennese society—the Emperor, the beautiful mad Empress, the Archdukes, the priests—and also of some hurried visits to Hungarian country houses in winter, of the cosmopolitan luxury and refinement to be found there, ringed by forests and barbarism.

Fenwick listened greedily, and presently inquired whether Mr. Welby had shared in all these amusements.

'Oh yes. He was generally the life and soul of them.'

'I suppose he made lots of friends—and got on with everybody?'

Madame de Pastourelles assented—cautiously.

'That's all a question of manners,' said Fenwick, with sudden roughness.

She gave a vague 'Perhaps'—and he straightened himself aggressively.

'I don't think manners very important, do you?'

'Very!' She said it, with a gay firmness.

'Well, then, some of us will never get any,' his tone was surly—'we weren't taught young enough.'

'Our mothers teach us generally—all that's wanted!'

He shook his head.

'It's not as simple as that. Besides—one may lose one's mother.'

'Ah, yes!' she said, with quick feeling.

And presently a little tact, a few questions on her part had brought out some of his own early history—his mother's death—his years of struggle with his father. As he talked on—disjointedly—painting hard all the time, she had a vision of the Kendal shop and its customers—of the shrewd old father, moulded by the business, the avarice, the religion of an English country town, with a Calvinist contempt for art and artists—and trying vainly to coerce his sulky and rebellious son.

'Has your father seen these pictures?' She pointed to the 'Genius Loci' on its further easel—and to the portrait.

'My father! I haven't spoken to him or seen him for years.'

'Years!' She opened her eyes. 'Is it as bad as that?'

'Aye, that's North-Country. If you've once committed yourself, you stick to it—like death.'

She declared that it might be North-Country, but was none the less barbarous. However, of course it would all come right. All the interesting tales of one's childhood began that way—with a cruel father, and a rebellious son. But they came to magnificent ends, notwithstanding—with sacks of gold and a princess. Diffident, yet smiling, she drew conclusions. 'So, you see, you'll make money—you'll be an R.A.—you'll *marry*—and Mr. Fenwick will nurse the grandchildren. I assure you—that's the fairy-tale way.'

Fenwick, who had flushed hotly, turned away and occupied himself in replenishing his palette.

'Papa, of course, would say—Don't marry till you're a hundred and two!' she resumed. 'But pray, don't listen to him.'

'I dare say he's right,' said Fenwick, returning to his easel, his face bent over it.

'Not at all. People should have their youth together.'

'That's all very well. But many men don't know at twenty what they'll want at thirty,' said Fenwick, painting fast.

Madame de Pastourelles laughed.

'The doctors say nowadays—it is papa's latest craze—that it doesn't matter what you eat—or how little—if you only chew it properly. I wonder if that applies to matrimony?'

'What's the chewing?'

'Manners,' she said, laughing—'that you think so little of. Whether the food's agreeable or not, manners help it down.'

'Manners!—between husband and wife?' he said, scornfully.

'But certainly!' She lifted her beautiful brows for emphasis. 'Show me any persons, please, that want them more!'

'The people I've been living among,' said Fenwick, with sharp persistence, 'haven't got time for fussing about manners—in the sense you mean. Life's too hard.'

A flush of bright colour sprang into her face. But she held her ground.

'What do you suppose I mean? I don't meant court trains and courtesies—I really don't.'

Fenwick was silent a moment, and then said—aggressively—' We can't all of us have the same chances—as Mr. Welby, for instance.'

Madame de Pastourelles looked at him in astonishment. What an extraordinary obsession! They seemed not to be able to escape from Arthur Welby's name: yet it never cropped up without producing some sign of irritation in this strange young man. Poor Arthur!—who had always shown himself so ready to make friends, whenever the two men met—as they often did—in the St. James's Square drawing-room. Fenwick's antagonism, indeed, had been plain to her for some time. It was natural, she supposed; he was clearly very sensitive on the subject of his own humble origin and bringing-up; but she sighed that a perverse youth should so mismanage his opportunities.

As to 'chances,' she declared rather tartly that they had nothing to do with it. It was natural to Arthur Welby to make himself agreeable.

'Yes—like all other kinds of aristocrats,' said Fenwick, grimly.

Madame de Pastourelles frowned.

'Of all the words in the dictionary—that word is the most detestable!' she declared. 'It ought to be banished. Well, thank goodness, it *is* generally banished.'

'That's only because we all like to hide our heads in the sand—you who possess the privileges—and we who envy them!'

'I vow I don't possess any privileges at all,' she said, with defiance.

'You say so, because you breathe them—live in them—like the air—without knowing it,' said Fenwick, also trying to speak lightly. Then he added, suddenly putting down his palette and brushes, while his black eyes lightened—'And so does Mr. Welby. You can see from his pictures that he doesn't know anything about common, coarse people—*real* people—who make up the world. He paints wax, and calls it life; and you—'

'Go on!—*please* go on!'

'I shall only make a fool of myself,' he said, taking up his brushes again.

'Not at all. And I praise humbug?—and call it manners?'

He paused, then blurted out—'I wouldn't say anything rude to you for the world!'

She smiled—a smile that turned all the delicate severity of her face to sweetness. 'That's very nice of you. But if you knew Mr. Welby better, you'd never want to say anything rude to *him* either!'

Fenwick was silent. Madame de Pastourelles, feeling that for the moment she also had come to the end of her tether, fell into a reverie, from which she was presently roused by finding Fenwick standing before her, palette in hand.

'I don't want you to think me an envious brute,' he said, stammering.
'Of course, I know the "Polyxena" is a fine thing—a very fine thing.'

She looked a little surprised—as though he offered her moods to which she had no key. 'Shall I show you something I like much better?' she said, with quick resource. And drawing towards her a small portfolio she had brought with her, she took out a drawing and handed it to him. 'I am taking it to be framed. Isn't it beautiful?'

It was a drawing, in silver-point, of an orange-tree in mingled fruit and bloom—an exquisite piece of work, of a Japanese truth, intricacy, and perfection. Fenwick looked at it in silence. These silver-point drawings of Welby's were already famous. In the preceding May there had been an exhibition of them at an artistic club. At the top of the drawing was an inscription in a minute handwriting—'Sorrento: Christmas Day,' with the monogram 'A.W.' and a date three years old.

As Madame de Pastourelles perceived that his eyes had caught the inscription, she rather hastily withdrew the sketch and returned it to the portfolio.

'I watched him draw it,' she explained—'in a Sorrento garden. My father and I were there for the winter. Mr. Welby was in a villa near ours, and I used to watch him at work.'

It seemed to Fenwick that her tone had grown rather hurried and reserved, as though she regretted the impulse which had made her show him the drawing. He praised it as intelligently as he could; but his mind was guessing all the time at the relation which lay behind the drawing. According to Cuningham's information, it was now three years since a separation had been arranged between Madame de Pastourelles and her husband, Comte Albert de Pastourelles, owing to the Comte's outrageous misconduct. Lord Findon had no doubt taken her abroad after the catastrophe. And, besides her father, Welby had also been near, apparently—watching over her?

He returned to his work upon the hands, silent, but full of speculation. The evident bond between these two people had excited his imagination and piqued his curiosity from the first moment of his acquaintance with them. They were both of a rare and fine quality; and the signs of an affection between them, equally rare and fine, had not been lost on those subtler perceptions in Fenwick which belonged perhaps to his heritage as an artist. If he gave the matter an innocent interpretation, and did not merely say to himself, 'She has lost a husband and found a lover,' it was because the woman herself had awakened in him fresh sources of judgement. His thoughts simply did not dare besmirch her.

* * * * *

The clock struck five; and thereupon a sound of voices on the stairs outside.

'Papa!' said Madame de Pastourelles, jumping up—in very evident relief—her teeth chattering.

The door opened and Lord Findon put in a reconnoitring head.

'May I—or we—come in?'

And behind him, on the landing, Fenwick with a start perceived the smiling face of Arthur Welby.

'I've come to carry off my daughter,' said Findon, with a friendly nod to the artist. 'But don't let us in if you don't want to.'

'Turn me out, please, at once, if I'm in the way,' said Welby. 'Lord
Findon made me come up.'

It was the first time that Welby had visited the Bernard Street studio. Fenwick's conceit had sometimes resented the fact. Yet now that Welby was there he was unwilling to show his work. He muttered something about there being 'more to see in a day or two.'

'There's a great deal to see already,' said Lord Findon. 'But, of course, do as you like. Eugénie, are you ready?'

'Please!—may I be exhibited?' said Madame de Pastourelles to Fenwick, with a smiling appeal.

He gave way, dragged the easel into the best light, and fell back while the two men examined the portrait.

'Stay where you are, Eugénie,' said Lord Findon, holding up his hand.
'Let Arthur see the pose.'

She sat down obediently. Fenwick heard an exclamation from Welby, and a murmured remark to Lord

Findon; then Welby turned to the painter, his face aglow.

'I say, I do congratulate you! You *are* making a success of it! The whole scheme's delightful. You've got the head admirably.'

'I'm glad you like it,' said Fenwick, rather shortly, ready at once to suspect a note of patronage in the other's effusion. Welby—a little checked—returned to the picture, studying it closely, and making a number of shrewd, or generous comments upon it, gradually quenched, however, by Fenwick's touchy or ungracious silence. Of course the picture was good. Fenwick wanted no one to tell him that.

Meanwhile, Lord Findon—though in Fenwick's studio he always behaved himself with a certain jauntiness, as a man should who has discovered a genius—was a little discontented.

'It's a fine thing, Eugénie,' he was saying to her, as he helped her put on her furs, 'but I'm not altogether satisfied. It wants animation. It's too—too—'

'Too sad?' she asked, quietly.

'Too grave, my dear—too grave. I want your smile.'

Madame de Pastourelles shook her head.

'What do you mean?' he asked.

'I can't go smiling to posterity!' she said; first gaily—then suddenly her lip quivered.

'Eugénie, darling—for God's sake—'

'I'm all right,' she said, recovering herself instantly. 'Mr. Arthur, are you coming?'

'One moment,' said Welby; then, turning to Fenwick as the others approached them, he said, 'Might I make two small criticisms?'

'Of course.'

'The right hand seems to me too large—and the chin wants fining. Look!' He took a little ivory paper-cutter from his pocket, and pointed to the line of the chin, with a motion of the head towards Madame de Pastourelles.

Fenwick looked—and said nothing.

'By George, I think he's right,' said Lord Findon, putting on spectacles. 'That right hand's certainly too big.'

'In my opinion, it's not big enough,' said Fenwick, doggedly.

Welby withdrew instantly from the picture, and took up his hat. Lord Findon looked at the artist—half angry, half amused. 'You don't buy her gloves, sir—I do.'

Eugénie's eyes meanwhile had begun to sparkle, as she stood in her sable cap and cloak, waiting for her companions. Fenwick approached her.

'Will you sit to-morrow?'

'I think not—I have some engagements.'

'Next day?'

'I will let you know.'

Fenwick's colour rose.

'There is a good deal to do still—and I must work at my other picture.'

'Yes, I know. I will write.'

And with a little dry nod of farewell she slipped her hand into her father's arm and led him away. Welby also saluted pleasantly, and followed the others.

* * * * *

Fenwick was left to pace his room in a tempest, denouncing himself as a 'damned fool,' bent on destroying all his own chances in life. Why was it that Welby's presence always had this effect upon him:—setting him on edge, and making a bear of him? No!—it was not allowed to be so handsome, so able, so ingratiating. Yet he knew very well that Welby made no enemies, and that in his grudging jealousy of a delightful artist he, Fenwick, stood alone.

He walked to the window. Yes, there they were, all three—Mademoiselle Barras seemed to have gone her ways separately—just disappearing into Russell Square. He saw that Welby had possessed himself of the fair lady's portfolio, and was carrying her shawl. He watched their intimate, laughing ways—how different from the stiffness she had just shown *him*—from the friendly, yet distant relations she always maintained between herself and her painter! A fierce and irritable ambition swept through him—rebellion against the hampering conditions of birth and poverty, which he felt as so many chains upon body and soul. Why was he born the son of a small country tradesman, narrow, ignorant, and tyrannical?—harassed by penury, denied opportunities—while a man like Welby found life from the beginning a broad road, as it were, down a widening valley, to a land of abundance and delight?

But the question led immediately to an answering outburst of vanity. He paced up and down, turning from the injustice of the past to challenge the future. A few more years, and the world would know where to place *him*—with regard to the men now in the running—men with half his power—Welby and the like. A mad arrogance, a boundless confidence in himself, flamed through all his veins. Let him paint, paint, *paint*—think of nothing, care for nothing but the maturing of his gift!

How long he lost himself in this passion of egotism and defiance he hardly knew. He was roused from it by the servant bringing a lamp; and as she set it down, the light fell upon a memorandum scrawled on the edge of a sketch which was lying on the table: 'Feb. 21—10 o'clock.'

His mood collapsed. He sat down by the dying fire, brooding and miserable. How on earth was he going to get through the next few weeks? Abominable!—thoughtlessly cruel!—that neither Lord Findon nor Madame de Pastourelles should ever yet have spoken to him of money! These months of work on the portrait—this constant assumption on the part of the Findon circle that both the portrait and the 'Genius Loci' were to become Findon possessions—and yet no sum named—no clear agreement even—nothing, as it seemed to Fenwick's suspicious temper, in either case, that really bound Lord Findon. 'Write to the old boy'—so Cuningham had advised again and again—'get something definite out of him.' But Fenwick had once or twice torn up a letter of the kind in morbid pride and despair. Suppose he were rebuffed? That would be an end of the Findon connexion, and he could not bring himself to face it. He must keep his *entrée* to the house; above all, he clung to the portrait and the sittings.

But the immediate outlook was pretty dark. He was beginning to be pestered with debts and duns—the appointment on the morrow was with an old frame-maker who had lent him twenty pounds before Christmas, and was now begging piteously for his money. There was nothing to pay him with—nothing to send Phoebe, in spite of a constant labour at paying jobs in black-and-white that often kept him up till three or four in the morning. He wondered whether Watson would help him with a loan. According to Cuningham, the queer fellow had private means.

The fact was he was overstrained—he knew it. The year had been the hardest of his life, and now that he was approaching the time of crisis—the completion of his two pictures, the judgement of the Academy and the public, his nerve seemed to be giving way. As he thought of all that success or failure might mean, he plunged into a melancholy no less extravagant than the passion of self-confidence from which he had emerged. Suppose that he fell ill before the pictures were finished—what would become of Phoebe and the child?

As he thought of Phoebe, suddenly his heart melted within him. Was she, too, hating the hours? As he bowed his head on his arms a few hot, unwilling tears forced themselves into his eyes. Had he been unkind and harsh to her?—his poor little Phoebe! An imperious impulse seemed to sweep him back into her arms. She was his own, his very own; one flesh with him; of the same clay, the same class, the same customs and ideals. Let him only recover her, and his child—and live his own life as he pleased. No more dependence on the moods of fine people. He hated them all! Clearly he had offended Madame de Pastourelles. Perhaps she would not sit again—the portrait would be thrown on his hands—because he had not behaved with proper deference to her spoilt and petted favourite.

Involuntarily he looked up. The lamp-light fell on the portrait.

There she sat, the delicate, ethereal being, her gentle brow bent forward, her eyes fixed upon him. He perceived, as though for the first time, what an image of melancholy grace it was which he had built up there. He had done it, as it were, without knowing—had painted something infinitely pathetic and noble without realising it in the doing.

As he looked, his irritation died away, and something wholly contradictory took its place. He felt a rush of self-pity, and then of trust. What if he called on her to help him—unveiled himself to this kind and charming woman—confessed to her his remorse about Phoebe—his secret miseries and anxieties—the bitterness of his envies and ambitions? Would she not rain balm upon him—quiet him—guide him?

He yearned towards her, as he sat there in the semi-darkness—seeking the *ewig-weibliche* in the sweetness of her face—without a touch of passion—as a Catholic might yearn towards his Madonna. Her slight and haughty farewell showed that he had tried her patience—had behaved like an ungenerous cur. But he must and would propitiate her—win her friendship for himself and Phoebe. The weakness of the man threw itself strangely, instinctively, on the moral strength of the woman; as though in this still young and winning creature he might recover something of what he had lost in childhood, when his mother died. He mocked at his own paradox, but it held him. That very night would he write to her; not yet about Phoebe—not yet!—but letting her understand, at least, that he was *not* ungrateful, that he valued her sympathy and good-will. Already the phrases of the letter, warm and eloquent, yet restrained, began to flow through his mind. It might be an unusual thing to do; but she was no silly conventional woman; she would understand.

By Jove! Welby was perfectly right. The hand was too big. It should be altered at the next sitting. Then he sprang up, found pen and paper, and began to write to Phoebe—still in the same softened and agitated state. He wrote in haste and at length, satisfying some hungry instinct in himself by the phrases of endearment which he scattered plentifully through the letter.

* * * * *

That letter found Phoebe on a mid-March morning, when the thrushes were beginning to sing, when the larches were reddening, and only in the topmost hollows of the pikes did any snow remain, to catch the strengthening sunlight.

As she opened it, she looked at its length with astonishment. Then the tone of it brought the rushing colour to her cheek, and when it was finished she kissed it and hid it in her dress. After weeks of barrenness, of stray post-cards and perfunctory notes, these ample pages, with their rhetorical and sentimental effusion, brought new life to the fretting, lonely woman. She went about in penitence. Surely she had done injustice to her John; and she dreaded lest any inkling of those foolish or morbid thoughts she had been harbouring should ever reach him.

She wrote back with passion—like one throwing herself on his breast. The letter was long and incoherent, written at night beside Carrie's bed—and borrowing much, unconsciously, from the phraseology of the novels she still got from Bowness. Alack! it is to be feared that John Fenwick—already at another point in spiritual space when the letter reached him—gave it but a hasty reading.

But, for the time, it was an untold relief to the writer. Afterwards, she settled down to wait again, working meanwhile night and day at her beautiful embroidery that John had designed for her. Miss Anna came to see her, exclaimed at her frail looks, wanted to lend her money. Phoebe in a new exaltation, counting the weeks, and having still three or four sovereigns in the drawer, refused—would say nothing about their straits. John, she declared, was on the eve of an *enormous* success. It would be all right presently.

* * * * *

Weeks passed. The joy of that one golden letter faded; and gradually the shadows re-closed about her. Fenwick's letters dwindled again to post-cards, and then almost ceased. When the hurried lines came, the strain and harass expressed in them left no room for affection. Something wrong with the 'Genius Loci'!—some bad paints—hours of work needed to get the beastly thing right—the portrait still far from complete—but the dress would be a *marvel*!—without quenching the head in the least. And not a loving word!—scarcely an inquiry after the child.

April came. The little shop in the neighbouring village gave Mrs. Fenwick credit—but Phoebe, brought up in frugal ways, to loathe the least stain of debt, hated to claim it, and went there in the dusk, that she might not be seen.

Meanwhile not a line from John to tell her that his pictures had gone in to the Academy. She saw a paragraph, however, in the local papers describing 'Show Sunday.' Had John been entertaining smart people to tea, and showing his pictures, with the rest? If so, couldn't he find ten minutes in which to send her news of it? It *was* unkind! All her suspicions and despair revived.

As she carried her child back from the village, tottering often under the weight, gusts of mingled weakness and passion would sweep over her. She would not be treated so—John should see! She would get her money for her work and go to London—whether he liked it or no—tax him with his indifference

to her—find out what he was really doing.

The capacity for these moments of violence was something new in her—probably depending, if the truth were known, on some obscure physical misery. She felt that they degraded her, yet could not curb them.

And, in this state, the obsession of the winter seized her again. She brooded perpetually over the doleful Romney story—the tale of a great painter, born, like her John, in this Northern air, and reared in Kendal streets, deserting his peasant wife—enslaved by Emma Hamilton through many a passionate year—and coming back at last that the drudge of his youth might nurse him through his decrepit old age. She remembered going with John in their sweetheart days to see the house where Romney died, imbecile and paralysed, with Mary Romney beside him.

'I would never have done it—*never*!' she said to herself in a mad recoil. 'He had chosen—he should have paid!'

She sat closer and closer at her work, in a feverish eagerness to finish it, sleeping little and eating little. When she wrote to her husband it was in a bitter, reproachful tone she had never yet employed to him. 'I have had one nice letter from you this winter, and only one. As you can't take the trouble to write any more, you'll hardly wonder if I think you sent that one to keep me quiet.' She wrote too often in this style. But, whether in this style or another, John made no answer—had apparently ceased to write.

One afternoon towards the end of April she was sitting at her work in the parlour, with the window open to the lengthening day, when she heard the gate open and shut. A woman in black came up the pathway, and, seeing Phoebe at the window, stopped short. Phoebe rose, and, as the visitor threw back her veil, recognised the face of Mr. Morrison's daughter, Bella.

She gave a slight cry; then, full of pity and emotion, she hastened to open the door.

'Oh, Miss Morrison!' She held out her hand; her attitude, her beautiful eyes, breathed compassion, and also embarrassment. The thought of the debt rushed into her mind. Had Miss Morrison come to press for it? It was within a fortnight of twelve months since the loan was granted. She felt a vague terror.

The visitor just touched her hand, then looked at her with an expression which stirred increasing alarm in the woman before her. It was so hard and cold; it threatened, without speech.

'I came to return you something I don't want any more,' said the girl, with a defiant air; and Phoebe noticed, as she spoke, that she carried in her left hand a large, paper-covered roll. In her deep black she was more startling than ever, with spots of flame-colour on either cheek, the eyes fixed and staring, the lips wine-red. It might have been a face taken from one of those groups of crudely painted wood or terra-cotta, in which northern Italy—as at Orta or Varallo—has expressed the scenes of the Passion. The Magdalen in one of the ruder groups might have looked so.

'Will you please to come in?' said Phoebe, leading the way to the parlour, which smelled musty and damp for lack of fire, and was still littered with old canvases, studies, casts, and other gear of the painter who had once used it as his studio.

Bella Morrison came in, but she refused a chair.

'There's no call for me to stay,' she said, sharply. 'You won't like what I came to do—I know that.'

Phoebe looked at her, bewildered.

'I've brought back that picture of me your husband painted,' said the girl, putting down her parcel on the table. 'It's in there.'

'What have you done that for?' said Phoebe, wondering.

'Because I loathe it—and all my friends loathe it, too. Papa—'

'Oh! do tell me—how is Mrs. Morrison?' cried Phoebe, stepping forward, her whole aspect quivering with painful pity.

'She's all right,' said Bella, looking away. 'We're going to live in Guernsey. We're selling this house. It's hers, of course. Papa settled it on her, years before—'

She stopped—then drew herself together.

'So, you see, I got that picture out of mother. I've never forgiven Mr. Fenwick for taking it home, saying he'd improve it, and then sending it back as bad as ever. I knew he'd done that to spite me—he'd disliked me from the first.'

'John never painted a portrait to spite anybody in his life,' cried Phoebe. 'I never heard such nonsense.'

'Well, anyway, he can take it back,' said the girl. 'Mother wouldn't let me destroy it, but she said I might give it back; so there it is. We kept the frame—that's decent—that might do for something else.'

Phoebe's eyes flashed.

'Thank you, Miss Morrison. It would, indeed, be a great pity to waste my husband's work on some one who couldn't appreciate it.' She took the roll and stood with her hand upon it, protecting it. 'I'll tell him what you've done.'

'Oh, then, you do know where he is!' said Bella, with a laugh.

'What do you mean?'

'What I say.' The eyes of the two women met across the table. A flash of cruelty showed itself in those of the girl. 'I thought, perhaps, you mightn't—as he's been passing in London for an unmarried man.'

There was a pause—a moment's dead silence.

'That, of course, is a lie!' said Phoebe at last, drawing in her breath—and then, restraining herself, 'or else a silly mistake.'

'It's no mistake at all,' said Bella, with a toss of the head. 'I thought you ought to know, and mother agreed with me. The men are all alike. There's a letter I got the other day from a friend of mine.'

She drew a letter from a stringbag on her wrist, and handed it to Phoebe.

Phoebe made no motion to take it. She stood rigid, her fierce, still look fixed on her visitor.

'You'd better,' said Bella; 'I declare you'd better. If my husband had been behaving like this, I should want to know the truth—and pay him out.'

Phoebe took the letter, opened it with steady fingers, and read it. While she was reading it the baby Carrie, escaped from the little servant's tutelage, ran in and hid her face in her mother's skirts, peering sometimes at the stranger.

When she had finished the letter, Phoebe handed it back to its owner.

'Who wrote that?'

'A friend of mine who's working at South Kensington. You can see—she knows a lot about artists.'

'And what she doesn't know she makes up,' said Phoebe, with slow contempt. 'You tell her, Miss Morrison, from me, she might be better employed than writing nasty, lying gossip about people she never saw.'

She caught up her child, who flung her arms round her mother's neck, nestling on her shoulder.

'Oh, well, if you're going to take it like that—' said the other, with a laugh.

'I *am* taking it like that, you see,' said Phoebe, walking to the door and throwing it wide. 'You'd better go, Miss Morrison. I am sure I can't imagine why you came. I should have thought you'd have had sorrow enough of your own, without trying to make it for other people.'

The other winced.

'Well, of course, if you don't want to know the truth, you needn't.'

Phoebe laughed.

'It isn't truth,' she said. 'But if it was—Did you want to know the truth about your father?' Her white face, encircled by the child's arms, quivered as she spoke.

'Don't you abuse my father,' cried Bella, furiously.

Phoebe's eyes wavered and fell.

'I wasn't going to abuse him,' she said, in a choked voice. 'I was sorry for him—and for your mother. But *you've* got a hard, wicked heart—and I hope I'll never see you again, Miss Morrison. I'll thank you, please, to leave my house.'

The other drew down her veil with an affected smile and shrug. 'Good-bye, Mrs. Fenwick. Perhaps you'll find out before long that my friend wasn't such a fool to write that letter—and I wasn't such a beast to tell you—as you think now. Good-bye!'

Phoebe said nothing. The girl passed her insolently, and left the house.

Phoebe put the child to bed, sat without touching a morsel while Daisy supped, and then shut herself into the parlour, saying that she was going to sit up over her work, to which only a few last touches were wanting. It had been her intention to go with the carrier to Windermere the following day in order to hand it over to the shop that had got her the commission, and ask for payment.

But as soon as she was alone in the room, with her lamp and her work, she swept its silken, many-coloured mass aside, found a sheet of paper, and began to write.

She was trying to write down, as nearly as she could remember, the words of the letter which Bella had shown her.

'Didn't you tell me about a man called John Fenwick, who painted your portrait?—a beastly thing you couldn't abide? Well, they say he's going to be awfully famous soon, and make a pile of money. I don't know him, but I have a friend who knows one of the two men who used to lodge in the same house with him—I believe they've just moved to Chelsea. He says that Mr. Fenwick will have two ripping pictures in the Academy, and is sure to get his name up. And, besides that, there is some lord or other who's wild about him—and means to buy everything he can paint. But I thought you said your man was married?—do you remember I chaffed you about him when he began, and you said, "No fear—he is married to a school-teacher," or something of that sort? Well, I asked about the wife, and my friend says, "Nonsense! he isn't married—nothing of the sort—or, at any rate, if he is, he makes everybody believe he isn't—and there must be something wrong somewhere." By the way, one of the pictures he's sending in is a wonderful portrait. An awfully beautiful woman—with a white *velvet* dress, my dear—and they say the painting of the dress is marvellous. She's the daughter of the Lord Somebody who's taken him up. They've introduced him to all sorts of smart people, and, as I said before, he's going to have a *tremendous* success. Some people have luck, haven't they?'

She reproduced it as accurately as she could, read it through again, and then pushed it aside. With set lips she resumed her work, and by midnight she had put in the last stitch and fastened the last thread. That she should do so was essential to the plan she had in her mind. For she had already determined what to do. Within forty-eight hours she would be in London. If he had really disowned and betrayed her—or if he had merely grown tired of her and wished to be quit of her—in either case she would soon discover what it behoved her to know.

When at last, in the utter silence of midnight, she took up her candle to go to bed, its light fell, as she moved towards the door, on the portrait of himself that Fenwick had left with her at Christmas. She looked at it long, dry-eyed. It was as though it began already to be the face of a stranger.

CHAPTER VII

Eugénie, are you there?'

'Yes, papa.'

Lord Findon, peering short-sightedly into the big drawing-room, obstructed by much furniture and darkened by many pictures, had not at first perceived the slender form of his daughter. The April day was receding, and Eugénie de Pastourelles was sitting very still, her hands lightly clasped upon a letter which lay outspread upon her lap. These moments of pensive abstraction were characteristic of her. Her life was turned within; she lived more truly in thought than in speech or action.

Lord Findon came in gaily. 'I say, Eugénie, that fellow's made a hit.'

'What fellow, papa?'

'Why, Fenwick, of course. Give me a cup of tea, there's a dear. I've just seen Welby, who's been hob-nobbing with somebody on the Hanging Committee. Both pictures accepted, and the portrait will be on the line in the big room—the other very well hung, too, in one of the later rooms. Lucky dog! Millais came up and spoke to me about him—said he heard we had discovered him. Of course, there's lots of criticism. Drawing and design, modern and realistic—the whole *painting* method, traditional and old-fashioned, except for some wonderful touches of pre-Raphaelitism—that's what most people say. Of course, the new men think it'll end in manner and convention; and the old men don't quite know *what* to say. Well, it don't much matter. If he's genius, he'll do as he likes—and if he hasn't—'

Lord Findon shrugged his shoulders, and then, throwing back his head against the back of his capacious chair, proceeded to 'sip' his tea, held in both hands, according to an approved digestive method—ten seconds to a sip—he had lately adopted. He collected new doctors with the same zeal that he spent in pushing new artists.

Eugénie put out a hand and patted his shoulder tenderly. She and her father were the best of comrades, and they showed it most plainly in Lady Findon's absence. That lady was again on her travels, occupied in placing her younger daughter for a time in a French family, with a view to 'finishing.' Eugénie or Lord Findon wrote to her every day; they discussed her letters when they arrived with all proper *égards*; and, for the rest, enjoyed their *tête-à-tête,* and never dreamed of missing her. *Tête-à-tête*, indeed, it scarcely was; for there was still another daughter in the house, whom Madame de Pastourelles—her much older half-sister—mothered with great assiduity in Lady Findon's absence; and the elder son also, who was still unmarried, lived mainly at home. Nevertheless, it was recognised that 'papa' and Eugénie had special claims upon each other, and as the household adored them both, they were never interfered with.

On this occasion Eugénie was bent on business as well as affection. She withdrew her hand from her father's shoulder in order to raise a monitory finger.

'Genius or no, papa, it's time you paid him his money.'

'How you go on, Eugénie!' said Lord Findon, crossing his knees luxuriously, as the tea filtered down. 'Pray, what money do I owe him?'

'Well, of course, if you wait till he's made a hit, prices will go up,' said Eugénie, calmly. 'I advise you to agree with him quickly, while you are in the way with him.'

'I never asked him to paint you,' said Lord Findon, hastily, swallowing a sip of tea under the regulation time, and frowning at the misdeed.

'Oh, shuffling papa! Come—how much?—two hundred?'

'Upon my word! A painter shouldn't propose to paint a picture, my dear, and then expect to get paid for it as if he'd been commissioned. The girls might as well propose matrimony to the men.'

'Nobody need accept,' said Eugénie, slyly, replenishing his cup. 'I consider, papa, that you have bolted that cup.'

'Then for goodness' sake, don't give me any more!' cried Lord Findon. 'It's no joke, Eugénie, this sipping business—Where were we? Oh, well, of course I knew we should have to take it—and I don't say I'm not pleased with it. But two hundred!'

'Not a penny less,' said Eugénie—'and the apotheosis of my frock alone is worth the money. Two hundred for that—and two-fifty for the other?'

'Welby told me that actually was the price he had put on it! The young man won't starve, my dear, for want of knowing his own value.'

'I shouldn't wonder if he had been rather near starving,' said
Eugénie, gravely.

'Nothing of the kind, Eugénie,' said her father, testily. 'You think everybody as sensitive as yourself. I assure you, young men are tough, and can stand a bit of hardship.'

'They seem to require butcher's meat, all the same,' said Eugénie. 'Do you know, papa, that I have been extremely uncomfortable about our behaviour to Mr. Fenwick?'

'I entirely fail to see why,' said Lord Findon, absently. He was holding his watch in his hand, and

calculating seconds.

'We have let him paint my portrait without ever saying a word of money—and you have always behaved as though you meant to buy the "Genius Loci."'

'Well, so I do mean to buy it,' said Lord Findon, closing his watch with a sigh of satisfaction.

'You should have told him so, papa, and advanced him some money.'

'It is an excellent thing, my dear Eugénie, for a young man to be kept on tenterhooks. Otherwise they soon get above themselves.'

'You have driven him into debt, papa.'

'What on earth do you mean?'

'I have been questioning Mr. Cuningham. He doesn't know, but he *thinks* Mr. Watson has been lending him money.'

'Artists are always so good to one another,' said Lord Findon, complacently. 'Nice fellow, Watson—but quite mad.'

'Papa, you are incorrigible. I tell you he has been in great straits. He has not been able to buy a winter overcoat, and Mr. Cuningham suspects he has often not had enough to eat. He does illustration-work the greater part of the night—*et cetera*.'

'The way you pile on the agony, my dear!' said Lord Findon, rising. 'What I see you want is that I should write the check, and then go with you to call on the young man?'

'Precisely!' said Eugénie, nodding.

Lord Findon looked at her.

'And that you suppose is your own idea?'

Eugénie waited—interrogatively.

'Do you know why I have never said a word to the young man about money?'

'Because you forgot it,' said Eugénie, smiling.

'Not in the least,' said Lord Findon, flushing like a school-boy found out; 'I wanted my little sensation at the end.'

'My very epicurean papa!' said Eugénie, caressing him. 'I see! Young man in a garret—starving—*au désespoir.* Enter Providence, *alias* my papa—with fame in one hand and gold in the other. Ah, *que tu es comédien, mon père. A la bonne heure*!—I now order the carriage!'

She moved toward the bell, but paused suddenly:—

'I forgot—Arthur was to come before six.'

A slight silence fell between the father and daughter.

Lord Findon cleared his throat, took up the evening paper and laid it down again.

'Eugénie!'

'Yes, papa.'

Lord Findon went up to her and took her hand. She stood with downcast eyes, the other hand playing with the folds of her dress. Her father's face was discomposed.

'Eugénie!' he broke out. 'I don't think he ought to come so much.
Forgive me, dear!'

'You only think what I have thought for a long time,' she said, in a low voice, without raising her eyes. 'But to-day I sent for him.'

'Because?'—Lord Findon's face expressed a quick and tender anxiety.

'I want to persuade him—to marry Elsie Bligh.'

Lord Findon made a hurried exclamation, drew her to him, kissed her on the brow, and then, releasing her, turned away.

'I might have known—what you would do,' he said, in a muffled voice.

'I ought to have done it long ago,' she said, passionately; then, immediately curbing herself, she turned deliberately to a vase of roses that stood near and began to rearrange them, picking out a few faded blooms and throwing them on the wood-fire.

Lord Findon watched her, the delicate, drooping figure in its grey dress, the thin hand among the roses.

'Eugénie!—tell me one thing!—you are in the same mind as ever about the divorce?'

She made a sign of assent.

'Just the same. I am Albert's wife—unless he himself asks me to release him—and then the release would only be—for him.'

'You are too hard on yourself, Eugénie!' cried Lord Findon. 'I vow you are! You set an impossible standard.'

'I am his wife'—she repeated, gently—'while he lives. And if he sent for me—at any hour of the day or night—I would go.'

Lord Findon gave an angry sigh.

'You can't wonder, Eugénie,' he said, impetuously, 'that I often wish his death.'

A shudder ran through her.

'Don't, papa! Never, never wish that. He loves life so.'

'Yes!—now that he has ruined yours.'

'He didn't mean to,' she said, almost inaudibly. 'You know what I think.'

Lord Findon restrained himself. In his eyes there was no excuse whatever for his scoundrel of a son-in-law, who after six years of marriage had left his wife for an actress, and was now living with another woman of his own class, a Comtesse S., ten years older than himself. He knew that Eugénie believed her husband to be insane; as for him, he had never admitted anything of the kind. But if it comforted her to believe it, let her, for Heaven's sake, believe it—poor child!

So he said nothing—as he paced up and down—and Eugénie finished the rearrangement of the roses. Then she turned to him, smiling.

'You didn't know I saw Elsie yesterday?'

'Did she confide in you?'

'Oh, that—long ago! The poor child's dreadfully in love.'

'Then it's a great responsibility,' said Lord Findon, gravely. 'How is he going to satisfy her?'

'Only too easily. She would marry him blindly—on any terms.'

There was a short silence. Then Eugénie gathered up the letter she had been reading when her father entered.

'Let's talk of something else, papa! Do you know that I've had a very interesting letter from Mr. Fenwick this afternoon?'

Lord Findon stared.

'Fenwick? What on earth does he write to you about?'

'Oh! this is not the first time by a long way!' said Eugénie, smiling. 'He began it in March, when he thought he had offended me—by being rude to Arthur.'

'So he was—abominably rude. But what can one expect? He hasn't had the bringing-up of a gentleman—and there you are. That kind of thing will out.'

'I wonder whether it matters—to a genius?' said Eugénie, musing.

'It matters to everybody!' cried Lord Findon. 'Gentlefolk, my dear, say what you will, are the result of a long natural selection—and you can't make 'em in a hurry.'

'And what about genius? You will admit, papa, that a good many gentlefolk in the world go to one genius!'

The light was still good enough to show Lord Findon that, in spite of her flicker of gaiety, Eugénie was singularly pale. And he knew well that they were both listening for the same step on the stairs. However, he tried to keep it up.

'Genius?' he said, humming and hawing—'genius? How do we know what it is—or who has it? Everybody's so diabolically clever nowadays. Take my advice, Eugénie—I know you want to play Providence to that young fellow—you think you'll civilise him, and that kind of thing; but I warn you—he hasn't got breeding enough to stand it.'

Eugénie drew a long breath.

'Well, don't scold me, papa—if I try—I must'—her voice escaped her, and she began again, firmly—'I must have something to fill up.'

'Fill up what?'

She looked round to make sure that the servants had finished clearing away the tea, and that they were alone.

'The days—and the hours,' she said, softly. 'One must have something to think of.'

Lord Findon frowned.

'He will fall in love with you, Eugénie—and then where shall we be?'

He heard a laugh—very sweet—very feminine, yet, to his ear, very forlorn.

'I'll take care of that. We'll find him a wife, too, papa—when he "arrives." We shall be in practice—you and I.'

Lord Findon sprang up.

'Here he is!' he said, with very evident agitation.

The pronoun clearly had no reference to Fenwick. Eugénie sat motionless, looking into the fire, her hands on her knee. Lord Findon listened a moment.

'I'm going to my room. Eugénie!—if I could be the slightest use—'

'Dear papa!' she looked up, smiling. 'It's very simple.'

With a muttered exclamation, Lord Findon walked to the further end of the drawing-room, and vanished through an inner door.

The footman announced 'Mr. Welby.'

As soon as the door was shut, Eugénie rose.

Welby hurriedly approached her. 'You say in your note that you have something important to tell me?'

She made a sign of assent, and as he grasped her hand, she allowed herself a moment's pause. Her eyes rested—just perceptibly—on the face of the man whose long devotion to her, expressed through every phase of delicate and passionate service, had brought them both at last to that point where feeling knows itself—where illusions die away—and the deep foundations of our life appear.

Welby's dark face quivered. In the touch of his friend's hand, in the look of her eyes there was that which told him that she had bidden him to no common meeting. The air between them was in an instant alive with memories. Days of first youth; youth's high impressions of great and lovely things; all the innocent, stingless joys of art and travel, of happy talk and ripening faculty, of pure ambitions, hero-worships, compassions, shared and mutually enkindled: these were for ever intertwined with their thoughts of each other.

But much more than these!

For him, the unspoken agony of loss suffered when she married; for her, the memories of her marriage, of the dreary languor into which its wreck had plunged her, and of the gradual revival in her of the old intellectual pleasures, the old joys of the spirit, under the influence of Arthur's life and Arthur's companionship. How simply he had offered all that his art, his tact, his genius had to give!—and how pitifully, how hungrily she had leaned upon it! It had seemed so natural. Her own mind was clear, her own pulses calm; their friendship had appeared a thing apart, and she was able to feel, with sincerity and dignity, that if she received much, she also gave much—the hours of relief and pleasure which ease the labour, the inevitable torment of the artist, all that protecting environment which a woman's sweet and agile wit can build around a man's taxed brain or ruffled nerves. To chat with her, in success or failure; to be sure of her welcome, her smile at all times; to ask her sympathy in matters where he had himself trained in her the faculty of response; to rouse in her the gentle, diffident humour which seemed to him a much rarer and more distinguished thing than other women's brilliance; to watch the ways of a personality which appeared to many people a little cold, pale, and over-refined, and was to him supreme distinction; to search for pleasures for her, as a botanist hunts rare flowers; to save her from the most trifling annoyance, if time and brains could do it;—these things, for three years, had made the charm of Welby's life. And Eugénie knew it—knew it with an affectionate gratitude that had for long seemed both to her and to the world the last word of their situation on both sides—a note, a tone, which could always be evoked from it, touch or strike it where you would.

And now?

Through what subtle phases and developments had time led them to this moment of change and consciousness?—representing in her, sharp recoil, an instant girding of the will—and in him a new despair, which was also a new docility, a readiness to content and tranquillise her at any cost. As they stood thus, for these few seconds, amid the shadows of the rich encumbered room, the picture of the weeks and months they had just passed through flashed through both minds—illuminated—thrown into true relation with surrounding and irrevocable fact. Both trembled—she under the admonition of her own higher life—he, because existence beside her could never again be as sweet to him to-morrow as it had been yesterday.

She moved. The trance was broken.

'I do, indeed, want to talk to you,' she said, in her gentlest voice.
'We shan't have very long. Papa wants me in half an hour.'

She motioned to the seat beside her; and their talk began.

* * * * *

Lord Findon sat alone in his study on the ground-floor, balancing a paper-knife on one finger, fidgeting with a newspaper of which he never read a word, and otherwise beguiling the time until the sound of Welby's step on the stairs should tell him that the interview upstairs was over.

His mind was full of disagreeable thoughts. Eugénie was dearer to him than any other human being, and Welby—his ward, the orphan child of one of his oldest friends—had been from his boyhood almost a son of the house. Eight years before, what more natural than that these two should marry? Welby had been then deeply in love; Eugénie in her first maiden bloom had been difficult to read, but a word from the father she adored would probably have been enough to incline her towards her lover, to transform and fire a friendship which was already more romantic than she knew. But Lord Findon could not make up his mind to it. Arthur was a dear fellow; but from the worldly point of view it was not good enough. Eugénie was born for a large sphere; it was her father's duty to find it for her if he could.

Hence the French betrothal—the crowning point of a summer visit to a French château where Eugénie had been the spoiled child of a party containing some of the greatest names in France. It flattered both Lord Findon's vanity and imagination to find himself brought into connexion with historic families all the more attractive because of that dignified alienation from affairs, imposed on them by their common hatred of the Second Empire. Eugénie, too, had felt the romance of the *milieu*; had invested her French suitor with all that her own poetic youth could bring to his glorification; had gone to him a timid, willing, and most innocent bride.

Ah, well! it did not do to think of the sequel. Perhaps the man was mad, as Eugénie insisted; perhaps much was due to some obscure brain effects of exposure and hardship during the siege of Paris—for the war had followed close on their honeymoon. But, madness or wickedness, it was all the same; Eugénie's life was ruined, and her father could neither mend it nor avenge it.

For owing to some—in his eyes—quixotic tenderness of conscience on Eugénie's part, she would not sue for her divorce. She believed that Albert was not responsible—that he might return to her. And that

passionate spiritual life of hers, the ideas of which Lord Findon only half understood, forbade her, it seemed, any step which would finally bar the way of that return; unless Albert should himself ask her to take it. But the Comte had never made a sign. Lord Findon could only suppose that he found himself as free as he wished to be, that the ladies he consorted with were equally devoid of scruples, and that he, therefore, very naturally, preferred to avoid publicity.

So here was Eugénie, husbandless and childless at eight-and-twenty—for the only child of the marriage had died within a year of its birth; the heroine of an odious story which, if it had never reached the law courts, was none the less perfectly well known in society; and, in the eyes of those who loved her, one of the bravest, saddest, noblest of women. Of course Welby had shared in the immense effort of the family to comfort and console her. They had been so eager to accept his help; he had given it with such tact and self-effacement; and now, meanly, they must help Eugénie to dismiss him! For it was becoming too big a thing, this devotion of his, both in Eugénie's life and also in the eyes of the world. Lord Findon must needs suppose—he did not choose to *know*—that people were talking; and if Eugénie would not free herself from her wretched Albert, she must not provide him—poor child!—with any plausible excuse.

All of which reasoning was strictly according to the canons as Lord Findon understood them; but it did not leave him much the happier. He was a sensitive, affectionate man, with great natural cleverness, and much natural virtue—wholly unleavened by either thought or discipline. He did the ordinary things from the ordinary motives; but he suffered when the ordinary things turned out ill, more than another man would have done. It would certainly have been better, he ruefully admitted, if he had not meddled so much with Eugénie's youth. And presently he supposed he should have to forgive Charlie!—(Charlie was the son who had married his nurse)—if only to prove to himself that he was not really the unfeeling or snobbish father of the story-books.

Ah! there was the upstairs door! Should he show himself, and make Arthur understand that he was their dear friend all the same, and always would be?—it was only a question of a little drawing-in.

But his courage failed him. He heard the well-known step come downstairs and cross the hall. The front door closed, and Lord Findon was still balancing the paper-knife.

Would he really marry that nice child Elsie? Elsie Bligh was a cousin of the Findons; a fair-haired, slender slip of a thing, the daughter of a retired Indian general. The Findons had given a ball the year before for her coming-out, and she had danced through the season, haloed, Euphrosyne-like, by a charm of youth and laughter—till she met Arthur Welby. Since then Euphrosyne had grown a little white and piteous, and there had been whisperings and shakings of the head amongst the grown-ups who were fond of her.

Well, well; he supposed Eugénie would give him some notion of the way things had gone. As to her—his charming, sweet-natured Eugénie!—it comforted him to remember the touch of resolute and generally cheerful stoicism in her character. If a hard thing had to be done, she would not only do it without flinching, but without avenging it on the bystanders afterwards. A quality rare in women!

* * * * *

'Papa!—is the carriage there?'

It was her voice calling. Lord Findon noticed with relief its even, silvery note. The carriage was waiting, and in a few minutes she was seated beside him, and they were making their way eastwards through the sunset streets.

'Dear?' he said, with timid interrogation, laying his hand momentarily on hers.

Eugénie was looking out of window with her face turned away.

'He was very—kind,' she said, rather deliberately. 'Don't let us talk about it, papa—but wait—and see!'

Lord Findon understood that she referred to Elsie Bligh—that she had sown her seed, and must now let it germinate.

But herself—what had it cost her? And he knew well that he should never ask the question; and that, if he did, she would never answer it.

By the time they were threading the slums of Seven Dials, she was talking rather fast and flowingly of Fenwick.

'You have brought the cheque, papa?'

'I have my cheque-book.'

'And you are quite certain about the pictures?'

'Quite.'

'It will be nice to make him happy,' she said, softly. 'His letters have been pretty doleful.'

'What has he found to write about?' exclaimed Lord Findon, wondering.

'Himself, mostly!' she laughed. 'He likes rhetoric—and he seems to have found out that I do too. As I told you, he began with an apology—and since then he writes about books and art—and—and the evils of aristocracy.'

'Bless my soul, what the deuce does he know about it! And you answer him?'

'Yes. You see he writes extremely well—and it amuses me.'

Privately, he thought that if she encouraged him beyond a very moderate point, Fenwick would soon become troublesome. But whenever she pleaded that anything 'amused' her, he could never find a word to say.

Every now and then he watched her, furtively trying to pierce that grey veil in which she had wrapt herself. To-morrow morning, he supposed, he should hear her step on the stairs, towards eight o'clock—should hear it passing his door in going, and an hour later in coming back—and should know that she had been to a little Ritualist church close by, where what Lady Findon called 'fooleries' went on, in the shape of 'daily celebrations' and 'vestments' and 'reservation.' How lightly she stepped; what a hidden act it was; never spoken of, except once, between him and her! It puzzled him often; for he knew very well that Eugénie was no follower of things received. She had been a friend of Renan and of Taine in her French days; and he, who was a Gallic with a leaning to the Anglican Church, had sometimes guessed with discomfort that Eugénie was in truth what his Low Church wife called a 'free-thinker.' She never spoke of her opinions, directly, even to him. But the books she ordered from Paris, or Germany, and every now and then the things she let fall about them, were enough for any shrewd observer. It was here too, perhaps, that she and Arthur were in closest sympathy; and every one knew that Arthur, poor old boy, was an agnostic.

And yet this daily pilgrimage—and that light and sweetness it breathed into her aspect!—

So one day he had asked her abruptly why she liked the little church so much, and its sacramental 'goings-on.'

'One wouldn't expect it, you know, darling—from the things you read.'

Eugénie had coloured faintly.

'Wouldn't you, papa? It seems to me so simple. It's an *Action*—not words—and an action means anything you like to put into it—one thing to me—another to you. Some day we shall all be tired, shan't we?—of creeds, and sermons, but never of "This *do,* in remembrance of Me!"'

And she had put up her hand to caress his, with such a timid sweetness of lip, and such a shining of the eye, that he had been silenced, feeling himself indeed in the presence of something he was not particularly well fitted to explore.

Well, if she was inconsequent, she was dear!—and if her mystical fancies comforted and sustained her, nobody should ever annoy or check her in the pursuit of them. He put a very summary stop to his wife's 'Protestant nonsense,' whenever it threatened to worry Eugénie; though on other occasions it amused him.

* * * * *

The landlady in Bernard Street greeted them with particular effusion. If they had only known, they represented to her—cautious yet not unkindly soul!—the main security for those very long arrears of rent she had allowed her lodger to run up. Were they now come—at this unusual hour—to settle up with Mr. Fenwick? If so, her own settling up—sweet prospect!—might be in sight. Cuningham and Watson had recently left her, and taken a joint studio in Chelsea. Their rooms, moreover, were still unlet. Her anxieties therefore were many, and it was with lively expectation that she watched the 'swells' grope their way upstairs to Mr. Fenwick's room. She always knew it must come right some day, with people like that about.

Lord Findon and Eugénie mounted the stairs. The studio door was half-open. As they approached the

threshold they heard Fenwick speaking.

'I say, hand me that rag—and look sharp and bring me some more oil—quick! And where the devil is that sketch? Well, get the oil—and then look for it—under that pile over there—No!—hi!—stand still a moment—just where you are—I want to see the tone of your head against this background! Hang it!—the light's going!'

The visitors paused—to see Fenwick standing between them and a large canvas covered with the first 'laying-in' of an important subject. The model, a thin, dark-faced fellow, was standing meekly on the spot to which Fenwick had motioned him, while the artist, palette on thumb, stood absorbed and frowning, his keen eye travelling from the man's head to the canvas behind it.

Lord Findon smiled. He was a clever amateur, and relished the details of the business.

'Smells good!' he said, in Eugénie's ear, sniffing the scents of the studio. 'Looks like a fine subject too. And just now he's king of it. The torments are all ahead. Hullo, Fenwick!—may we come in?'

Fenwick turned sharply and saw them in the doorway. He came to meet them with mingled pleasure and embarrassment.

'Come in, please! Hope you don't mind this get-up.' He pointed to his shirt-sleeves.

'It's we who apologise!' smiled Eugénie. 'You are in a great moment!'

She glanced at the canvas, filled with a rhythmical group of dim figures, already beautiful, though they had caught the artist and his work in the very act of true creation—when after weeks or months of brooding, of hard work, of searching study of this or that, of inspiration tested and verified, of mechanical drudgery, of patient construction, *birth* begins—the birth of values, relations, distances, the *drawing of colour*.

Fenwick shrugged his shoulders. His eyes sparkled in a strained and haggard face, with such an ardour that Eugénie had the strange impression of some headlong force, checked in mid-career, and filling the quiet studio with the thrill of its sudden reining-up; and Lord Findon's announcement was checked on his lips.

'Why, it is my subject!' she cried, looking again at the picture.

'Well, of course!' said Fenwick, flushing.

It was only a few weeks before that she had read him, from a privately printed volume, a poem, of which the new, strange music was then freshly in men's ears—suggesting that he should take it as a theme. The poem is called 'An Elegy on a Lady, whom grief for the death of her betrothed killed.' Its noble verse summons all true maids and lovers to bear the dead company, in that burial procession which should have been her bridal triumph. The priests go before, white-robed; the 'dark-stoled minstrels follow'; then the bier with the bride:—

And then the maidens in a double row,
Each singing soft and low,
And each on high a torch upstaying:
Unto her lover lead her forth with light,
With music, and with singing, and with praying.

'Here is the finished sketch,' he said, placing it in her hands and watching her eagerly.

She bent over it in emotion, conscious of that natural delight of woman when she has fired an artist.

'How fine!—and how you must have worked!'

'Night and day. It possessed me. I didn't want you to see it yet a while. But you understand?—it is to be romantic—not sentimental. Strong form. Every figure discriminated, and yet kept subordinate to the whole. No monotony! Character everywhere—expressing grief—and longing. An evening light-between sunset and moonrise. The sky gold—and the torches. Then below—in the crowd, the autumn woods, the distant River of Death, towards which the procession moves—a massing of blues and purples'—his hand—pointing—worked rapidly over the canvas; 'and here, some pale rose, black, emerald green, dimly woven in—and lastly, the whites of the bride-maidens, and of the bride upon her bier—towards which, of course, the whole construction mounts.'

'I see!—a sort of Mantegna Triumph—with a difference!'

'The drawing's all right,' said Fenwick, with a long breath, and a stretch. 'If I can only get the paint as

I want it'—he stooped forward again peering into the canvas—'it's the *handling of the paint*—that's what excites me! I want to get it broad and pure—no messing—no working over!—a fine surface!—and yet none of your waxy prettiness. The forms like Millet—simple—but full of knowledge. *Ah!*'—he took up a brush, flung it down bitterly, and turned on his heel—'I can draw!—but why did no one ever teach me to paint?'

Eugénie lifted her eyebrows—amused at the sudden despair. Lord Findon laughed. He had restrained himself so far with difficulty while these two romanced; and now, bursting with his tidings, he laid a hand on Fenwick:—

'Look here, young man—we didn't come just on the loose—to bother you. Have you heard—?'

Fenwick made a startled movement.

'Heard what?'

'Why, that your two pictures are *accepted*!—and will be admirably hung—both on the line, and one in the big room.'

The colour rushed again into Fenwick's cheeks.

'Are you sure?' he stammered, looking from one to the other.

Lord Findon gave his authority, and then Eugénie held out her hand.

'We *are* so glad!'

She had thrown back the gauze veil in which she had shrouded herself during her drive with her father, and her charming face—still so pale!—shone in sympathy.

Fenwick awkwardly accepted her congratulation, and shook the proffered hand.

'I expect it's your doing,' he said, abruptly.

'Not in the least!' cried Lord Findon. His eye twinkled. 'My dear fellow, what are you thinking of? These are the days of merit, and publicity!—when every man comes to his own.' Fenwick grinned a little. 'You've earned *your* success anyway, and it'll be a thumper. Now look here, where can we talk business?'

Fenwick put down his palette, and slipped his arms into his coat. The model lit a lamp, and disappeared. Eugénie meanwhile withdrew discreetly to the further end of the room, where she busied herself with some wood-blocks on which Fenwick had been drawing. The two men remained hidden behind the large canvas, and she heard nothing of their conversation. She was aware, however, of the scratching of a pen, and immediately after her father called to her.

'Eugénie, come!—we must get back for dinner.'

Fenwick, looking up, saw her emerging from the shadows of the further room into the bright lamp-light, her grey veil floating cloudwise round her. As she came towards him, he felt her once more the emblem and angel of his good-fortune. All the inspiration she had been to him, all that closer acquaintance, to which during the preceding weeks she had admitted him, throbbed warm at his heart. His mind was full of gratitude—full also of repentance!—towards Phoebe and towards her. That very night would he write his confession to her, at last!—tell all his story, beg her to excuse his foolish lack of frankness and presence of mind to Lord Findon, and ask her kindness for Phoebe and the child. He already saw little Carrie on her knee, and the *aegis* of her protecting sweetness spread over them all.

Meanwhile the impression upon her was that he had taken the news of his success with admirable self-restraint, that he was growing and shaping as a human being, no less than as an artist, that his manner to her father was excellent, neither tongue-tied nor effusive, and his few words of thanks manly and sincere. She thought to herself that here was the beginning of a great career—the moment when the streamlet finds its bed, and enters upon its true and destined course.

And in the warm homage, the evident attachment she had awakened in the man before her, there was for Eugénie at the moment a peculiar temptation. Had she not just given proof that she was set apart—that for her there could be no more thought of love in its ordinary sense? In her high-strung consciousness of Welby's dismissal, she felt herself not only secure against the vulgar snares of vanity and sex, but, as it were, endowed with a larger spiritual freedom. She had sent away the man of whom she was in truth afraid—the man whom she might have loved. But in this distant, hesitating, and yet strong devotion that Fenwick was beginning to show her, there was something that appealed—and with

peculiar force, in the immediate circumstances,—to a very sore and lonely heart. Here was no danger to be feared!—nothing but a little kind help to a man of genius, whose great gifts might be so easily nullified and undone by his thorny vehemence of character, his lack of breeding and education.

The correspondence indeed which had arisen between them out of Fenwick's first remarkable letter to her, had led unconsciously to a new attitude on the part of Madame de Pastourelles. That he was an interesting and promising artist she knew; that on subjects connected with his art he could talk copiously and well, that also, she knew; but that he could write, with such pleasant life, detail, and ingenuity, was a surprise, and it attracted her, as it would have attracted a French-woman of the eighteenth century. Her maimed life had made her perforce an 'intellectual'; and in these letters, the man's natural poetry and force stirred her enthusiasm. Hence a new interest and receptivity in her, quickened by many small and natural incidents—books lent and discussed, meetings in picture-galleries, conversations in her father's house, and throughout it that tempting, dangerous pleasure of 'doing good,' that leads astray so many on whom Satan has no other hold! She was introducing him every week to new friends—her friends, the friends she wished him to have; she was making his social way plain before him; she had made her father buy his pictures; and she meant to look after his career in the future.

So that, quivering as she still was under the strain of her scene with Welby—so short, so veiled, and at bottom so tragic!—she showed herself glitteringly cheerful—almost gay—as she stood talking a few minutes with her father and Fenwick. The restless happiness in Fenwick's face and movements gave his visitors indeed so much pleasure that they found it hard to go; several times they said good-bye, only to plunge again into the sketches and studies that lay littered about the room, to stand chatting before the new canvas, to laugh and gossip—till Lord Findon remembered that Eugénie did not yet know that he had offered Fenwick five hundred pounds for the two pictures instead of four hundred and fifty pounds; and that he might have the prompt satisfaction of telling her that he had bettered her instructions, he at last dragged her away. On this day of all days, did he wish to please her!—if it were only in trifles.

CHAPTER VIII

When Fenwick was alone, he walked to a chest of drawers in which he kept a disorderly multitude of possessions, and took out a mingled handful of letters, photographs, and sketches. Throwing them on a table, he looked for and found a photograph of Phoebe with Carrie on her knee, and a little sketch of Phoebe—one of the first ideas for the 'Genius Loci.' He propped them up against some books, and looked at them in a passion of triumph.

'It's all right, old woman—it's all right!' he murmured, smiling. Then he spread out Lord Findon's cheque before the photograph, as though he offered it at Phoebe's shrine.

Five hundred pounds! Well, it was only what his work was worth—what he had every right to expect. None the less, the actual possession of the money seemed to change his whole being. What would his old father say? He gave a laugh, half-scornful, half-good-humoured, as he admitted to himself that not even now—probably—would the old man relent.

And Phoebe!—he imagined the happy wonder in her eyes—the rolling away of all clouds between them. For six weeks now he had been a veritable brute about letters! First, the strain of his work (and the final wrestle with the 'Genius Loci,' including the misfortune of the paints, had really been a terrible affair!)—then—he confessed it—the intellectual excitement of the correspondence with Madame de Pastourelles: between these two obsessions, or emotions, poor Phoebe had fared ill.

'But you'll forgive me now, old girl—won't you?' he said, kissing her photograph in an effusion that brought the moisture to his eyes. Then he replaced it, with the sketches, in the drawer, forgetting in his excitement the letters which lay scattered on the table.

What should he do now? Impossible to settle down to any work! The North post had gone, but he might telegraph to Phoebe and write later. Meanwhile he would go over to Chelsea, and see Cuningham and Watson—repay Watson his debt!—or promise it at least for the morrow, when he should have had time to cash the cheque—perhaps even—pompous thought!—to open a banking account.

Suddenly a remembrance of Morrison crossed his mind and he stood a moment with bent head—sobered—as though a ghost passed through the room. Must he send a hundred pounds to Mrs.

Morrison? He envisaged it, unwillingly. Already his treasure seemed to be melting away. Time enough, surely, for that. He and Phoebe had so much to do—to get a house and furnish it, to pay pressing bills, to provide models for the new picture! Why, it would be all gone directly!

He locked up the cheque safely, took his hat, and was just running out when his eye fell on the three-hours' sketch of Madame de Pastourelles, which had been the foundation of the portrait. He had recently framed it, but had not yet found a place for it. It stood on the floor, against the wall. He took it up, looked at it with delight—by Jove! it was a brilliant thing!—and placing it on a small easel, he arranged two lamps with moveable shades, which he often used for drawing in the evening, so as to show it off. There was in him more than a touch of theatricality, and as he stood back from this little arrangement to study its effect, he was charmed with his own fancy. There she queened it, in the centre of the room—his patron saint, and Phoebe's. He knew well what he owed her—and Phoebe should soon know. He was in a hurry to be off; but he could not make up his mind—superstitiously—to put out the lights. So, after lingering a few moments before her, in this tremor of imagination and of pleasure, he left her thus, radiant and haloed!—the patron saint in charge.

On his way out he found an anxious landlady upon his path. Mrs. Gibbs was soon made happy, so far as promises could do it, and in another minute he was in a hansom speeding westward. It was nearly seven o'clock on a mild April evening. The streets were full, the shops still open. As he passed along Oxford Street, monarch it seemed of all he beheld, his eyes fell on Peter Robinson's windows, glittering with lights, and gay with spring ribbons, laces, and bright silks. An idea rushed into his mind. Only the week before, on his first visit to the new Chelsea quarters whither Cuningham and Watson had betaken themselves, he had stumbled upon an odd little scene in the still bare, ungarnished studio. Cuningham, who had been making money with some rapidity of late, was displaying before the half-sympathetic, half-sarcastic eyes of Watson, some presents that he was just sending off to his mother and sisters in Scotland. A white dress, a lace shawl, some handkerchiefs, a sash, a fan—there they lay, ranged on brown paper on the studio floor. Cuningham was immensely proud of them, and had been quite ready to show them to Fenwick also, fingering their fresh folds, enlarging on their beauties. And Fenwick had thought sorely of Phoebe as he watched Cuningham turn the pretty things over. When had he ever been able to give her any feminine gauds? Always this damned poverty, pressing them down!

But now—by Jove!—

He made the hansom stop, rushed into Peter Robinson's, bought a dress-length of pink-and-white cotton, a blue sash for Carrie, and a fichu of Indian muslin and lace. Thrusting his hand into his pocket for money, he found only a sovereign—pretty nearly his last!—and some silver. 'That's on account,' he said loftily, giving the sovereign to the shopman; 'send the things home to-morrow afternoon—to-morrow *afternoon*, mind—and I'll pay for them on delivery.'

Then he jumped into his hansom again, and for sheer excitement told the man to hurry, and he should have an extra shilling. On they sped down Park Lane. The beds of many-coloured hyacinths in the Park shone through the cheerful dusk; the street was crowded, and beyond, the railings, the seats under the trees were full of idlers. There was a sparkle of flowers in the windows of the Park Lane houses, together with golden sunset touches on the glass; and pretty faces wrapt in lace or gauze looked out from the hansoms as they passed him by. Again the London of the rich laid hold on him; not threateningly this time, but rather as though a door were opened and a hand beckoned. His own upward progress had begun; he was no longer jealous of the people who stood higher.

Dorchester House, Dudley House;—he looked at them with a good-humoured tolerance. After all, London was pleasant; there was some recognition of merit; and even something to be said for Academies.

Then his picture began to hover before him. It was a big thing; suppose it took him years? Well, there would be portraits to keep him alive. Meanwhile it was true enough what he had said to Madame de Pastourelles. As a *painter* he had never been properly trained. His values were uncertain; and he had none of the sureness of method which men with half his talent had got out of study under a man like, say, Carolus Duran.

Supposing now, he went to Paris for a year? No, no!—too many of the Englishmen who went to Paris lost their individuality and became third-rate Frenchmen. He would puzzle out things for himself—stick to his own programme and ideas.

English poetic feeling, combined with as much of French technique as it could assimilate—there was the line of progress. Not the technique of these clever madmen—Manet, Degas, Monet, and the rest—with the mean view of life of some, and the hideous surface of others. No!—but the Barbizon men—and Mother Nature, first and foremost! Beauty too, beauty of idea and selection—not mere beauty of paint, to which everything else—line, modelling, construction—was to be vilely sacrificed.

In his exaltation he began an imaginary article denouncing the Impressionists, spouting it aloud as he went along; so that the passers-by caught a word or two, through the traffic, now and then, and turned to look, astonished, at the handsome, gesticulating fellow in the hansom. Till he stopped abruptly, first to laugh at himself, and then to chuckle over the thought of Phoebe, and the presents he had just bought.

* * * * *

Meanwhile, at the very moment, probably, that Fenwick was in Peter Robinson's shop, an omnibus coming from Euston passed through Russell Square, and a woman, volubly advised by the conductor, alighted from it at the corner of Bernard Street. She was very tall and slender; her dress was dusty and travel-stained, and as she left the omnibus she drew down a thickly spotted veil over a weary face. She walked quickly down Bernard Street, looking at the numbers, and stopped before the door of Fenwick's lodgings.

The door was opened by Mrs. Gibbs, the landlady.

'Is Mr. Fenwick at home?'

'No; he's just this minute gone out. Did you want to see him, Miss?'

The young woman hung back a moment in hesitation. Then she advanced into the hall.

'I've got a parcel for him'—she showed it under her arm. 'If you'll allow me, I'll go up, and leave it in his room. It's important.'

'And what name, Miss—if I may ask?'

The visitor hesitated again—then she said, quietly:

'I am Mrs. Fenwick—Mr. Fenwick's wife.'

'His wife!' cried the other, startled. 'Oh no; there is some mistake—he hasn't got no wife!'

Phoebe drew herself up fiercely.

'You mustn't say such things to me, please! I *am* Mr. Fenwick's wife—and you must please show me his rooms.'

The emphasis and the passion with which these words were said left Mrs. Gibbs gaping. She was a worthy woman, for whom the world—so far as it could be studied from a Bernard Street lodging-house—had few surprises; and a number of alternative conjectures ran through her mind as she studied Phoebe's appearance.

'I'm sure, ma'am, I meant no offence,' she said, hurriedly; 'but, you see, Mr. Fenwick has never—as you might say—'

'No,' said Phoebe, proudly, interrupting her; 'there was no reason why he should speak of his private affairs. I have been in the country, waiting till he could make a home for me. Now will you show me his room?'

But Mrs. Gibbs did not move. She stood staring at Phoebe, irresolute—thinking, no doubt, of the penny novelettes on which she fed her leisure moments—till Phoebe impatiently drew a letter from her pocket.

'I see you doubt what I say. Of course it is quite right that you should be careful about admitting anybody to my husband's rooms in his absence. But here is the last letter I received from him a week or two ago.'

And, drawing it from its envelope, Phoebe showed first the signature,
'John Fenwick,' and then pointed to the address on the envelope—'Mrs.
John Fenwick, Green Nab Cottage, Great Langdale.'

'Well, I never!' said Mrs. Gibbs, staring still more widely, and slowly retreating—'and he never lettin' me post a letter since he came here—not once—no confidence nowhere—and I'm sure I have been his good friend!'

Phoebe moved towards the staircase.

'Is Mr. Fenwick's room on the first floor or the second?'

Lost in protesting wonder, Mrs. Gibbs wheezily mounted the stairs far enough to point to the door of Fenwick's room.

'Here's matches'—she fumbled in her apron-pocket. 'There's a candle on the mantelpiece. Though I dare say he's left his lamp going. He generally does—he don't take no account of what I says to him about it.'

Phoebe passed on. Mrs. Gibbs called after her:

'So I'm to say "Mrs. Fenwick," am I, madam—when Mr. Fenwick gets back?'

She stood leaning against the banisters, one hand behind her, looking her visitor up and down with impertinent eyes.

'Certainly,' said Phoebe. Then she put her hand to her head, and said, in a low, bewildered voice, 'At least, if I'm here—if he comes back soon—but I can't stay.'

Mrs. Gibbs went downstairs again, consumed with conjecture and excitement.

'Wife indeed!—that's what they all say—bound to. But of all the cool young women! I hope I haven't done no harm, letting her into the studio. But that letter and all—it was enough to make a jelly of you things a-turnin' out like this. And me all a-tremblin', and givin' in!'

* * * * *

Phoebe opened the studio door, noticed the bright light with amazement, and shut the door behind her. She stood there, with her back to it, sharply arrested, her eyes held by the spectacle before her.

Close to her, in the centre of the freest portion of the floor, rose the sketch of Eugénie de Pastourelles, lit by the two lamps, which threw a concentrated glow upon the picture, and left all the rest of the room shadowy. Nothing could have been more strange than the aspect of the drawing, thus solitary, and brightly illuminated. Phoebe looked at it in bewilderment, then round the littered studio. Beyond the lamps, she saw the large new canvas, showing dimly the first 'laying-in' of its important subject. On the floor, and running round the walls, was a thin line of sketches and canvases. The shallow, semi-circular window at the further end of the room was not yet curtained, and the branches of the still leafless plane-tree outside showed darkly in the gathering dusk. The room, apart from its one spot of light, struck bare and chill. Except for the 'throne' and a few chairs, it contained scarcely any furniture. But, for Phoebe, it was held by two presences. Everything around her spoke of John. Here was his familiar belongings—his clothes that she had mended—his books—his painting-things. And over John's room—her husband's room—the woman in the picture held sway.

She slowly approached the drawing, while a sob mounted in her throat. She was still in the grip of that violent half-hysterical impulse which had possessed her since the evening of Bella Morrison's visit. Nights almost sleepless, arrangements made and carried out in a tumult of excitement, a sense of impending tragedy, accepted, and almost welcomed, as the end of long weeks of doubt and self-torment, which had become at last unbearable—into this fatal coil of actions and impressions, the young wife had been sinking deeper and deeper with each successive hour. She had neither friend nor adviser. Her father, a weak inarticulate man, was dying; her stepmother hated her; and she had long ceased to write to Miss Anna, because it was she who had urged John to go to London! All sane inference and normal reasoning were now indeed, and had been for some time, impossible to her. Fenwick, possessed by the imaginations of his art, had had no imagination—alack!—to spend upon his wife's case, and those morbid processes of brain developed in her by solitude, and wounded love, and mortified vanity. One hour with him!—one hour of love, scolding, tears—would have saved them both. Alone, she was incapable of the merest common sense. She came prepared to discover the worst—to find evidence for all her fears. And for the worst she had elaborately laid her plans. Only if it should turn out that she had been an unkind, unreasonable wife, wrongly suspicious of her husband, was she uncertain what she would do.

With dry, reddened eyes, she stared at the portrait of the woman who must have stolen John from her. The mere arrangement of the room seemed to her excited nerves a second outrage;—Mrs. Gibbs's reception of her and all that it had implied, had been the first. What could this strange illumination mean but that John's thoughts were taken up with his sitter in an unusual and unlawful way? For weeks he could leave his wife without a letter, a word of affection. But before going out for an hour, he must needs light these lamps and place them so—in order that this finicking lady should not feel herself deserted, that he should still seem to be admiring and adoring her!

And after all, was she so pretty? Phoebe looked at the pale and subtle face, at the hair and eyes so much less brilliant than her own, at the thin figure, and the repose of the hands. Not pretty at all!—she

said to herself, violently—but selfish, and artful, and full, of course, of all the tricks and wiles of 'society people.' *Didn't* she know that John was married? Phoebe scornfully refused to believe it. Such women simply didn't care what stood in their way. If they took a fancy to a man, what did it matter whether he were married or no?

The poor girl stood there, seething with passion, pluming herself on a knowledge of the world which enabled her to 'see through' these abominable great ladies.

But if she didn't know, if Bella Morrison's tale were true, then it was John, on whom Phoebe's rage returned to fling itself with fresh and maddened bitterness. That he should have thus utterly ignored her in his new surroundings—have never said a word about her to the landlady with whom he had lodged for nearly a year, or to any of his new acquaintances and friends—should have deliberately hidden the very fact of his marriage—could a husband give a wife any more humiliating proof of his indifference, or of her insignificance in his life?

[Illustration: *Phoebe's Rival*]

Meanwhile the picture possessed her more and more. Closer and closer she came, her chest heaving. Was it not as though John had foreseen her coming, her complaints—and had prepared for her this silent, this cruel answer? The big picture of course was gone in to the Academy, but his wife, if she came, was to see that he could not do without Madame de Pastourelles. So the sketch, with which he had finished, really, months ago, was dragged out, and made queen of all it surveyed, because, no doubt, he was miserable at parting with the picture. Ingenuity and self-torment grew with what they fed on. The burning lamps—the solitude—the graceful woman, with her slim, fine-lady hands—with every moment they became in Phoebe's eyes a more bitter, a more significant offence. Presently, in her foolish agony, she did actually believe that he had thought she might descend upon him, provoked beyond bearing by his silence and neglect, and had carefully planned this infamous way of telling her—what he wanted her to know!

Waves of unreasoning passion swept across her. The gentleness and docility of her youth had been perhaps mechanical, half-conscious; she came in truth of a hard stock, capable of violence. She put her hands to her face, trembled, and turned away. She began to be afraid of herself.

With a restless hand, as though she caught hold of anything that might distract her from the picture, she began to rummage among the papers on the table. Suddenly her attention pounced upon them; she bent her head, took up some and carried them to the lamp. Five or six large envelopes, bearing a crest and monogram, addressed in a clear hand, and containing each a long letter—she found a packet, of these, tied round with string. Throwing off her hat and veil, she sat down under the lamp, and, without an instant's demur, began to read.

First, indeed, she turned to the signature—'Eugénie de Pastourelles.' Why, pray, should Madame de Pastourelles write these long letters to another woman's husband? The hands which held them shook with anger and misery. These pages filled with discussion of art and books, which had seemed to the woman of European culture, and French associations, so natural to write, which had been written as the harmless and kindly occupation of an idle hour, with the shades of Madame de Sévigné and Madame du Deffand standing by, were messengers of terror and despair to this ignorant and yet sentimental Westmoreland girl. Why should they be written at all to *her* John, her own husband? No nice woman that she had ever known wrote long letters to married men. What could have been the object of writing these pages and pages about John's pictures and John's prospects?—affected stuff!—and what was the meaning of these appointments to see pictures, these invitations to St. James's Square, these thanks 'for the kind and charming things you say'—above all, of the constant and crying omission, throughout these delicately written sheets, of any mention whatever of Fenwick's wife and child? But of course for the two correspondents whom these letters implied, such dull, stupid creatures did not exist.

Ah! but wait a moment. Her eye caught a sentence—then fastened greedily on the following passage:

'I hardly like to repeat what I said the other day—you will think me a very intrusive person!—but when you talk of melancholy and loneliness, of feeling the strain of competition, and the nervous burden of work, so that you are sometimes tempted to give it up altogether, I can't help repeating that some day a wife will save you from all this. I have seen so much of artists!—they of all men should marry. It is quite a delusion to suppose that art—whatever art means—is enough for them, or for anybody. Imagination is the most exhausting of all professions!—and if we women are good for nothing else we *can* be cushions—we can "stop a chink and keep the wind away." So pay no attention, please, to my father's diatribes. You will very soon be prosperous—sooner perhaps than you think. A *home* is what you want.'

Kind and simple sentences!—written so innocently and interpreted so perversely! And yet the fierce and blind bewilderment with which Phoebe read or misread them was natural enough. She never doubted for a moment but that the bad woman who wrote them meant to offer herself to John. She was separated from her husband, John had said, declaring of course that it was not her fault. As if any one could be sure of that! But, at any rate, if she were separated, she might be divorced—some time. And then—*then*!—*she* would be so obliging as to make a 'cushion,' and a home, for Phoebe Fenwick's husband! As to his not being grand enough for her, that was all nonsense. When a man was as clever as John, he was anybodies equal—one saw that every day. No, this creature would make people buy his pictures—she would push him on—and after a while—

With a morbid and devastating rapidity, a whole scheme, by which the woman before her might possess herself of John, unfolded itself in Phoebe's furious mind.

Yet, surely, it would only want one word from her—from her, his wife?—

She felt herself trembling. Her limbs began to sink under her. She dropped upon a chair, sobbing. What was the use of fighting, of protesting? John had forgotten her—John's heart had grown cold to her. She might dismay and trample on her rival—how would that give her back her husband?

Oh, how could he, how *could* he have treated her so! 'I know I was ill-tempered and cross, John,—I couldn't write letters like that—but I did, *did* love you—you know, you know—I did!'

It seemed as though she twined her arms round him, and he sat rigid as a stone, with a hard, contemptuous mouth. A lonely agony, a blackness of despair, seized on Phoebe, as she crouched there, the letters on her lap, her hands hanging, her beautiful eyes, blurred with tears and sleeplessness, fixed on the picture. What she felt was absurd; but how many tragedies—aye, the deepest—are at bottom ridiculous! She had lost him; he cared no more for her; he had passed into another world out of her ken; and what was to become of her?

She started up, goaded by a blind instinct of revenge, seizing she scarcely knew what. On the table lay a palette, laden with some dark pigment with which Fenwick had just been sketching in part of his new picture. In a pot beside it were brushes.

She caught up a large brush, dipped it in the paint, and going to the picture—panting and crimson—she daubed it from top to bottom, blotting out the eyes, the mouth, the beautiful outline of the head—above all, the hands, whose delicate whiteness specially enraged her.

When the work of wreck was done, she stood a moment gazing at it. Then, violently, she looked for writing-paper. She could see none: but there was an unused half-sheet at the back of one of Madame de Pastourelles' letters, and she roughly tore it off. Making use of a book held on her knee, and finding the pen and ink with which, only half an hour before, Lord Findon had written his cheque, she began to write:

Good-bye, John,—I have found out all I want to know, and you will never see me again. I will never be a burden on a man who is ashamed of me, and has behaved as though I were dead. It is no good wasting words—you know it's true. Perhaps you may think I have no right to take Carrie. But I can't be alone—and, after all, she is more mine than yours. Don't trouble about me. I have some money, and I mean to support myself and Carrie. It was only last night this idea came to me, though it was the night before that—Never mind—I can't write about it, it would take too long, and it doesn't really matter to either of us. I don't want you to find me here; you might persuade me to come back to you, and I know it would be for the misery of both of us. What was I saying?—oh, the money—Well, last night, a cousin of mine, from Keswick, perhaps you remember him—Freddie Tolson—came to see me. Father sent him. You didn't believe what I told you about father—you thought I was making up. You'll be sorry, I think, when you read this, for by now, most likely, father has passed away. Freddie told me the doctor had given him up, and he was very near going. But he sent Freddie to me, with some money he had really left me in his will—only he was afraid Mrs. Gibson would get hold of it, and never let me have it. So he sent it by hand, with his love and blessing—and Freddie was to say he was sorry you had left me so long, and he didn't think it was a right thing for a man to do. Never mind how much it was. It's my very own, and I'm glad it comes from my father, and not from you. I have my embroidery money too, and I shall be all right—though very, very miserable. The idea of what I would do came into my head while I was talking with Freddie—and since I came into this room, I have made up my mind. I'm sorry I can't set you free altogether. There's Carrie to think of, and I must live for her sake. But at any rate you won't have to look after me, or to feel that I'm disgracing you with the smart people who have taken you up—

Don't look for us, for you will never, never find us.

Good-bye, John. Do you remember that night in the ghyll, and all the things we said?

I've spoiled your sketch—I couldn't help it—and I'm not sorry—not yet, anyway. She has everything in the world, and I had nothing—but you. Why did you leave the lamps?—just to mock at me?

Good-bye. I have left my wedding-ring on this paper. You'll know I couldn't do that, if I ever meant to come back!

She rose, and moved a small table in front of the ruined picture. On it she placed, first, the parcel she had brought with her, which contained papers and small personal possessions belonging to her husband; in front of the packet she laid the five letters of Madame de Pastourelles, her own letter in an envelope addressed to him, and upon it her ring.

Then she put on her hat and veil, tying the veil closely round her face, and, with one last look round the room, she crept to the door and unlocked it. So quietly did she descend the stairs that Mrs. Gibbs, who was listening sharply, with the kitchen door open, for any sound of her departure, heard nothing. The outer door opened and shut without the smallest noise, and the slender, veiled figure was quickly lost in the darkness and the traffic of the street.

PART III

AFTER TWELVE YEARS

'Our acts our angels are, or good or ill,
Our fatal shadows that walk by us still.'

CHAPTER IX

'Quand vous arriverez au troisième, monsieur, montez, montez toujours! Vous trouverez un petit escalier tournant, en bois. Ça vous conduira à l'atelier.'

Thus advised by the wife of the concierge, Fenwick crossed the courtyard of an old house in the Rue du Bac, looked up a moment at the sober and distinguished charm of its architecture, at the corniced, many-paned windows, so solidly framed and plentifully lined in white, upon the stone walls, and the high roof, with its lucarne windows just touched with classical decoration; each line and tint contributing to a seemly, restrained whole, as of something much worn by time, yet merely enhanced thereby, something deliberately built, moreover, to stand the years, and abide the judgement of posterity. The house in Saint-Simon's day had belonged to one of those newly ennobled dukes, his contemporaries and would-be brethren, whose monstrous claims to rank with himself and the other real magnificences among the *ducs et pairs de France* drove him to distraction. It was now let out to a multitude of families, who began downstairs in affluence and ended in the genteel or artistic penury of the garrets. The first floor was occupied by a deputy and ex-minister, one of the leaders of the Centre Gauche—in the garrets it was possible for a *rapin* to find a bedroom at sixteen francs a month. But it was needful that he should be a seemly *rapin*, orderly and quietly ambitious, like the house, otherwise he would not have been long suffered within its tranquil and self-respecting walls.

Fenwick climbed and climbed, discovered the little wooden staircase, and still climbed. At the very top he found a long and narrow corridor, along which he groped in darkness. Suddenly, at the end, a door opened, and a figure appeared on the threshold.

'Fenwick!—that you? All right!—no steps! The floor was left *au naturel* about 1680—but you won't come to grief.'

Fenwick arrived at the open door, and Dick Watson drew him into the large studio beyond. Fenwick

looked round him in astonishment. The room was a huge *grenier* in the roof of the old house, roughly adapted to the purposes of a studio. A large window to the north had been put in, and the walls had been rudely plastered. But all the blasts of heaven seemed still to blow through them, and through the chinks or under the eaves of the roof; while in the middle of the floor a pool of water, the remains of a recent heavy shower, testified to the ease with which the weather could enter if it chose.

'I say'—said Fenwick, pointing to the water—'can you stand this kind of thing?'

Watson shivered.

'Not in this weather. I'm off next week. In the summer it's pleasant enough. Well, it's deuced lucky I caught sight of you at that show yesterday! How are you? I believe it's nearly two years since we met last.'

'I'm all right,' said Fenwick, accepting a shaky seat and a cigarette.

Watson lighted a fresh one for himself, and then with arms akimbo surveyed his visitor.

'I've seen you look better. What's the matter? Have you been working through the summer in London?'

'I'm all right,' Fenwick repeated; then, with a little grimace—'or I should be, if I could pay my way, and paint the things I want to paint.'

He looked up.

'Well, why don't you?'

'Because—somehow—one has to live.'

Watson climbed on to his high stool, still observing his visitor. For a good many years now, Fenwick had been always well and carefully dressed—an evident Londoner, accustomed to drawing-rooms and frequenting expensive tailors. But to-day there was something in his tired, dishevelled look, and comparatively shabby coat, which reminded Watson of years long gone by—of a studio in Bernard Street, and a broad-browed, handsome fellow, with queer manners and a North-Country accent. As to good looks, Fenwick's face and head were now far finer than they had been in first youth; Watson's critical eye took note of it. The hair, touched lightly with grey, had receded slightly on the temples, and the more ample brow, heavily lined, gave a nobler shelter than of old to the still astonishing vivacity of the eyes. The carriage of the head, too, was prouder and more assured. Fenwick, indeed, as far as years went, was, as Watson knew, in the very prime of life. Nevertheless, there was in his aspect, as he sat there, a prophetic note of discouragement, of ebbing vitality which startled his friend.

'I say,' said Watson, abruptly, 'you've been over-doing it. Have you made it up with the Academy?'

Fenwick laughed.

'Goodness, no!'

'Where have you been exhibiting this year?'

'At the gallery I always take. And I sent some things to the Grosvenor.'

Watson shook his head.

'It's an awful pity. You'd got in—you should have stayed in—and made yourself a power.'

Fenwick's attitude stiffened.

'I have never regretted it for a single hour—except that the scene itself was ridiculous.'

Watson knew very well to what he referred. Some two years before, it had been the nine days wonder of artistic London. Fenwick, then a newly elected Associate of the Academy, and at what seemed to be the height of his first success as an artist, had sent in a picture to the Spring Exhibition which appeared to the Hanging Committee of the moment a perfunctory thing. They gave it a bad place, and an Academician told Fenwick what had happened. He rushed to Burlington House, tore down his picture from the wall, stormed at the astonished members of the Hanging Committee, carried off his property, and vowed that he would resign his Associateship. He was indeed called upon to do so; and he signalised his withdrawal by a furious letter to the *Times* in which the rancours, grievances, and contempts of ten chequered and ambitious years found full and rhetorical expression. The letter

naturally made a breach between the writer and England's official art. Watson, who was abroad when the whole thing happened, had heard of it with mingled feelings. 'It will either make him—or finish him!' was his own judgement, founded on a fairly exhaustive knowledge of John Fenwick; and he had waited anxiously for results. So far no details had reached him since. Fenwick seemed to be still exhibiting, still writing to the papers, and, as far as he knew, still selling. But the aspect of the man before him was not an aspect of prosperity.

Watson, however, having started a subject which he well knew to be interminable, would instantly have liked to escape from it. He was himself nervous, critical, and easily bored. He did not know what he should do with Fenwick's outpourings when he had listened to them.

But Fenwick had come over—charged—and Watson had touched the spring. He sat there, smoking and declaiming, his eyes blazing, one hand playing with Watson's favourite dog, an Aberdeen terrier who was softly smelling and pushing against him. All that litany of mockery and bitterness, which the Comic Spirit kindles afresh on the lips of each rising generation, only to quench it again on the lips of those who 'arrive,' flowed from him copiously. He was the age indeed for 'arrival,' when, as so often happens, the man of middle life, appeased by success, dismisses the revolts of his youth. But this was still the language—and the fierce language—of revolt! The decadence of English art and artists, the miserable commercialism of the Academy, the absence of any first-rate teaching, of any commanding traditions, of any 'school' worth the name—the vulgarity of the public, from royalty downward, the snobbery of the rich world in its dealings with art: all these jeremiads which he recited were much the same—*mutatis mutandis*—as those with which, half a century before, poor Benjamin Haydon had filled the 'autobiography' which is one of the capital 'documents' of the artistic life. This very resemblance, indeed, occurred to Watson.

'Upon my word,' he said, with a queer smile, 'you remind me of Haydon.'

Fenwick started; with an impatient movement he pushed away the dog, who whimpered.

'Oh, come—I hope it's not as bad as that,' he said, roughly.

Watson sharply regretted his remark. Through the minds of both there passed the same image of Haydon lying dead by his own hand beneath the vast pictures that no one would buy.

'Why you talk like this, I'm sure I don't know,' Watson said, with an impatient laugh. 'I'm always seeing your name in the papers. You have a great reputation, and I don't expect the Academy matters to your *clientèle*.'

Fenwick shook his head. 'I haven't sold a picture for more than a year—except a beastly portrait—one of the worst things I ever did.'

'That's bad,' said Watson. 'Of course that's my state—perennially! But you're not used to it.'

Fenwick said nothing, and the delicate sensibility of the other instantly divined that, friends as they were, the comparison with himself had not been at all welcome to his companion. And, indeed, at the time when Watson left England to begin the wandering life he had been leading for some three years, it would have been nothing less than grotesque. Fenwick was then triumphant, in what, it was supposed, would be his 'first period'—that 'young man's success,' brilliant, contested, noisy, from which, indeed, many roads lead, to many goals; but with him, at that time, the omens were of the best. His pictures were always among the events of the spring exhibitions; he had gathered round him a group of enthusiastic pupils who worked in the studio of the new house; and he had already received a good many honours at the hands of foreign juries. He was known to be on the threshold of the Academy, and to be making, besides, a good deal of money. 'Society' had first admitted him as the *protégé* of Lord Findon and the friend of Madame de Pastourelles, and was now ready to amuse itself with him, independently, as a genius and an 'eccentric.' He had many enemies; but so have all 'fighters.' The critics spoke severely of certain radical defects in his work, due to insufficiency of early training; defects which time might correct—or stereotype. But the critics 'must be talking'; and the public, under the spell of a new and daring talent, appeared to take no notice.

As these recollections passed through Watson's mind, another expression showed itself in the hollow-cheeked, massive face. It was the look of the visionary who sees in events the strange verification of obscure instincts and divinations in which he himself perhaps has only half-believed. He and Fenwick had been friends now—in some respects, close friends—for a good many years. Of late, they had met rarely, and neither of the men was a good correspondent. But the friendship, the strong sense of congruity and liking, persisted. It had sprung, originally—unexpectedly enough—from that loan made to

Fenwick in his days of stress and poverty; and there were many who prophesied that it would come to an end with Fenwick's success. Watson had no interest in and small tolerance for the prosperous. His connexion with Cuningham, in spite of occasional letters, had dropped long ago, ever since that clever Scotch painter had shown himself finally possessed of the usual Scotch power to capture London and a competence. But his liking for Fenwick had never wavered through all the blare of Fenwick's success.

Was it that the older man with his melancholy Celtic instinct had divined from the first that he and Fenwick were in truth of the same race—the race of the [Greek: dusammoroi]—the ill-fated—those for whom happiness is not written in the stars?

He sat staring at his companion, his eyes dreamily intent, taking note of the restless depression of the man before him, and of the disagreeable facts which emerged from his talk—declining reputation, money difficulties, and—last and most serious—a new doubt of himself and his powers, which Watson never remembered to have noticed in him before.

'But you must have made a great deal of money!' he said to him once, interrupting him.

Fenwick turned away uneasily.

'So I did. But there was the new house and studio. I have been trying to sell the house. But it's a white elephant.'

'Building's the deuce,' said Watson, gloomily. 'It ruins everybody from Louis Quatorze and Walter Scott downward. Have no barns—that's my principle—and then you can't pull 'em down and build greater! But, you know, it's all great nonsense, your talking like this! You're as clever as ever—cleverer. You've only got to *paint*—and it'll be all right. But, of course, if you will spend all your time in writing letters to the papers, and pamphlets, and that kind of thing—well!—'

He shrugged his shoulders.

Fenwick took the remark good-temperedly. 'I've finished three large pictures in eight months—if only somebody would buy 'em. And I'm in Paris now'—he hesitated a moment—'on a painting job. I've promised C——' (he named a well-known actor-manager in London) 'to help him with the production of a new play! I never did such a thing before—but—'

He looked up uncertainly, his colour rising.

'What?—scenery for *The Queen's Necklace?* I've seen the puffs in the papers. Why not? Hope he pays well. Then you're going to Versailles, of course?'

Fenwick replied that he had taken some rooms at the Hôtel des Réservoirs and must make some sketches in the palace; also in the park, and the Trianon garden. Then he rose abruptly.

'Well, and what have you been after?'

'The same old *machines*,' said Watson, tranquilly, pointing to a couple of large canvases. 'My subjects are no gayer than they used to be. Except that—ah, yes—I forgot—I had a return upon myself this spring—and set to work on some Bacchantes.' He stopped, and picked up a canvas which was standing with its face to the wall.

It represented a dance of Bacchantes. Fenwick looked at it in silence. Watson replaced it with a patient sigh. 'Theophile Gautier said of some other fellow's Bacchantes that they had got drunk on "philosophical" wine. He might, I fear, have said it of mine. Anyway, I felt I was not made for Bacchantes—so I fell back on the usual thing.'

And he showed an 'Execution of a Witch'—filled with gruesome and poignant detail—excellent in some of its ideas and single figures, but as a whole crude, horrible, and weak.

'I don't improve,' he said, abruptly, turning away—'but it keeps me contented—that and my animals. Anatole!—*vaurien*!—*où es-tu*?'

A small monkey, in a red jacket, who had been sitting unnoticed on the top of a cabinet since Fenwick's entrance, clattered down to the floor, and, running to his master, was soon sitting on his shoulder, staring at Fenwick with a pair of grave, soft eyes. Watson caressed him;—and then pointed to a wicker cage outside the window in which a pigeon was pecking at some Indian-corn. The cage door was wide open. 'She comes to feed here by day. In the morning I wake up and hear her there—the darling! In the evening she spreads her wings, and I watch her fly toward Saint-Cloud. No doubt the jade keeps a family there. Oh! some day she'll go—like the rest of them—and I shall miss her abominably.'

'You seem also to be favoured by mice?' said Fenwick, idly looking at two traps on the floor beside him.

Watson smiled.

'My *femme de service* sets those traps every night. She says we are overrun—the greatest nonsense! As if there wasn't enough for all of us! Then in the night—I sleep there, you see, behind that screen—I wake, and hear some little fool squeaking. So I get up, and take the trap downstairs in the dark—right away down—to the first floor. And there I let the mouse go—those folk down there are rich enough to keep him. The only drawback is that my old woman is so cross in the morning, and she spends her life thinking of new traps. *Ah, ben!—Je la laisse faire!*'

'And this place suits you?'

'Admirably—till the cold comes. Then I march. I must have the sun.'

He shivered again. Fenwick, struck by something in his tone, looked at him more closely.

'How are you, by the way?' he asked, repentantly, 'I ought to have inquired before. You mentioned consulting some big man here. What did he say to you?'

'Oh, that I am phthisical, and must take care,' said Watson, carelessly—'that's no news. Ah! by the way'—he hurried the change of subject—'you know, of course, that Lord Findon and madame are to be at Versailles?'

'They will be there to-night,' said Fenwick, after a moment.

'Ah! to-night. Then you meet them?'

'I shall see them, of course.'

'What a blessed thing to be rid of that fellow!—What's she been doing since?'

Fenwick replied that since the death of her husband—about a year before this date—Madame de Pastourelles, worn out with nursing, had been pursuing health—in Egypt and elsewhere. Her father, stepmother, and sister had been travelling with her. The sister and she were to stay at Versailles till Christmas. It was a place for which Madame de Pastourelles had an old affection.

'And I suppose you know that you will find the Welbys there too?'

Fenwick made a startled movement.

'The *Welbys*? How did you hear that?'

'I had my usual half-yearly letter from Cuningham yesterday. He's the fellow for telling you the news. Welby has begun a big picture of Marie Antoinette, at Trianon, and has taken a studio in Versailles for the winter.'

Fenwick turned away and began to pace the bare floor of the studio.

'I didn't know,' he said, evidently discomposed.

'By the way, I have often meant to ask you. I trust he wasn't mixed up in the "hanging" affair?' said Watson, with a quick look at his companion.

'He was ill the day it was done, but in my opinion he behaved in an extremely mean and ungenerous manner afterwards!' exclaimed Fenwick, suddenly flushing from brow to chin.

'You mean he didn't support you?'

'He shilly-shallied. He thought—I have very good reason to believe—that I had been badly treated—that there was personal feeling in the matter—resentment of things that I had written—and so on but he would never come out into the open and say so!'

The excitement with which Fenwick spoke made it evident that Watson had touched an extremely sore point.

Watson was silent a little, lit another cigarette, and then said, with a smile:

'Poor Madame de Pastourelles!'

Fenwick looked up with irritation.

'What on earth do you mean?'

'I am wondering how she kept the peace between you—her two great friends.'

'She sees very little of Welby.'

'Ah! Since when?'

'Oh! for a long time. Of course they meet occasionally—'

A big, kindly smile flickered over Watson's face.

'What—was little Madame Welby jealous?'

'She would be a great goose if she were,' said Fenwick, turning aside to look through some sketches that lay on a chair beside him.

Watson shook his head, still smiling, then remarked:

'By the way, I understand she has become quite an invalid.'

'Has she?' said Fenwick. 'I know nothing of them.'

Watson began to talk of other things. But as he and Fenwick discussed the pictures on the easels, or Fenwick's own projects, as they talked of Manet, and Zola's 'L'Oeuvre,' and the Goncourts, as they compared the state of painting in London and Paris, employing all the latest phrases, both of them astonishingly well informed as to men and tendencies—Watson as an outsider, Fenwick as a passionate partisan, loathing the Impressionists, denouncing a show of Manet and Renoir recently opened at a Paris dealer's—Watson's inner mind was really full of Madame de Pastourelles, and that *salon* of hers in the old Westminster house in Dean's Yard, of which during so many years Fenwick had made one of the principal figures. It should perhaps be explained that some two years after Fenwick's arrival in London, Madame de Pastourelles had thought it best to establish a little *ménage* of her own, distinct from the household in St. James's Square. Her friends and her stepmother's were not always congenial to each other; and in many ways both Lord Findon and she were the happier for the change. Her small panelled rooms had quickly become the meeting-place of a remarkable and attractive society. Watson himself, indeed, had never been an *habitué* of that or any other drawing-room. As he had told Lord Findon long ago, he was not for the world, nor the world for him. But whereas his volatile lordship could never draw him from his cell, Lord Findon's daughter was sometimes irresistible, and Watson's great shaggy head and ungainly person was occasionally to be seen beside her fire, in the years before he left London. He had, therefore, been a spectator of Fenwick's gradual transformation at the hands of a charming woman; he had marked the stages of the process; and he knew well that it had never excited a shadow of scandal in the minds of any reasonable being. All the same, the deep store of hidden sentiment which this queer idealist possessed had been touched by the position. The young woman isolated and childless, so charming, so nobly sincere, so full of heart—was she to be always Ariadne, and forsaken? The man—excitable, nervous, selfish, yet, in truth, affectionate and dependent—what folly, or what chivalry kept him unmarried? Ever since the death of M. le Comte de Pastourelles, dreams concerning these two people had been stirring in the brain of Watson, and these dreams spoke now in the dark eyes he bent on Fenwick.

Presently, Fenwick began to talk gloomily of the death of his old Bernard Street landlady, who had become his housekeeper and factotum in the new Chelsea house and studio, which he had built for himself.

'I don't know what I shall do without her. For eleven years I've never paid a bill or engaged a servant for myself. She's done everything. Every morning she used to give me my pocket-money for the day.'

'The remedy, after all, is simple,' said Watson, with a sudden turn of the head.

Fenwick raised his eyebrows interrogatively.

'I imagine that what Mrs. Gibbs did well, "Mrs. Fenwick" might do even better—*n'est-ce pas?*'

Fenwick sprang up.

'Mrs.—?' he repeated, vaguely.

He stood a moment bending over Watson—his eyes staring, his mouth open. Then he controlled himself.

'You talk as though she were round the corner,' he said, turning away and buttoning his coat afresh. 'But please understand, my dear fellow, that she is not round the corner, nor likely to be.'

He spoke with a hard emphasis, smiling, and slapping the breast of his coat.

Watson looked at him and said no more.

Fenwick walked rapidly along the Quai Voltaire, crossed the Pont Neuf, and found himself inside the enclosure of the Louvre. Twenty minutes to four. Some impulse, born of the seething thoughts within, took him to the door of the Musée. He mounted rapidly, and found himself in the large room devoted to the modern French school.

He went straight to two pictures by Hippolyte Flandrin—'Madame Vinet' and 'Portrait de Jeune Fille.' When, in the first year of his London life, he had made his hurried visits to Paris, these pictures, then in the Luxembourg, had been among those which had most vitally affected him. The beautiful surface and keeping which connected them with the old tradition, together with the modern spirit, the trenchant simplicity of their portraiture, had sent him back—eager and palpitating—to his own work on the picture of Madame de Pastourelles, or on the last stages of the 'Genius Loci.'

He looked into them now, sharply, intently, his heart beating to suffocation under the stress of that startling phrase of Watson's. Still tremulous—as one in flight—he made himself recognise certain details of drawing and modelling in 'Madame Vinet' which had given him hints for the improvement of the portrait of Phoebe; and, again, the ease with which the head moves on its shoulders, its relief, its refinement—how he had toiled to rival them in his picture of Madame Eugénie!—translating as he best could the cold and disagreeable colour of the Ingres school into the richer and more romantic handling of an art influenced by Watts and Burne-Jones!

Then he passed on to the young girl's portrait—the girl in white muslin, turning away her graceful head from the spectator, and showing thereby the delicacy of her profile, the wealth of her brown hair, the beauty of her young and virginal form. Suddenly, his eyes clouded; he turned abruptly away, left the room without looking at another picture, and was soon hurrying through the crowded streets northward towards the Gare Saint-Lazare.

Carrie!—his child!—his own flesh and blood. His heart cried out for her. Watson's *brusquerie*—the young girl of the picture—and his own bitter and disappointed temper—they had all their share in the emotion which possessed him.

The child whom he remembered, with her mother's eyes, and that light mutinous charm, which was not Phoebe's—why, she was now seventeen!—a little younger—only a little younger, than the girl of the portrait. His longing fancy pursued her—saw her a wild, pretty, laughing thing, nearly a woman—and then fell back passionately on a more familiar image!—of the baby at his knee, open-mouthed, her pink lips rounded for the tidbit just about to descend upon them, her sweet and sparkling eyes fixed upon her father.

'My God!—where are they?—are they alive, or dead? How cruel—*cruel*!' And he ground his teeth in one of those paroxysms which every now and then, at long intervals, represented the return upon him of the indestructible past. Often for months together it meant little or nothing to him, but the dull weight of his secret; twelve years had inevitably deadened feeling, and filled the mind with fresh interests, while of late the tumult of his Academy and Press campaign had silenced the stealing, distant voices. Yet there were moments when all was as fresh and poignant as it had been in the first hours, when Phoebe, with her golden head and her light, springing step, seemed to move beside him, and he felt the drag of a small hand in his.

He stiffened himself—like one attacked. The ghosts of dead hours came trooping and eddying round him, like the autumn leaves that had begun to strew the Paris streets—all the scenes of that first ghastly week when he had hunted in desperation for his lost wife and child. His joyous return from Chelsea, on the evening of his good-fortune—Mrs. Gibbs's half-sulky message on the door-step that 'Mrs. Fenwick' was in the studio—his wild rush upstairs—the empty room, the letter, the ring:—his hurried journey North—the arrival at the Langdale cottage, only to find on the table of the deserted parlour another letter from Phoebe, written before she left Westmoreland, in the prevision that he would come there in search of a clue, and urging him for both their sakes to make no scandal, no hue and cry, to accept the inevitable, and let her go in peace—his interview with the servant Daisy, who had waited with the child in an hotel close to Euston, while Phoebe went to Bernard Street, and had been sent back to the North immediately after Phoebe's return, without the smallest indication of what her mistress meant to do—his fruitless consultations with Anna Mason!—the whole dismal story rose before him, as it was wont to do periodically, filling him with the same rage, the same grief, the same fierce and inextinguishable resentment.

Phoebe had destroyed his life. She had not only robbed him of herself and of their child, she had forced him into an acted lie which had poisoned his whole existence, and, first and foremost, that gracious and beautiful friendship which was all, save his art, that she had left him. For, in the first moments of his despair and horror, he had remembered what it would mean to Madame de Pastourelles, did she ever know that his mad wife had left him out of jealousy of her. He was not slow to imagine the effect of Phoebe's action on that proud, pure nature and sensitive conscience; and he knew what she and her father must feel towards the deception which had led her into such a position, and made such a tragedy possible. He foresaw her recoil, her bitter condemnation, the final ruin of the relation between himself and her; and yet more than these did he dread her pain, her causeless, innocent pain. To stab the hand which had helped him, the heart which had already suffered so much, in the very first hours of his own shock and misery, he had shrunk from this, he had tried his best to protect Madame de Pastourelles.

Hence the compact with his landlady, by which he had in fact bribed her to silence, and transformed her into a devoted servant always under his eye; hence the various means by which he had found it possible to quiet the members of his own family and of Phoebe's—needy folk, most of them, cannily unwilling to make an enemy of a man who was likely, so they understood, to be rich, and who already showed a helpful disposition. When once he had convinced himself that he had no clue, and that Phoebe had disappeared, it had not been difficult indeed to keep his secret, and to hide the traces of his own wrong-doing, his own share in the catastrophe. Between Phoebe's world and the world in which he was now to live, there were few or no links. Bella Morrison might have supplied one. But she and her mother had moved to Guernsey, and a year after Phoebe's flight Fenwick ascertained that old Mrs. Morrison was dead, and that Bella had gone to South America as companion to a lady.

So in an incredibly short time the crisis was over. The last phase was connected with the cousin—Freddy Tolson—who had visited Phoebe the night before her journey to London, and was now in New South Wales.

A letter from Fenwick to this young man, containing a number of questions as to his conversation with Phoebe, and written immediately after Phoebe's flight, obtained an answer after some three or four months, but Tolson's reply was wholly unprofitable. He merely avowed that he had discovered nothing at all of Phoebe's intention, and could throw no light whatever upon her disappearance. The letter was laboriously written by a man of imperfect education, and barely covered three loosely written sides of ordinary note-paper. It arrived when Fenwick's own researches were already at a standstill, and seemed to leave nothing more to hope for. The police inquiries which had been initiated went on intermittently for a while, then ceased; the waters of life closed over Phoebe Fenwick and her child.

What was Fenwick's present feeling towards his wife? If amid this crowded Paris he had at last beheld her coming to him, had seen the tall figure and the childish look, and the lovely, pleading eyes, would his heart have leapt within him?—would his hands have been outstretched to enfold and pardon her?—or would he have looked at her sombrely, unable to pass the gulf between them—to forget what she had done?

In truth, he could not have answered the question; he was uncertain of himself. Her act, by its independence, its force of will, and the ability she had shown in planning and carrying it out, had transformed his whole conception of her. In a sense, he knew her no longer. That she could do a thing at once so violent and so final, was so wholly out of keeping with all his memories of her, that he could only think of the woman who had come in his absence to the Bernard Street studio, and defaced the sketch of Madame de Pastourelles, as in some sort a stranger—one whom, were she to step back into his life, he would have had to learn afresh. Sometimes, when anything reminded him of her suddenly—as, for instance, the vision in a shop-window of the very popular mezzotint which had been made from the 'Genius Loci' the year after its success in the Academy—the pang from which he suffered would seem to show that he still loved her, as indeed he had always loved her, through all the careless selfishness of his behaviour. But, again, there were many months when she dropped altogether—or seemed to drop—out of his mind and memory, when he was entirely absorbed in the only interests she had left him—his art, his quarrels, and his relation to Eugénie de Pastourelles.

There was a time, indeed—some two or three years after the catastrophe—when he passed through a stage of mental and moral tumult, natural to a man of strong passions and physique. Even in their first married life, Phoebe had been sometimes jealous, and with reason. It was her memory of these occasions that had predisposed her to the mad suspicion which wrecked her. And when she had deserted him, he came violently near, on one or two occasions, to things base and irreparable. But he was saved—first by the unconscious influence, the mere trust, of a good woman—and, secondly, by his keen and advancing intelligence. Dread lest he should cast himself out of Eugénie's delightful presence; and the fighting life of the mind: it was by these he was rescued, by these he ultimately conquered.

And yet, was it, perhaps, his bitterest grievance against his wife that she had, in truth, left him *nothing*!—not even friendship, not even art. In so wrenching herself from him, she had perpetuated in him that excitable and unstable temper it should have been her first object to allay, and had thus injured and maimed his artistic power; while at the same time she had so troubled, so falsified his whole attitude towards the woman who on his wife's disappearance from his life had become naturally and insensibly his dearest friend, that not even the charm of Madame de Pastourelles' society, of her true, delicate, and faithful affection, could give him any lasting happiness. He himself had begun the falsification, but it was Phoebe's act which had prolonged and compelled it, through twelve years.

For a long time, indeed, his success as an artist steadily developed. The very energy of his resentment—his inner denunciation—of his wife's flight, the very force of his fierce refusal to admit that he had given her the smallest real justification for such a step, had quickened in him for a time all the springs of life. Through his painting, as we have seen, he wrestled out his first battles with fate and with temptation; and those early years were the years of his artistic triumph, as they were also the years of Madame de Pastourelles' strongest influence upon him. But the concealment on which his life was based, the tragedy at the heart of it, worked like 'a worm i' the bud.' The first check to his artistic career—the 'hanging' incident and its sequel—produced an effect of shock and disintegration out of all proportion to its apparent cause—inexplicable indeed to the spectators.

Madame de Pastourelles wondered, and sorrowed. But she could do nothing to arrest the explosion of egotism, arrogance, and passion which Fenwick allowed himself, after his breach with the Academy. The obscure causes of it were hidden from her; she could only pity and grieve; and Fenwick, unable to satisfy her, unable to re-establish his own equilibrium, full of remorse towards her, and of despair about his art, whereof the best forces and inspirations seemed to have withered within him like a gourd in the night, went from one folly to another, while his pictures steadily deteriorated, his affairs became involved, and a shrewd observer like Lord Findon wondered who or what the deuce had got hold of him—whether he had begun to take morphia—or had fallen into the clutches of a woman.

In the midst of these developments, so astonishing and disappointing to Fenwick's best friends, Eugénie de Pastourelles was suddenly summoned to the death-bed of the husband from whom she had been separated for nearly fifteen years. It was now nearly twelve months since Fenwick had seen her; and it was his eagerness to meet her again, much more than the necessities of his new commission, which had brought him out post-haste to Paris and Versailles, where, indeed, Lord Findon, in a kind letter, had suggested that he should join them.

* * * * *

Amid these memories and agitations, he found himself presently at the Gare Saint-Lazare, taking his ticket at the *guichet*. It was characteristic of him that he bought a first-class return without thinking of it, and then, when he found himself pompously alone in his compartment, while crowds were hurrying into the second-class, he reproached himself for extravagance, and passed the whole journey in a fume of discomfort. For eight or nine years he had been rich; and he loathed the small ways of poverty.

Versailles was in the glow of an autumn sunset, as he walked from the station to the famous Hôtel des Réservoirs on the edge of the Park. The white houses, the wide avenues, the château on its hill, were steeped in light—a light golden, lavish, and yet melancholy, as though the autumn day still remembered the October afternoon when Marie Antoinette turned to look for the last time at the lake and the woods of Trianon.

As Fenwick crossed the Rue de la Paroisse, a lady on the other side of the road, who was hurrying in the opposite direction, stopped suddenly at sight of him, and stared excitedly. She was a woman no longer young, much sunburnt, with high cheek-bones and a florid complexion. He did not notice her, and after a moment's hesitation she resumed her walk.

He went into the Park, where the statues shone flamelike amid the bronze and orange of the trees, where the water of the fountains was dyed in blue and rose, and all the faded magnificence and decaying grace of the vast incomparable scene were kindling into an hour's rich life, under the last attack of the sun. He wandered a while, restless and unhappy—yet always counting the hours till he should see the slight, worn figure which for a year had been hidden from him.

He dined in the well-known restaurant, wandered again in the mild dusk, then mounted to his room and worked a while at some of the sketches he was making for his new commission. While he was so engaged, a carriage drew up below, and two persons descended. He recognised Lord Findon, much aged and whitened in these last years. The lady in deep mourning behind him paused a moment on the broad pathway, and looked round her, at the hill of the château, at the bright lights in the restaurant. She threw back her veil, and Fenwick's heart leapt as he recognised the spiritual beauty, the patient sweetness of a face which through twelve troubled years had kept him from evil and held him to good—

had been indeed 'the master light' of all his seeing.

And to his best and only friend he had lied, persistently and unforgiveably, for twelve years. There was the sting—and there the pity of it.

CHAPTER X

Eugénie de Pastourelles was sitting on the terrace at Versailles. Or rather she was established in one of the deep embrasures between the windows, on the western side. The wind was cold, but again a glorious sun bathed the terrace and the château. It was a day of splendour—a day when heaven and earth seemed to have conspired to flatter and to adorn the vast creation of Louis Quatorze, this white, flaming palace, amid the gold and bronze of its autumn trees, and the blue of its waters. Superb clouds, of a royal sweep and amplitude, sailed through the brilliant sky; the woods that girdled the horizon were painted broadly and solidly in the richest colour upon an immense canvas steeped in light. In some of the nearer alleys which branch from the terrace, the eye travelled, through a deep magnificence of shade, to an arched and framed sunlight beyond, embroidered with every radiant or sparkling colour; in others, the trees, almost bare, met lightly arched above a carpet of intensest green —a *tapis vert* stretching toward a vaporous distance, and broken by some god, or nymph, on whose white shoulders the autumn leaves were dropping softly one by one.

Wide horizons, infinitely clear—a blazing intensity of light, beating on the palace, the gardens, the statues, and the distant water of the 'Canal de Versailles'—each tint and outline, sharp and vehement, full-bodied and rich—the greenest greens, the bluest blues, the most dazzling gold:—this was Versailles, as Eugénie saw it, on this autumn day. And through it all, the blowing of a harsh and nipping wind sounded the first approach of winter, still defied, as it were, by these bright woods decked for a last festival.

It was the 5th of October—the very anniversary of the day when Marie Antoinette, sitting alone beside the lake at Trianon, was startled by a page from the château bringing the news of the arrival of the Paris mob, and the urgent summons to return at once;—the day when she passed the Temple of Love, gleaming amid the quiet streams, for the last time, and fled back through the leafy avenues leading to Versailles, under a sky—cloudy and threatening rain—which was remembered by a later generation as blending fitly with the first act of that most eminent tragedy—'The Fall of the House of France.'

Madame de Pastourelles had in her hand a recent book in which a French man of letters, both historian and poet, had told once again the most piteous of stories; a story, however, which seemed then, and still seems, to be not even yet ripe for history—so profound and living are the sympathies and the passions which to this day surround it in France.

Eugénie had closed the book, and her eyes, as they looked out upon the astonishing light and shade of the terrace and its surroundings, had filled unconsciously with tears, not so much for Marie Antoinette, as for all griefs!—for this duped, tortured, struggling life of ours—for the 'mortalia' which grip all hearts, which none escape—pain, and separation, and remorse, hopes deceived, and promise mocked, decadence in one's self, change in others, and that iron gentleness of death which closes all.

For nearly a year she had been trying to recover her forces after an experience which had shaken her being to its depths. Not because, when she went to nurse his last days, she had any love left, in the ordinary sense, for her ruined and debased husband; but because of that vast power of pity, that genius for compassion to which she was born. Not a tremor of body or soul, not a pang of physical or spiritual fear, but she had passed through them, in common with the man she upheld; a man who, like Louis the Well-Beloved, former master of the building beneath whose shadow she was sitting, was ready to grovel for her pardon, when threatened with a priest and the last terrors, and would have recalled his mistress, rejoicing, with the first day of recovered health.

He and she had asked for respite in vain, however; and M. de
Pastourelles slept with his fathers.

Since his death, her strength had failed her. There had been no definite illness, but a giving way for some six or seven months of nature's resisting powers. Also—significant sign of the strength of all her personal affections!—in addition to the moral and physical strain she had undergone, she had suffered much about this time from the loss of her maid, an old servant and devoted friend, who left her shortly

after M. de Pastourelles' death—incited, forced thereto by Eugénie—in order to marry and go out to Canada. Eugénie had missed her sorely; and insensibly, the struggle to get well had been the harder. The doctors ordered travel and change, and she had wandered from place to place; only half-conscious, as it often seemed to her; the most docile of patients; accompanied now by one member of the family, now by another; standing as it were, like the bather who has wandered too far from shore, between the onward current which means destruction, and that backward struggle of the will which leads to life. And little by little the tide of being had turned. After a winter in Egypt, strength had begun to come back; since then Switzerland and high air had quickened recovery; and now, physically, Eugénie was almost herself again.

But morally, she retained a deep and lasting impress of what she had gone through. More than ever was she a creature of tenderness, of the most delicate perceptions, of a sensibility, as our ancestors would have called it, too great for this hurrying world. Her unselfishness, always one of her cradle-gifts, had become almost superhuman; and had she been of another temperament, the men and women about her might have instinctively shrunk from her, as too perfect—now—for human nature's daily food. But from that she was saved by a score of most womanish, most mundane qualities. Nobody knew her, luckily, for the saint she was; she herself least of all. As her strength renewed itself, her soft fun, too, came back, her gentle, inexhaustible delight in the absurdities of men and things, which gave to her talk and her personality a kind of crackling charm, like the crispness of dry leaves upon an autumn path. Naturally, and invincibly, she loved life and living; all the high forces and emotions called to her, but also all the patches, stains, and follies of this queer world; and there is no saint, man or woman, of whom this can be said, that has ever repelled the sinners. It is the difference between St. Francis and St. Dominic!

How very little—all the same—could Eugénie feel herself with the saints, on this October afternoon! She sat, to begin with, on the threshold of Madame de Pompadour's apartment; and in the next place, she had never been more tremulously steeped in doubts and yearnings, entirely concerned with her friends and her affections. It was a re-birth; not of youth—how could that be, she herself would have asked, seeing that she was now thirty-seven?—but of the natural Eugénie, who, 'intellectual' though she were, lived really by the heart, and the heart only. And since it is the heart that makes youth and keeps it—it *was* a return of youth—and of beauty—that had come upon her. In her black dress and shady hat, her collar and cuffs of white lawn, she was very discreetly, quietly beautiful; the passer-by did not know what it was that had touched and delighted him, till she had gone, and he found himself, perhaps, looking after the slim yet stately figure; but it was beauty none the less. And the autumn violets, her sister's gift, that were fastened to-day in profusion at her waist, marked in truth the re-awakening of buried things, of feminine instincts long repressed. For months, her maid Fanchette had dressed her, and she had worn obediently all the long crape gowns and veils dictated by the etiquette of French mourning. But to-day she had chosen for herself; and in this more ordinary garb, she was vaguely—sometimes remorsefully—conscious of relief and deliverance.

Two subjects filled her mind. First, a conversation with Fenwick that she had held that morning, strolling through the upper alleys of the Park. Poor friend, poor artist! Often and often, during her wanderings, had her thoughts dwelt anxiously on his discontents and calamities; she had made her sister or her father write to him when she could not write herself—though Lord Findon indeed had been for long much out of patience with him; and during the last few months she herself had written every week. But she had never felt so clearly the inexorable limits of her influence with him. This morning, just as of old, he had thrown himself tempestuously upon her advice, her sympathy; and she had given him counsel as she best could. But a woman knows when her counsel is likely to be followed, or no. Eugénie had no illusions. In his sore, self-tormented state he was, she saw, at the mercy of any passing idea, of anything that seemed to offer him vengeance on his enemies, or the satisfaction of a vanity that writhed under the failure he was all the time inviting and assuring.

Yet as she thought of him, she liked him better than ever. He might be perverse, yet he appealed to her profoundly! The years of his success had refined and civilised him no doubt, but they had tended to make him like anybody else. Whereas this passionate accent of revolt—as of some fierce, helpless creature, struggling blindly in bonds of its own making—had perhaps restored to him that more dramatic element which his personality had possessed in his sulky, gifted youth. He had expressed himself with a bitter force on the decline of his inspiration and the weakening of his will. He was going to the dogs, he declared; had lost all his hold on the public; and had nothing more to say or to paint. And she had been very, very sorry for him, but conscious all the time that he had never been so eloquent, and never in such good looks, what with the angry energy of the eyes, and the sweep of grizzled hair across the powerful brow, and the lines cut by life and thought round the vigorous, impatient mouth. How could he be at once so able and so childish! Her woman's wit pondered it; while at the same time she remembered with emotion the joy with which he had greeted her, his eager, stammering sympathy, his rough grasp of her hand, his frowning scrutiny of her pale face.

Yes, he was a great, great friend—and, somehow, she *must* help him! Her lips parted in a sigh of aspiration. If only this unlucky thing had not happened!—this meeting of Arthur and of Fenwick, before the time, before she had prepared and engineered it.

And so she came to her second topic of meditation. Gradually as her mind pursued it, her aspect seemed to lose its new and tremulous brightness; the face became once more a little grey and pinched. They had somehow missed all the letters which should have warned them. To find Arthur established here, with his poor invalid wife—nothing had been more unexpected, and, alack, more unwelcome, considering the relations between them and John Fenwick—Fenwick who was practically her father's guest and hers.

Did Arthur think it strange, unkind? Wouldn't he really believe that it was pure accident! If so, it would be only because Elsie was there, influencing him against his old friends—poor, bitter, stricken Elsie. Eugénie's lips quivered. There flitted before her the image of the girl of eighteen—muse of laughter and delight. And she recalled the taciturn woman whom she had seen on her sofa the night before, speaking coldly, in dry, sharp sentences, to her husband, her cousin, her maid—evidently unhappy and in pain.

Eugénie shaded her eyes from the light of the terrace. Her heart seemed to be sinking, contracting. Mrs. Welby had been already ill, and therewith jealous and tyrannical, for some little time before Madame de Pastourelles had been summoned to the death-bed of her husband! But now!—Eugénie shrank aghast before what she saw and what she guessed.

And it was, too, as if the present state of things—as if the new hardness in Elsie's eyes, and the strange hostility of her manner, especially towards the Findons, and her cousin Eugénie—threw light on earlier years, on many a puzzling trait and incident of the past.

There had been a terrible confinement, at the end of years of childlessness—a still-born child—and then, after a short apparent recovery, a rapid loss of strength and power. Poor, poor Elsie! But why—why should this trouble have awakened in her this dumb tyranny towards Arthur, this alienation from Arthur's friends?

Eugénie sharply drew herself together. She banished her thoughts. Elsie was young, and would get well. And when she recovered, she would know who were her friends, and Arthur's.

A figure came towards her, crossing the *parterre d'eau*. She perceived her father—just released, no doubt, from two English acquaintances with whom he had been exploring the 'Bosquet d'Apollon.'

He hurried towards her—a tall Don Quixote of a man, gaunt, active, grey-haired, with a stride like a youth of eighteen, and the very minimum of flesh on his well-hung frame. Lord Findon had gone through many agitations during the last ten or twelve years. In his own opinion, he had upset a Ministry, he had recreated the army, and saved the Colonies to the Empire. That history was not as well aware of these feats as it should be, he knew; but in the memoirs, of which there were now ten volumes privately printed in his drawer, he had provided for that. Meanwhile, in the rush of his opinions and partisanships, two things at least had persisted unchanged—his adoration for Eugénie—and his belief that if only man—and much more woman—would but exchange 'gulping' for 'chewing'—would only, that is to say, reform their whole system of mastication, and thereby of digestion, the world would be another and a happier place.

He came up now, frowning, and out of temper.

'Upon my word, Eugénie, the blindness of some people is too amazing!'

'Is it? Sit down, papa, and look at that!'

She pushed a chair towards him, smiling, and pointed to the terrace, the woods, the sky.

'It's all very well, my dear,' said Lord Findon, seating himself—'but this place tries me a good deal.'

'Because the ladies in the restaurant are so stout?' said Eugénie.
'Dear papa—somebody must keep these cooks in practice!'

'Never did I see such spectacles!' said Lord Findon, fuming. 'And when one knows that the very smallest attention to their diet—and they might be sylphs again—as young as their grandchildren!—it's really disheartening.'

'It is,' said Eugénie. 'Shall we announce a little conference in the salon? I'm sure the ladies would flock.'

'The amount the French eat is appalling!' exclaimed Lord Findon—without noticing. 'And they have such ridiculous ideas about us! I said something about their gluttony to M. de Villeton this morning—and he fired up!—declared he had spent this summer in English country-houses, and we had seven meals a day—all told—and there wasn't a Frenchman in the world had more than three—counting his coffee in the morning.'

'He had us there,' said Eugénie.

'Not at all! It doesn't matter *when* you eat—it's what and how much you eat. We *can't* produce such women as one sees here. I tell you, Eugénie, we *can't*. It takes all the poetry out of the sex.'

Eugénie smiled.

'Haven't you been walking with Lady Marney, papa?'

Lord Findon looked a little annoyed.

'She's an exception, my dear—a hideous exception.'

'I wouldn't mind her size,' said Eugénie, softly—'if only the complexion were better done.'

Lord Findon laughed.

'Paint is on the increase,' he declared—'and gambling too. Villeton tells me there was baccarat in the Marney's' apartment last night, and Lady Marney lost enormously. Age seems to have no effect on these people. She must be nearly seventy-five.'

'You may be sure she'll play till the last trump,' said Eugénie.
'Papa!'—her tone changed—'is that Elsie's chair?'

The group to which she pointed was still distant, but Lord Findon, even at seventy, had the eyes of an eagle, and could read an *affiche* a mile off.

'It is.' Lord Findon looked a little disturbed, and, turning, he scanned the terrace up and down before he bent towards Eugénie.

'You know, darling, it's an awkward business about these two men. I don't believe Arthur's patience will hold out.'

'Oh yes, it will, papa. For our sakes, Arthur would keep the peace.'

'If the other will let him! I used to think, Eugénie, you had tamed the bear—but, upon my soul!'—Lord Findon threw up his hands in protest.

'He's in low spirits, papa. It will be better soon,' said Eugénie, softly, and as she spoke she rose and went down the steps to meet the Welbys.

Lord Findon followed her, tormented by a queer, unwelcome thought. Was it possible that Eugénie was now—with her widowhood—beginning to take a more than friendly interest in that strange fellow, Fenwick? If so, *he* would be tolerably punished for his meddling of long ago! To have snatched her from Arthur, in order to hand her to John Fenwick!—Lord Findon crimsoned hotly at the notion, all his pride of race and caste up in arms.

Of course she ought now to marry. He wished to see her before he died the wife of some good fellow, and the mistress of a great house. Why not? Eugénie's distinctions of person and family—leaving her fortune, which was considerable, out of count—were equal to any fate. 'It's all very well to despise such things—but we have to keep up the traditions,' he said to himself, testily.

And in spite of her thirty-seven years a suitable bridegroom would not be at all hard to find. Lord Findon had perceived that in Egypt, where they had spent the winter and early spring. Several of the most distinguished men then in Cairo had been her devoted slaves—ill as she was and at half-power. Alderney—almost certain to be the next Viceroy of India—one of the most charming of widowers, with an only daughter—it had been plain both to Lord Findon and his stupid wife that Eugénie had made a deep impression upon a man no less romantic than fastidious. Eugénie had but to lift her hand, and he would have followed them to Syria. On the contrary, she had taken special pains to prevent it. And General F,—and that clever fellow X,—who was now reorganising Egyptian finance—and several more—they were all under the spell.

But Eugénie had this quixotic liking for the 'intellectuals' of a particular sort, for artists and poets, and people in difficulties generally. Well, he had it himself, he reflected, frowning, as he strolled after

her; but there were limits. Marriage was a thing apart; in that quarter, at any rate, it was no good supposing you could escape from the rules of the game.

Not that the rules always led you right—witness De Pastourelles and his villainies. But matrimonial anarchy was not to be justified, any more than social anarchy, by the failures and drawbacks of arrangements which were on the whole for people's good. *Passe encore*!—if Fenwick had only fulfilled the promise of his youth!—were at least a successful artist, instead of promising to become a quarrelsome failure!

Now if Arthur himself were free! Supposing this poor girl were to succumb?—what then?

At this point Lord Findon checked himself roughly, and a minute afterwards was shaking Welby by the hand and stooping with an old man's courtesy over the invalid carriage in which Mrs. Welby lay reclined.

Euphrosyne, indeed, had shed her laughter! A face with sunken eyes and drawn lips, and with that perpetual suspicious furrow in the brow, which meant a terror lest any movement or jar should let loose the enemy, pain; an emaciated body, from which all the soft mouldings of youth had departed; a frail hand, lying in mute appeal on the shawl with which she was covered:—this was now Elsie Welby, whose beauty in the first years of her marriage had been one of the adornments of London.

Eugénie was bending over her, and Mrs. Welby was pettishly answering.

'It's so stiff and formal. I don't admire this kind of thing. And there isn't a bit of shade on this terrace. *I* think it's ugly!'

Welby laid a hand on hers, smiling.

'But to-day, Bébé, you like the sun?—in October?'

Mrs. Welby was very decidedly of opinion that even in October there was a glare—and in August—she shuddered to think of it! It was so tiresome, too, to have missed the Grandes Eaux. So like French red tape, to insist on stopping them on a particular date. Why should they be stopped? As to expense, that was nonsense. How could water cost anything! It was because the French were so *doctrinaire*, so tyrannical—so fond of managing for managing's sake.

So the pettish voice rambled on, the others tenderly and sadly listening, till presently Lord Findon shook his gaunt shoulders.

'Upon my word, it begins to get cold. With your leave, Elsie, I could do with a little more sun! Arthur, shall we take a brisk walk round the canal before tea?'

Welby looked anxiously at his wife. She had closed her eyes, and her pale lips, tightly shut, made no movement.

'I think I promised Elsie to stay with her,' he said, uncertainly.

'Let *me* stay with Elsie, please,' said Eugénie.

The blue eyes unclosed.

'Don't be more than an hour, Arthur,' said the young wife, ungraciously. 'You know I asked Mrs. Westmacott to tea.'

The gentlemen walked off, and a sharp sensation impressed upon Madame de Pastourelles that Arthur was only allowed to go with Lord Findon, because *she* was not of the party.

A sudden colour rose into her cheeks. For the hour that followed, she devoted herself to her cousin. But Mrs. Welby was difficult and querulous. Amongst other complaints she expressed herself bitterly as to the appearance of Mr. Fenwick at Versailles. Arthur had been so taken aback—Mr. Fenwick was always so atrociously rude to him! Arthur would have never come to Versailles had he known; but of course, as Uncle Findon and Eugénie liked Mr. Fenwick, as he was their friend, Arthur couldn't now avoid meeting him. It was extremely disagreeable.

'I think they needn't meet very much,' said Eugénie, soothingly—'and papa and I will do our best to keep Mr. Fenwick in order.'

'I wonder why he came,' said Elsie, fretfully.

'He has some work to do for the production of this play on Marie Antoinette. And I suppose he wanted

to meet us. You see, we didn't know about Arthur.'

'I can't think why you like him so much.'

'He is an old friend, my dear!—and just now very unhappy, and out of spirits.'

'All his own fault, Arthur says. He had the ball at his feet.'

'I know,' said Eugénie, smiling sadly. 'That's the tragedy of it!'

There was silence. Mrs. Welby still observed her companion. A variety of expressions, all irritable or hostile, passed through the large, languid eyes.

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The afternoon faded—on the blue surface of the distant 'canal,' the great poplars that stand sentinel at the western edge of the Park, one to right, and one to left—last *gardes du corps* of the House of France!—threw long shadows on the water; and across the opening which they marked, drifted the smoke of burning weeds, the only but sufficient symbol, amid the splendid scene, of that peasant France which destroyed Versailles. It was four o'clock, and to their left, as they sat sheltered on the southern side of the château, the visitors of the day were pouring out into the gardens. The shutters of the lower rooms, in the apartments of the Dauphin and of Mesdames, were being closed one by one, by the *gardiens* within. Eugénie peered through the window beside her. She saw before her a long vista of darkened and solitary rooms, dim portraits of the marshals of France just visible on their walls. Suddenly—under a gleam of light from a shutter not yet fastened—there shone out amid the shadows a bust of Louis Seize! The Bourbon face, with its receding brow, its heavy, good-natured lips, its smiling incapacity, held—dominated—the palace.

Eugénie watched, holding her breath. Slowly the light died; the marble withdrew into the dark; and Louis Seize was once more with the ghosts.

Eugénie's fancy pursued him. She thought of the night of the 20th of January, 1793, when Madame Royale, in the darkness of the Temple, heard her mother turning miserably on her bed, sleepless with grief and cold, waiting for that last rendezvous of seven o'clock which the King had promised her—waiting—waiting—till the great bell of Notre Dame told her that Louis had passed to another meeting, more urgent, more peremptory still.

'Oh, poor soul!—poor soul!' she said, aloud, pressing her hands on her eyes.

'What on earth do you mean!' said Mrs. Welby's voice beside her—startled—stiff—a little suspicious.

Eugénie looked up and blushed.

'I beg your pardon!—I was thinking of Marie Antoinette.'

'I'm so tired of Marie Antoinette!' said the invalid, raising a petulant hand, and letting it fall again, inert. 'All the silly memorials of her they sell here!—and the sentimental talk about her! Arthur, of course, now—with his picture—thinks of nothing else.'

'Naturally!'

'I don't know. People are bored with Marie Antoinette. I wish he'd taken another subject. And as to her beauty—how could she have been beautiful, with those staring eyes, and that lower lip! I say so to Arthur—and he raves—and quotes Horace Walpole—and all sorts of people. But one can see for one's self. People are much prettier now than they ever were then! We should think nothing of their beauties.'

And the delicate lips of this once lovely child, this flower withered before its time, made a cold gesture of contempt.

In Eugénie's eyes, as they rested upon her companion, there was a flash—was it of horror?

Was she jealous even of the dead women whom Arthur painted?—no less than of his living friends?

Eugénie came close to her, took the irresponsive hand in hers, tucked the shawls closer round the wasted limbs, bent over her, chatting and caressing. Then, as the sun began to drop quickly, Madame de Pastourelles rose, and went to the corner of the château, to see if the gentlemen were in sight. But in less than a minute Mrs. Welby called her back.

'I must go in now,' she said, fretfully. 'This place is really *too* cold!'

'She won't let me go to meet them,' thought Eugénie, involuntarily; sharply reproaching herself, a moment afterwards, for the mere thought.

But when Elsie had been safely escorted home, Eugénie slipped back through the darkening streets, taking good care that her path should not lead her across her father and Arthur Welby.

She fled towards the western flight of the Hundred Steps, and ran down the vast staircase towards the Orangerie, and the still shining lake beyond, girdled with vaporous woods. A majesty of space and light enwrapt her, penetrated, as everywhere at Versailles, with memory, with the bitterness and the glory of human things. In the distance the voices of the children, still playing beside their nurses on the upper terrace, died away. Close by, a white Artemis on her pedestal bent forward—eager—her gleaming bow in air, watching, as it were, the arrow she had just sped toward the windows of Madame de Pompadour; and beside her, a nymph, daughter of gods, turned to the palace with a free, startled movement, shading her eyes that she might gaze the more intently on that tattered tricolour which floats above the palace of 'Le Roi Soleil.'

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'Oh, poor Arthur—poor Arthur! And I did it!—I did it!'

It was the cry of Eugénie's inmost life.

And before she knew, she found herself enveloped in memories that rolled in upon her like waves of storm. How long it had been before she would allow herself to see anything amiss with this marriage she had herself made! And, indeed, it was only since Elsie's illness that things dimly visible before had sprung into that sharp and piteous relief in which they stood to-day. Before it, indications, waywardnesses, the faults of a young and petted wife. But since the physical collapse, the inner motives and passions had stood up bare and black, like the ribs of a wrecked ship from the sand. And as Eugénie had been gradually forced to understand them, they had worked upon her own mind as a silent, yet ever-growing accusation, against which she defended herself in vain.

Surely, surely she had done no wrong! To have allowed Arthur to go on binding his life ever more and more closely to hers, would have been a crime. What could she give him, that such a nature most deeply needed? Home, wifely love, and children—it was to these dear enwrapping powers she had committed him in what she had done. She had feared for herself indeed. But is it a sin to fear sin?—the declension of one's own best will, the staining of one's purest feeling?

On her part she could proudly answer for herself. Never since Welby's marriage, either in thought or act, had she given Arthur's wife the smallest just cause of offence. Eugénie's was often an anxious and a troubled conscience; but not here, not in this respect. She knew herself true.

But from Elsie's point of view? Had she in truth sacrificed an ignorant child to her impetuous wish for Arthur's happiness, a too scrupulous care for her own peace? How 'sacrifice'? She had given the child her heart's desire. Arthur was not in love; but Elsie Bligh would have accepted him as a husband on any terms. Tenderly, in good faith, trusting to the girl's beauty, and Arthur's rich and loving nature, Eugénie had joined their hands.

Was that in reality her offence? In spite of all the delicacy with which it had been done, had the girl's passion guessed the truth? And having guessed it, had she then failed—and failed consciously—to make the gift her own?

Eugénie had watched—often with a sinking spirit—the development of a nature, masked by youth and happiness, but essentially narrow and poor, full of mean ambitions and small antipathies. Arthur had played his part bravely, with all the chivalry and the conscience that might have been expected of him. And there had been moments—intervals—of apparent happiness, when Eugénie's own conscience had been laid to sleep.

Was there anything she might have done for those two people, that she had not done? And Elsie had seemed—she sadly remembered—to love her, to trust her—till this tragic breakdown. Indeed, so long as she could dress, dance, dine, and chatter as much as she pleased, with her husband in constant attendance, Mrs. Welby had shown no open discontent with her lot; and if her caresses often hurt Eugénie more than they pleased, there had been no outward dearth of them.

Alack!—Eugénie's heart was wrung with pity for the young maimed creature; but the peevish image of the wife was swept away by the more truly tragic image of the husband. Eugénie might try to persuade herself of the possibility of Elsie's recovery; her real instinct denied it. Yet life was not necessarily threatened, it seemed, though certain fatal accidents might end it in a week. The omens pointed to a long and fluctuating case—to years of hopeless nursing for Arthur, and complaining misery

for his wife.

Years! Eugénie sat down in a corner of the Orangerie garden, locking her hands together, in a miserable pity for Arthur. She knew well what a shining pinnacle of success and fame Welby occupied in the eyes of the world; she knew how envious were the lesser men—such a man as John Fenwick, for instance—of a reputation and a success they thought overdone and undeserved. But Arthur himself! She seemed to be looking into his face, graven on the dusk, the face of a man tragically silent, patient, eternally disappointed; of an artist conscious of ideals and discontents, loftier, more poignant, far than his fellows will ever know—of a poet, alone at heart, forbidden to 'speak out,' blighted, and in pain.

'*Arthur—Arthur*!' She leaned her head against the pedestal of a marble vase—wrestling with herself.

Then, quick as fire, there flew through her veins the alternate possibility—Elsie's death—freedom for herself and Arthur—the power to retrace her own quixotic, fatal step….

Madame de Pastourelles rose to her feet, rigid and straight in her black dress, wrestling as though with an attacking Apollyon. She seemed to herself a murderess in thought—the lowest and vilest of human beings.

In an anguish she looked through the darkness, in a wild appeal to Heaven to save her from herself—this new self, unknown to her!—to shut down and trample on this mutiny of a sinful and selfish heart—to make it impossible—*impossible*!—that ever again, even without her will, against her will, a thought so hideous, so incredible, should enter and defile her mind.

She walked on blindly towards the water and the woods. Her eyes were full of tears, which she could not stop. Unconsciously, to hide them, she threw round her head a black lace scarf she had brought out with her against the evening chill, and drew it close round her face.

'How late you are!' said a joyous voice beside her.

She looked up. Fenwick emerging from the wood, towards the shelter of which she was hurrying, stood before her, bareheaded, as he often walked, his eyes unable to hide the pleasure with which he beheld her.

She gave a little gasp.

'You startled me!'

In the dim light he could only see her slight, fluttering smile; and it seemed to him that she was or had been in agitation. But at least it was nothing hostile to himself; nay, it was borne in upon him as he turned his steps, and she walked beside him with a quick yet gradually subsiding breath, that his appearance had been a relief to her, that she was glad of his companionship.

And he—miserable fellow!—to him it was peace after struggle, balm after torment. For his thoughts, as he wandered through the Satory woods alone, had been the thoughts of a hypochondriac. He hastened to leave them, now that she was near.

They wandered along the eastern edge of the 'Swiss Water,' towards the woods amid which the railway runs. Through the gold-and-purple air the thin autumn trees rose lightly into the evening sky, marching in ordered ranks beside the water. Young men were fishing in the lake; boys and children were playing near it, and sweethearts walking in the dank grass. The evening peace, with its note of decay and death, seemed to stir feeling rather than soothe it. It set the nerves trembling.

He began to talk of some pictures he had been studying in the Palace that day—Nattiers, Rigauds, Drouais—examples of that happy, sensuous, confident art, produced by a society that knew no doubts of itself, which not to have enjoyed—so the survivors of it thought—was to be for ever ignorant of what the charm of life might be.

Fenwick spoke of it with envy and astonishment. The *pleasure* of it had penetrated him, its gay, perpetual *festa*—as compared with the strain of thought and conscience under which the modern lives.

'It gives me a perfect hunger for fine clothes, and jewels, and masquerades—and "fêtes de nuit"—and every sort of theatricality and expense! Nature has sent us starvelings on the scene a hundred years late. We are like children in the rain, flattening our noses against a ballroom window.'

'There were plenty of them then,' said Eugénie. 'But they broke in and sacked the ballroom.'

'Yes. What folly!' he said, bitterly. 'We are all still groping among the ruins.'

'No, no! Build a new Palace of Beauty—and bring everybody in—out of the rain.'

'Ridiculous!' he declared, with sparkling eyes. Art and pleasure were only for the few. Try and spread them, make current coin of them, and they vanished like fairy gold.

'So only the artist may be happy?'

'The artist is never happy!' he said, roughly. 'But the few people who appreciate him and rob him, enjoy themselves. By the way, I took one of your ideas this morning, and made a sketch of it. I haven't noted a composition of any sort for weeks—except for this beastly play. It came to me while we talked.'

'Ah!' Her face, turned to him, received the news with a shrinking pleasure.

He developed his idea before her, drawing it on the air with his stick, or on the sand of the alleys where the arching trees overhead seemed still to hold a golden twilight captive. The picture was to represent that fine metal-worker of the *ancien régime* who, when the Revolution came, took his ragged children with him and went to the palace which contained his work—work for which he had never been paid—and hammered it to pieces.

Fenwick talked himself at last into something like enthusiasm; and Eugénie listened to him with a pitiful eagerness, only anxious to lead him on, to put this friendship, and the pure sympathy and compassion of her feeling for him, between her and the ugly memory which hovered round her like a demon thing. These dreams of the intellect and of art, as they gradually rose and took shape between them, were so infinitely welcome! Clean, blameless, strengthening—they put the ghosts to flight, they gave her back herself.

'Oh, you must paint it!' she said—'you must.'

He stopped, and walked on abruptly. Then she pressed him to promise her a time and date. It must be ready for a new gallery, and a distinguished exhibition, just about to open.

He shook his head.

'I probably shan't care about it to-morrow.'

She protested.

'Just now you were so keen!'

He hesitated—then blurted out—'Because I was talking to you! When you're not there—I know very well—I shall fall back to where I was before.'

She tried to laugh at him for a too dependent friend, who must always be fed on sugar-plums of praise; but the silence with which he met her, checked her. It was too full of emotion; and she ran away from it.

She ran, however, in vain. They reached the end of the lake, and went to look at the mouldering statue of Louis Quatorze at its further end—fantastic work of the great Bernini—Louis on a vast, curly-maned beast, with flames bursting round him—flung out into the wilderness and the woods, because Louis, after adding the flames to Bernini's composition, finally pronounced the statue unworthy of himself and of the sacred enclosure of the Park. So here, on the outer edge of Versailles, the crumbling failure rises, in exile to this day, without so much as a railing to protect it from the scribbling tourist who writes his name all over it. In the realm of Art, it seemed, the King's writ still ran, and the King's doom stood.

Fenwick's rhetorical sense was touched by the statue and its history. He examined it, talking fast and well, Eugénie meanwhile winning from him all he had to give, by the simplest words and looks—he the reed, and she the player. His mind, his fancy, worked easily once more, under the stimulus of her presence. His despondency began to give way. He believed in himself—felt himself an artist—again. The relief, physical and mental, was too tempting. He flung himself upon it with reckless desire, incapable of denying himself, or of counting the cost. And meanwhile, the effect of her black scarf, loosened, and eddying round her head and face in the soft night wind, defining their small oval, and the beauty of the brow, enchanted his painter's eye. There was a moment, just as they reentered the Park, when, as she stood looking at a moon-touched vista before them, the floating scarf suddenly recalled to him the outline of that lovely hood in which Romney framed the radiant head of Lady Hamilton as 'The Sempstress.'

The recollection startled him. Romney! Involuntarily there flashed across him Phoebe's use of the Romney story—her fierce comments on the deserted wife—the lovely mistress. Perhaps, while she stood looking at the portrait in his studio, she was thinking of Lady Hamilton, and all sorts of other ludicrous

and shameful things!

And *this*, all the while, was the reality—this pure, ethereal being, in whose presence he was already a better and a more hopeful man!—who seemed to bring a fellow comfort, and moral renewal, in the mere touch of her kind hand.

The shock of inner debate still further weakened his self-control. He slipped, hardly knowing how or why, into a far more intimate confession of himself than he had yet made to her. In the morning he had given her the *outer* history of his life, during the year of her absence. But this was the inner history of a man's weakness and failure—of his quarrels and hatreds, his baffled ambitions and ideals. She put it together as best she could from his hurried, excited talk—from stories half told, fierce charges against 'charlatans' and 'intriguers,' mingled with half-serious, half-comic returns upon himself, attacks on all the world, alternating with a ruthless self-analysis—the talk of a man who challenges society one moment with an angry '*J'accuse!*'—and sees himself the next—sardonically—as the chief obstacle in his own way.

Then suddenly a note of intense loneliness—anguish—inexplicable despair. Eugénie could not stop it, could not withdraw herself. There was a strange feeling that it brought her the answer to her prayer.—They hurried on through the lower walks of the Park—plunging now through tunnelled depths of shade, and now emerging into spaces where sunset and moonrise rained a mingled influence on glimmering water, on the dim upturned faces of Ceres or Flora, or the limbs of flower-crowned nymphs and mermaids. It seemed impossible to turn homeward, to break off their conversation. When they reached the 'Bassin de Neptune' they left the Park, turning down the Trianon Avenue, in the growing dark, till they saw to their right, behind its iron gates, the gleaming façade of the Petit Trianon; woods all about them, and to their left, again, the shimmer of wide water. Meanwhile the dying leaves, driven by the evening wind, descended on them in a soft and ceaseless shower; the woods, so significant and human in their planned and formal beauty, brought their 'visionary majesties' of moonlight and of gloom to bear on nerve and sense, turned all that was said and all that was felt, beneath their spell, to poetry.

Suddenly, at the Trianon gate, Eugénie stopped.

'I'm very tired,' she said, faintly. 'I am afraid we must go back.'

Fenwick denounced himself for a selfish brute; and they turned homeward. But it was not physical fatigue she felt. It was rather the burden of a soul thrown headlong upon hers—the sudden appeal of a task which seemed to be given her by God—for the bridling of her own heart, and the comforting and restoring of John Fenwick. From all the conflicting emotion of an evening which changed her life, what remained—or seemed to remain—was a missionary call of duty and affection. 'Save him!—and master thyself!'

So, yet again, poor Eugénie slipped into the snare which Fate had set for one who was only too much a woman.

The Rue des Réservoirs was very empty as Fenwick and Madame de Pastourelles mounted the paved slope leading towards the hotel. The street-lamps were neither many nor bright—but from the glazed gallery of the restaurant, a broad, cheerful illumination streamed upon the passers-by. They stepped within its bounds. And at the moment, a woman who had just crossed to the opposite side of the street stopped abruptly to look at them. They paused a few minutes in the entrance, still chatting; the woman opposite made a movement as though to re-cross the street, then shook her head, laughed, and walked away. Fenwick went into the restaurant and Eugénie hurried through the courtyard to the door of the Findon's apartment.

But in her reflexions of the night, Eugénie came to the conclusion that the situation, as it then stood at Versailles, was not one to be prolonged.

Next day she proposed to her father and sister a change of plan. On the whole, she said, she was anxious to get back to London; the holiday was overspreading its due limits; and she urged pressing on and home. Lord Findon was puzzled, but submissive; the bookish sister Theresa, now a woman of thirty, welcomed anything that would bring her back to the London Library and the British Museum. But suddenly, just as the maids had been warned, and Lord Findon's man had been sent to look out trains, his master caught a chill, going obstinately, and in a mocking spirit, to see what 'Faust' might be like, as given at the Municipal Theatre of Versailles. There was fever, and a touch of bronchitis; nothing serious; but the doctor who had been summoned from Paris would not hear of travelling. Lord Findon hoarsely preached 'chewing' to him, through the greater part of his visits; he revenged himself by keeping a tight hold on his patient, in all that was not his tongue. Eugénie yielded, with what appeared to Theresa a strange amount of reluctance; and they settled down for a week or two.

In the middle of the convalescence, the elder son, Marmaduke, came over to see his father. He was a talkative Evangelical, like his mother; a partner in the brewery owned by his mother's kindred; and recently married to a Lady Louisa.

After spending three days at the hotel, he suddenly said to Lord Findon, as he was mounting guard one night, while Eugénie wrote some letters:

'I say, pater, do you want Eugénie to marry that fellow Fenwick?'

Lord Findon turned uneasily in his bed.

'What makes you say that?'

'Well, he's dreadfully gone on her—never happy except when she's there—and she—well, she encourages him a good bit, father.'

'You don't understand, Marmie. You see, you don't care for books and pictures; Eugénie does.'

'I suppose she does,' said Marmaduke, doubtfully—'but she wouldn't care so much if Fenwick wasn't there to talk about them.'

'His talk is admirable!' said Lord Findon.

'I dare say it is, but he isn't my sister's equal,' replied the son, with stolidity.

'A good artist is anybodyies equal,' cried Lord Findon, much heated.

'You don't really think it, papa,' said Marmaduke, firmly. 'Shall I give Eugénie a talking to?—as you're not in a condition.'

Lord Findon laughed, though not gaily.

'You'd better try! Or rather, I don't advise you to try!'

Marmaduke, however, did try; with the only result that Eugénie soon grew a little vexed and tremulous, and begged him to go home. He might be a master of brewing finance, and a dear, kind, well-meaning brother, but he really did not understand his sister's affairs.

Marmaduke went home, much puzzled, urgently commanding Theresa to write to him, and announcing to Arthur Welby, who listened silently, as he talked, that if Fenwick did propose, he should think it a damned impertinence.

Lord Findon meanwhile held his peace. Every day Eugénie came in from her walk with Fenwick, to sit with or read to her father. She always spoke of what she had been doing, quite naturally and simply, describing their walk and their conversation, giving the news of Fenwick's work—bringing his sketches to show. Lord Findon would lie and listen—a little suspicious and ill at ease—sometimes a little sulky. But he let his illness and his voicelessness excuse him from grappling with her. She must, of course, please herself. If she chose, as she seemed about to choose—why, they must all make the best of it!—Marmaduke might talk as he liked. Naturally, Arthur kept away from them. Poor Arthur! But what a darling she looked in her black, with this fresh touch of colour in her pale cheeks!

The Welbys certainly had but little to do with the party at the Réservoirs. Welby seemed to be absorbed in his new picture, and Mrs. Welby let it be plainly understood that at home Arthur was too busy, and she too ill, to receive visitors; while out-of-doors they neither of them wished to be thrown across Mr. Fenwick.

Every evening, after taking his wife home, Welby went out by himself for a solitary walk. He avoided the Park and the woods; chose rather the St. Cyr road, or the Avenue de Paris. He walked, wrapt, a little too picturesquely perhaps, in an old Campagna cloak, relic of his years in Rome—with a fine collie for his companion. Once or twice in the distance he caught sight of Eugénie and Fenwick—only to turn down a side street, out of their way.

His thoughts meanwhile, day by day, his silent, thronging thoughts, dealt with his own life—and theirs. Would she venture it? He discussed it calmly with himself. It presented itself to him as an act altogether unworthy of her. What hurt him most, however, at these times, was the occasional sudden memory of Eugénie's face, trembling with pain, under some slight or unkindness shown her by his wife.

One day Welby was sitting beside his wife on the sheltered side of the Terrace, when Eugénie and Fenwick came in sight, emerging from the Hundred Steps. Suddenly Welby bent over his wife.

'Elsie!—have *you* noticed anything?'

'Noticed what?'

He motioned towards the distant figures. His gesture was a little dry and hostile.

Elsie in amazement raised herself painfully on her elbow to look.

'Eugénie!' she said, breathlessly—'Eugénie—and Mr. Fenwick!'

Arthur Welby watched the transformation in her face. It was the first time he had seen her look happy for months.

'What an *excellent* thing!' she cried; all flushed and vehement.
'Arthur, you know you said how lonely she must be!'

'Is he worthy of her?' he said, slowly, finding his words with difficulty.

'Well, of course, *we* don't like him!—but then Uncle Findon does. And if he didn't, it's Eugénie that matters—isn't it?—only Eugénie! At her age, you can't be choosing her husband for her! Well, I never, never thought—Eugénie's so close!—she'd make up her mind to marry anybody!'

And she rattled on, in so much excitement that Welby hastily and urgently impressed discretion upon her.

But when she and Eugénie next met, Eugénie was astonished by her gaiety and good temper—her air of smiling mystery. Madame de Pastourelles hoped it meant real physical improvement, and would have liked to talk of it to Arthur; but all talk between them grew rarer and more difficult. Thus Eugénie's walks with Fenwick through the enchanted lands that surround Versailles became daily more significant, more watched. Lord Findon groaned in his sick-room, but still restrained himself.

It was a day—or rather a night—of late October—a wet and windy night, when the autumn leaves were coming down in swirling hosts on the lawns and paths of Trianon.

Fenwick was hard at work, in the small apartment which he occupied on the third floor of the Hôtel des Réservoirs. It consisted of a sitting-room and two bedrooms looking on an inner *cour*. One of the bedrooms he had turned into a sort of studio. It was now full of drawings and designs for the sumptuous London 'production' on which he was engaged—rooms at Versailles and Trianon—views in the Trianon gardens—fragments of decoration—designs for stage grouping—for the reproduction of one of the famous *fêtes de nuit* in the gardens of the 'Hameau'—studies of costume even.

His proud ambition hated the work; he thought it unworthy of him; only his poverty had consented. But he kept it out of sight of his companions as much as he could, and worked as much as possible at night.

And here and there, amongst the rest, were the sketches and fragments, often the grandiose fragments, which represented his 'buried life'—the life which only Eugénie de Pastourelles seemed now to have the power to evoke. When some hours of other work had weakened the impulse received from her, he would look at these things sadly, and put them aside.

To-night, as he drew, he was thinking incessantly of Eugénie; pierced often by intolerable remorse. But whose fault was it? Will you ask a man, perishing of need, to put its satisfaction from him? The tests of life are too hard. The plain, selfish man must always fail under them. Why act and speak as though he were responsible for what Nature and the flesh impose?

But how was it all to end?—that was what tormented him. His conscience shrank from the half-perceived villainies before him; but his will failed him. What was the use of talking? He was the slave of an impulse, which was not passion, which had none of the excuse of passion, but represented rather the blind search of a man who, like a child in the dark, recoils in reckless terror from loneliness and the phantoms of his own mind.

Eleven o'clock struck. He was busying himself with a cardboard model, on which he had been trying the effect of certain arrangements, when he heard a knock at his door.

'*Entrez*!' he said, in astonishment.

At this season of the year the hotel kept early hours, and there was not a light to be seen in the *cour*.

The door opened. On the threshold stood Arthur Welby. Fenwick gazed at him open-mouthed.

'You?—you came to see me?'

He advanced, head foremost, hand outstretched.

'I have something important to say to you.' Welby took no notice of the hand. 'Shall we be undisturbed?'

'I imagine so!' said Fenwick, fiercely retreating; 'but, as you see, I am extremely busy!' He pointed to the room and its contents.

'I am sorry to interrupt you'—Welby's voice was carefully controlled—'but I think you will admit that I had good reason to come and find you.' He looked round to see that the door was shut, then advanced a step nearer. 'You are, I think, acquainted with that lady?'

He handed Fenwick a card. Fenwick took it to the light. On it was lithographed 'Miss Isabel Morrison,' and a written address, 'Corso de Madrid, Buenos Ayres,' had been lightly scratched out in one corner.

Fenwick put down the card.

'Well,' he said, sharply—'and if I am—what then?'

Welby began to speak—paused—and cleared his throat. He was standing, with one hand lightly resting on the table, his eyes fixed on Fenwick. There was a moment of shock, of mutual defiance.

'This lady seems to have observed the movements of our party here,' said Welby, commanding himself. 'She followed my wife and me to-day, after we met you in the Park. She spoke to us. She gave us the astonishing news that you were a married man—that your wife—'

Fenwick rushed forward and gripped the speaker's arm.

'My God! Tell me!—is she alive?'

His eyes starting out of his head—his crimson face—his anguish, seemed to affect the other with indescribable repulsion.

Welby wrenched himself free.

'That was what Miss Morrison wished to ask *you*. She says that when you and she last met you were not on very good terms; she shrank, therefore, from addressing you. But she had a respect for your wife—she wished to know what had become of her—and her curiosity impelled her to speak to us. She seems to have been in Buenos Ayres for many years. This year she returned—as governess—with the family of a French engineer, who have taken an apartment in Versailles. She first saw you in the street nearly a month ago.'

Fenwick had dropped into a chair, his face in his hands. As Welby ceased speaking, he looked up.

'And she said nothing about my wife's where-abouts?'

'Nothing. She knows nothing.'

'Nor of why she left me?'

Welby hesitated.

'Miss Morrison seems to have her own ideas as to that.'

'Where is she?' Fenwick rose hurriedly.

'Rue des Ecuries, 27. Naturally, you can't see her to-night.'

'No'—said Fenwick, sitting down again, like a man in a dream—'no.
Did she say anything else?'

'She mentioned something about a debt you owed her,' said Welby, coldly—'some matter that she had only just discovered. I had no concern with that.'

Fenwick's face, which had become deathly pale, was suddenly overspread with a rush of crimson. More almost than by the revelation of his long deception as to his wife was he humiliated and tortured by these words relating to his debt to Morrison on Welby's lips. This successful rival, this fine gentleman!—admitted to his sordid affairs. He rose uncertainly, pulling himself passionately together.

'Now that she has reappeared, I shall pay my debt to Miss Morrison—if it exists,' he said, haughtily; 'she need be in no fear as to that. Well, now then'—he leaned heavily on the mantelpiece, his face still twitching—'you know, Mr. Welby—by this accident—the secret of my life. My wife left me—for the maddest, emptiest reasons—and she took our child with her. I did everything I could to discover them. It was all in vain—and if Miss Morrison cannot enlighten me, I am as much in the dark to-night as I was yesterday, whether my wife is alive—or dead. Is there anything more to be said?'

'By God, yes!' cried Welby, with a sudden gesture of passion, approaching Fenwick. 'There is everything to be said!'

Fenwick was silent. Their eyes met.

'When you first made acquaintance with Lord Findon,' said Welby, controlling himself, 'you made him —you made all of us—believe that you were an unmarried man?'

'I did. It was the mistake—the awkwardness of a moment. I hadn't your easy manners! I was a raw country fellow—and I hadn't the courage, the mere self-possession, to repair it.'

'You let Madame de Pastourelles sit to you,' said Welby, steadily—'week after week, month after month—you accepted her kindness—you became her friend. Later on, you allowed her to advise you—write to you—talk to you about marrying, when your means should be sufficient—without ever allowing her to guess for a moment that you had already a wife and child!'

'That is true,' said Fenwick, nodding. 'The second false step was the consequence of the first.'

'The consequence! You had but to say a word—one honest word! Then, when your conduct, I suppose —I don't dare to judge you—had driven your wife away—for twelve years'—he dragged the words between his teeth—'you masquerade to Madame de Pastourelles—and when her long martyrdom as a wife is at last over—when in the tenderness and compassion of her heart she begins to show you a friendship which—which those who know her'—he laboured for breath and words—'can only—presently —interpret in one way—you who owe her everything—everything!—you *dare* to play with her innocent, her stainless life—you *dare* to let her approach—to let those about her approach—the thought of her marrying you—while all the time you knew—what you know! If there ever was a piece of black cruelty in this world, it is you, *you* that have been guilty of it!'

The form of Arthur Welby, drawn to its utmost height, towered above the man he accused. Fenwick sat, struck dumb. Welby's increasing stoop, which of late had marred his natural dignity of gait; the slight touches of affectation, of the *petit-maître*, which were now often perceptible; the occasional note of littleness, or malice, such as his youth had never known:—all these defects, physical and moral, had been burnt out of the man, as he spoke these words, by the flame of his only, his inextinguishable passion. For his dear mistress—in the purest, loftiest sense of that word—he stood champion, denouncing with all his soul the liar who had deceived and endangered her; a stern, unconscious majesty expressed itself in his bearing, his voice; and the man before him—artist and poet like himself —was sensible of it in the highest, the most torturing degree.

Fenwick turned away. He stooped mechanically to the fire, put it together, lifted a log lying in front of it, laid it carefully on the others. Then he looked at Welby, who on his side had walked to the window and opened it, as though the room suffocated him.

'Everything that you say is just'—said Fenwick, slowly—'I have no answer to make—except that—No! —I have no answer to make.'

He paced once or twice up and down the length of the room, slowly, thoughtfully; then he resumed:

'I shall write to Madame de Pastourelles to-night, and by the first train to-morrow, as soon as these things'—he looked round him—'can be gathered together, I shall be gone!'

Welby moved sharply, showing a face still drawn and furrowed with emotion—'No! she will want to see you.'

Fenwick's composure broke down. 'I had better not see her'—he said—'I had better not see her!'

'You will bear that for her,' said Welby, quietly. 'The more completely you can enlighten her, the better for us all.'

Fenwick's lips moved, but without speaking. Welby's ignorance of the whole truth oppressed him; yet he could make no effort to remove it.

Welby came back towards him.

'There is no reason, I think, why we should carry this conversation further. I will let Miss Morrison know that I have communicated with you.'

'No need,' said Fenwick, interrupting him. 'I shall see her first thing in the morning—'

'And'—resumed Welby, lifting a book and letting it fall uncertainly—'if there is anything I can do—with Lord Findon—for instance—'

Fenwick had a movement of impatience. He felt his endurance giving way.

'There is nothing to do!—except to tell the truth—and to as few people as possible!'

Welby winced. Was the reference to his wife?

'I agree with you—of course.'

He paused a moment—irresolute—wondering whether he had said all he had to say. Then, involuntarily, his eyes rested questioningly, piercingly, on the man beside him. They seemed to express the marvel of his whole being that such an offence could ever be—they tried to penetrate a character, a psychology which in truth baffled them altogether.

He moved to the door, and Fenwick opened it.

As his visitor walked away, Fenwick stood motionless, listening to the retreating step, which echoed in the silence of the vast, empty hotel, once the house of Madame de Pompadour.

He looked at his watch. Past midnight. By about three o'clock, in the midst of a wild autumnal storm, he had finished his letter to Madame de Pastourelles; and he fell asleep at his table, worn out, his head on his arms.

Before ten on the following morning Fenwick had seen Bella Morrison. A woman appeared—the caricature of something he had once known, the high cheek-bones of his early picture touched with rouge, little curls of black hair plastered on her temples, with a mincing gait, and a manner now giggling and now rude. She was extremely sorry if she had put him out—really particularly sorry! She wouldn't have done so for the world; but her curiosity got the better of her. Also, she confessed, she had wished to see whether Mr. Fenwick would acknowledge his debt to her. It was only lately that she had come across a statement of it amongst her father's papers. It was funny he should have forgotten it so long; but there—she wasn't going to be nasty. As to poor Mrs. Fenwick, no, of course she knew nothing. She had inquired of some friends in the North, and they also knew nothing. They had only heard that husband and wife couldn't hit it off, and that Mrs. Fenwick had gone abroad. It was a pity—but a body might have expected it, mightn't they?

The crude conceit and violence of her girlhood had given place, under the pressure of a hard life, to something venomous and servile. She never mentioned her visit to Phoebe; but her eyes seemed to mock her visitor all the time. Fenwick cut the interview short as soon as he could, hastily paid her a hundred pounds, though it left him overdrawn and almost penniless, and then rushed back to his hotel to see what might be waiting for him.

An envelope was lying on his table. It cost him a great effort to open it.

'I have received your letter. There is nothing to say, except that I must see you. I wish to keep what you have told me from my father, for the present, at any rate. There would be no possibility of our talking here. We have only one sitting-room, and my sister is there all the time. I will be at the Bosquet d'Apollon, by 11.30.'

Only that! He stared at the delicate, almost invisible writing. The moment he had dreaded for twelve years had arrived; and the world still went on, and quiet notes like that could still be written.

Long before the hour fixed he was in the Bosquet d'Apollon, walking up and down in front of the famous grotto, on whose threshold the white Apollo, just released from the chariot of the Sun, receives the ministrations of the Muses, while his divine horses are being fed and stalled in the hollows of the rock to either side. No stranger fancy than this ever engaged the architects and squandered the finances of the Builder-King. Reared in solid masonry on bare sandy ground now entirely disguised, the artificial rock that holds the grotto towers to a great height, crowned by ancient trees, weathered by wind and rain, overgrown by leaf and grass, and laved at its base by clear water. All round, the trees stand close—the lawns spread their quiet slopes. On this sparkling autumn morning, a glory of russet, amber, and red, begirt the white figures and the gleaming grotto. The Immortals, the champing horses, locked behind their *grilles* lest the tourist should insult them—all the queer crumbling romance of the statuary, all the natural beauty of leaf and water, of the white clouds overhead and their reflexions

below—combined to make Fenwick's guilty bewilderment more complete, to turn all life to dream, and all its figures into the puppets of a shadow-play.

A light step on the grass. A shock passed through him. He made a movement, then checked it.

Eugénie paused at some distance from him. In this autumnal moment of the year, and on week-days, scarcely any passing visitor disturbs the quiet of the Bosquet d'Apollon. In its deep dell of trees and grass, they were absolutely alone; the sunlight which dappled the white bodies of the Muses, and shone on the upstretched arm of Apollo, seemed the only thing of life besides themselves.

She threw back her veil as she came near him—her long widow's veil, which to-day she had resumed. Beneath it, framed in it, the face appeared of an ivory rigidity and pallor. The eyes only were wild and living as she came up to him, clasping her hands, evidently shrinking from him—yet composed.

'There is one thing more I want to know. If I have ever been your friend!—if you have ever felt any kindness for me, tell me—tell me frankly—why did your wife leave you?'

Fenwick's face fell. Had she come so soon to this point?—by the sureness of her own instinct?

'There were many troubles between us,' he said, hoarsely, walking on beside her, his eyes on the grass.

'Was she—was she jealous?'—she breathed with difficulty—'of any of your models?—I know that sometimes happens—or of your sitters—of *me*, for instance?'

The last words were scarcely audible; but her gaze enforced them.

'She was jealous of my whole life—away from her. And I was utterly blind and selfish—I ought to have known what was going on—and I had no idea.'

'And what happened? I know so little.'

Her voice so peremptorily strange—so remote—compelled him. With difficulty he gave an outline of Phoebe's tragic visit to his studio. His letter of the night before had scarcely touched on the details of the actual crisis, had dwelt rather on the months of carelessness and neglect on his own part, which had prepared it.

She interrupted.

'That was she?—the mother in the "Genius Loci"?'

He assented mutely.

She closed her eyes a moment, seeing, in her suffering, the face of the young mother and her child.

'But go on. And you were away? Please, please go on! When was it? It must have been that spring when—'

She put her hand to her head, trying to remember dates.

'It was just before the Academy,' he said, reluctantly.

'You were out?'

'I had gone to tell Watson and Cuningham the good news.'

His voice dropped.

Her hands caught each other again.

'It was that day—that very day we came to you?'

He nodded.

'But why?—what was it made her do such a thing?—go—for ever—without seeing you—without a word? She must have had some desperate reason.'

'She had none!' he said, with energy.

'But she must have thought she had. Can't—can't you explain it to me any more?'

He was almost at the end of his resistance.

'I told you—how she had resented—my concealment?'

'Yes—yes! But there must have been something more—something sudden—that maddened her?'

He was silent. She grew whiter than before.

'Mr. Fenwick—I—I have much to forgive. There is only one course of action—that can ever—make amends—and that is—an entire—an absolute frankness!'

Her terrible suspicion—her imperious will had conquered. Anything was better than to deny her, torture her—deceive her afresh.

He looked at her in a horrible indecision. Then, slowly, he put his hand within the breast of his coat.

'This is the letter she wrote me. I found it in my room.'

And he drew out the crumpled letter from his pocket-book, which he had worn thus almost from the day of Phoebe's disappearance.

Eugénie fell upon it, devoured it. Not a demur, not a doubt, as to this!—in one so strictly, so tenderly scrupulous. Even at that moment, it struck him pitifully. It seemed to give the measure of her pain.

'The picture?' she said, looking up—'I don't understand—you had sent it in.'

'Do you remember—asking me about the sketch? and I told you—it had been accidentally spoilt?'

She understood. Her lips trembled. Returning the letter, she sank upon a seat. He saw that her forces were almost failing her. And he dared not say a word or make a movement of sympathy.

For some little time she was silent. Her eyes ranged the green circuit of the hollow—the water, the reeds, the rock, and that idle god among his handmaidens. Her attitude, her look expressed a moral agony, how strangely out of place amid this setting! Through her—innocent, unconscious though she were—the young helpless wife had come to grief—a soul had been risked—perhaps lost. Only a nature trained as Eugénie's had been, by suffering and prayer and lofty living, could have felt what she felt, and as she felt it.

Fumbling, Fenwick put back the letter in his pocket-book—thrust it again into his coat. Never once did the thought cross Eugénie's mind that he had probably worn it there, through these last days, while their relation had grown so intimate, so dear. All recollection of herself had left her. She was possessed with Phoebe. Nothing else found entrance.

At last, after much more questioning—much more difficult or impetuous examination—she rose feebly.

'I think I understand. Now—we have to find her!'

She stood, her hands loosely clasped, her eyes gazing into the sunny vacancy of sky, above the rock.

Fenwick advanced a step. He felt that he must speak, must grovel to her—repeat some of the things he had said in his letter. But here, in her presence, all words seemed too crude, too monstrous. His voice died away.

So there was no repetition of the excuses, the cry for pardon he had spent the night on; and she made no reference to them.

They walked back to the hotel, talking coldly, precisely, almost as strangers, of what should be done. Fenwick—whose work indeed was finished—would return to England that night. After his departure, Madame de Pastourelles would inform her father of what had happened; a famous solicitor, Lord Findon's old friend, was to be consulted; all possible measures were to be taken once more for Phoebe's discovery.

At the door of the hotel, Fenwick raised his hat. Eugénie did not offer her hand; but her sweet face suddenly trembled afresh—before her will could master it. To hide it, she turned abruptly away; and the door closed upon her.

CHAPTER XI

After a moderately bright morning, that after-breakfast fog which we owe to the British kitchen and the domestic hearth was descending on the Strand. The stream of traffic, on the roadway and the pavements, was passing to and fro under a yellow darkness; the shop-lights were beginning to flash out here and there, but without any of their evening cheerfulness; and on the passing faces one saw written the inconvenience and annoyance of the fog—the fear, too, lest it should become worse and impenetrable.

Fenwick was groping his way along, eastward; one moment feeling and hating the depression of the February day, of the grimy, overcrowded street; the next, responsive to some dimly beautiful effect of colour or line—some quiver of light—some grouping of phantom forms in the gloom. Halfway towards the Law-Courts he was hailed and overtaken by a tall, fair-haired man.

'Hallo, Fenwick!—just the man I wanted to see!'

Fenwick, whose eyes—often very troublesome of late—were smarting with the fog, peered at the speaker, and recognised Philip Cuningham. His face darkened a little as they shook hands.

'What did you want me for?'

'Did you know that poor old Watson had come back to town—ill?'

'No!' cried Fenwick, arrested. 'I thought he was in Algiers.'

Cuningham walked on beside him, telling what he knew, Fenwick all the time dumbly vexed that this good-looking, prosperous fellow, this Academician in his new fur coat, breathing success and commissions, should know more of his best friend's doings than he.

Watson, it appeared, had been seized with hemorrhage at Marseilles, and had thereupon given up his winter plans, and crawled home to London, as soon as he was sufficiently recovered to bear the journey. Fenwick, much troubled, protested that it was madness to have come back to the English winter.

'No,' said Cuningham, looking grave. 'Better die at home than among strangers. And I'm afraid it's come to that, dear old fellow!'

Then he described—with evident self-satisfaction—how he had heard, from a common friend, of Watson's arrival, how he had rescued the invalid from a dingy Bloomsbury hotel, and settled him in some rooms in Fitzroy Square, with a landlady who could be trusted.

'We must have a nurse before long—but he won't have one yet. He wants badly to see you. I told him I'd look you up this evening. But this'll do instead, won't it? You'll remember?—23, Fitzroy Square. Shall I tell him when he may expect you? Every day we try to get him some little pleasure or other.'

Fenwick's irritation grew. Cuningham was talking as though the old relation between him and Richard Watson were still intact; while Fenwick knew well how thin and superficial the bond had grown.

'I shall go to-day,' he said, rather shortly. 'I have two or three things to do this morning, but there'll be time before my rehearsal this afternoon.'

'Your rehearsal?' Cuningham looked amiably curious.

Fenwick explained, but with fresh annoyance. The papers had been full enough of this venture on which he was engaged; Cuningham's ignorance offended him.

'Ah, indeed—very interesting,' said Cuningham, vaguely. 'Well, good-bye. I must jump into a hansom.'

'Where are you off to?'

'The Goldsmiths' Company are building a new Hall, and they want my advice about its decoration. Precious difficult, though, to get away from one's pictures, this time of year, isn't it?'

He hailed a hansom as he spoke.

'That's not a difficulty that applies to me,' said Fenwick, shortly.

Cuningham stared—frowned—and remembered.

'Oh, my dear fellow—what a mistake that was!—if you'll let me say so. Can't we put it right? Command me at any time.'

'Thank you. I prefer it as it is.'

'We'll talk it over. Well, good-bye. Don't forget old Dick.'

Fenwick walked on, fuming. Cuningham, he said to himself, was now the type of busy, pretentious mediocrity, the type which eternally keeps English art below the level of the Continent.

'I say—one moment! Have you had any news of the Findons lately?'

Fenwick turned sharply, and again saw Cuningham, whose hansom had been blocked by the traffic, close to the pavement. He was hanging over the door, and smiling.

In reply to the question, Fenwick merely shook his head.

'I had a capital letter from her ladyship a week or two ago,' said Cuningham, raising his voice, and bringing himself as near to Fenwick as his position allowed. 'The old fellow seems to be as fit as ever. But Madame de Pastourelles must be very much changed.'

Fenwick said nothing. It might have been thought that the traffic prevented his hearing Cuningham's remark. But he had heard distinctly.

'Do you know when they'll be home?' he asked, reluctantly, walking beside the hansom.

'No—haven't an idea. I believe I'm to go to them for Easter. Ah!—now we go on. Ta-ta!'

He waved his hand, and the hansom moved away.

Fenwick pursued his walk plunged in disagreeable thought. 'Much changed?' What did that mean? He had noticed no such change before the Findons left London. The words fell like a fresh blow upon a wound.

He turned north, toward Lincoln's Inn Fields, called at the offices of Messrs. Butlin & Forbes, the well-known solicitors, and remained there half an hour. When he emerged from the old house, he looked, if possible, more harried and cast down than when he had entered it.

They had had a letter to show him, but in his opinion it contributed nothing. There was no hope—and no clue! How could there be? He had never himself imagined for a moment that any gain would come of these new researches. But he had been allowed no option with regard to them. Immediately after his return to London from Versailles he had received a stern letter from Lord Findon, insisting—as his daughter had already done—that the only reparation he, Fenwick, could make to the friends he had so long and cruelly deceived, was to allow them a free hand in a fresh attempt to discover his wife, and so to clear Madame de Pastourelles from the ridiculous suspicions that Mrs. Fenwick had been led so disastrously to entertain. 'Most shamefully and indefensibly my daughter has been made to feel herself an accomplice in Mrs. Fenwick's disappearance,' wrote Lord Findon; 'the only amends you can ever make for your conduct will lie in new and vigorous efforts, even at this late hour, to find and to undeceive your wife.'

Hence, during November and December, constant meetings and consultations in the well-known offices of Lord Findon's solicitors. At these meetings both Madame de Pastourelles and her father had been often present, and she had followed the debates with a quick and strained intelligence, which often betrayed to Fenwick the suffering behind. He painfully remembered with what gentleness and chivalry Eugénie had always treated him personally on these occasions, with what anxious generosity she had tried to curb her father.

But there had been no private conversation between them. Not only did they shrink from it; Lord Findon could not have borne it. The storm of family and personal pride which the disclosure of Fenwick's story had aroused in the old man had been of a violence impossible to resist. That Fenwick's obscure and crazy wife should have dared to entertain *jealousy* of a being so far above his ken and hers, as Eugénie then was—that she should have made a ridiculous tragedy out of it—and that Fenwick should have conduced to the absurd and insulting imbroglio by his ill-bred and vulgar concealment:—these things were so irritating to Lord Findon that they first stimulated a rapid recovery from his illness at Versailles, and then led him to frantic efforts on Phoebe's behalf, which were in fact nothing but the expression of his own passionate pride and indignation—resting, no doubt ultimately, on those weeks at Versailles when even he, with all the other bystanders, had supposed that Eugénie would marry this man. His mood, indeed, had been a curious combination of wounded affection with a class arrogance stiffened by advancing age and long indulgence. When, in those days, the old man entered the room where Fenwick was, he bore his grey head and sparkling eyes with the air of a teased lion.

Fenwick, a man of violent temper, would have found much difficulty in keeping the peace under these circumstances, but for the frequent presence of Eugénie, and the pressure of his own dull remorse. 'I too—have—much to forgive!'—that, he knew well, would be the only reference involving personal reproach that he would ever hear from her lips, either to his original deceit, or to those wild weeks at Versailles (that so much ranker and sharper offence!)—when, in his loneliness and craving, he had gambled both on her ignorance and on Phoebe's death. Yet he did not deceive himself. The relation between them was broken; he had lost his friend. Her very cheerfulness and gentleness somehow enforced it. How natural!—how just! None the less his bitter realisation of it had worked with crushing effect upon a miserable man.

About Christmas, Lord Findon's health had again caused his family anxiety. He was ordered to Cannes, and Eugénie accompanied him. Before she went she had gone despairingly once more through all the ingenious but quite fruitless inquiries instituted by the lawyers; and she had written a kind letter to Fenwick begging to be kept informed, and adding at the end a few timid words expressing her old sympathy with his work, and her best wishes for the success of the pictures that she understood he was to exhibit in the spring.

Then she and her father departed. Fenwick had felt their going as perhaps the sharpest pang in this intolerable winter. But he had scarcely answered her letter. What was there to say? At least he had never asked her or her father for money—had never owed Lord Findon a penny. There was some small comfort in that.

* * * * *

Nevertheless, it was of money that he thought—and must think—night and day.

After his interview with the magnificent gentlemen in Lincoln's Inn Fields, he made his way wearily to a much humbler office in Bedford Row. Here was a small solicitor to whom he had often resorted lately, under the constant pressure of his financial difficulties. He spent an hour in this man's room. When he came out, he walked fast towards Oxford Street and the west, hardly conscious in his excitement of where he was going. The lawyer he had just seen had for the first time mentioned the word 'bankruptcy.' 'I scarcely see, Mr. Fenwick, how you can avoid it.'

Well, it might come to that—it might. But he still had his six pictures—time to finish two others that were now on hand—and the exhibition.

It was with that he was now concerned. He called on the manager of a small gallery near Hanover Square with whom he had already made an arrangement for the coming May—paying a deposit on the rent—early in the winter. In his anxiety, he wished now to make the matter still clearer, to pay down the rest of the rent if need be. He had the notes always in his breast-pocket, jealously hidden away, lest any other claim, amid the myriads which pressed upon him, should sweep them from him.

The junior partner in charge of the gallery and the shop of which it made part, received him very coldly. The firm had long since regretted their bargain with a man whose pictures were not likely to sell, especially as they could have relet the gallery to much better advantage. But their contract with Fenwick—clinched by the deposit—could not be evaded; so they were advised.

All, therefore, that the junior partner could do was to try to alarm Fenwick, as to the incidental expenses involved—hanging, printing, service, etc. But Fenwick only laughed. 'I shall see to that!' he said, contemptuously. 'And my pictures will sell, I tell you,' he added, raising his voice. 'They'll bring a profit both to you and to me.'

The individual addressed said nothing. He was a tall, well-fed young man, in a faultless frock-coat, and Fenwick, as they stood together in the office—the artist had not been offered a chair—disliked him violently.

'Well, shall I pay you the rest?' said Fenwick, abruptly, turning to go, and fumbling at the same time for the pocket-book in which he kept the notes.

The other gave a slight shrug.

'That's just as you please, Mr. Fenwick.'

'Well, here's fifty, anyway,' said Fenwick, drawing out a fifty-pound note and laying it on the table.

'We are not in any hurry, I assure you.'

The young man stood looking at the artist, in an attitude of cool indifference; but at the same time his hand secured the note, and placed it safely in the drawer of the table between them.

He wrote a receipt, and handed it to Fenwick.

'Good-day,' said Fenwick, turning to go.

The other followed him, and as they stepped out into the exhibition-rooms of the shop, hung in dark purple, Fenwick perceived in the distance what looked like a fine Corot, and a Daubigny—and paused.

'Got some good things, since I was here last?'

'Oh, we're always getting good things,' said his companion, carelessly, without the smallest motion towards the pictures.

Fenwick nodded haughtily, and walked towards the door. But his soul smarted within him. Two years before, the owners of any picture-shop in London would have received him with *empressement*, have shown him all they had to show, and taken flattering note of his opinion.

On the threshold he ran against the Academician with the orange hair and beard, who had been his fellow-guest at the Findon's on the night of his first dinner-party there. The orange hair was now nearly white; its owner had grown to rotundity; but the sharp, glancing eyes and pompous manner were the same as of old. Mr. Sherratt nodded curtly to Fenwick, and was then received with bows and effusion by the junior partner standing behind.

'Ah, Mr. Sherratt!—*delighted* to see you! Come to look at the Corot?
By all means! This way, please.'

Fenwick pursued his course to Oxford Street in a morbid self-consciousness. It seemed to him that all the world knew him by now for a failure and a bankrupt; that he was stared and pointed at.

He took refuge from this nightmare in an Oxford Street restaurant, and as he ate his midday chop he asked himself, for the hundredth time, how the deuce it was that he had got into the debts which weighed him down. He had been extravagant on the building and furnishing of his house—but after all he had earned large sums of money. He sat gloomily over his meal—frowning—and trying to remember. And once, amid the foggy darkness, there opened a vision of a Westmoreland stream, and a pleading face upturned to his in the moonlight—'And then, you know, I could look after money! You're *dreadfully* bad about money, John!'

The echo of that voice in his ears made him restless. He rose and set forth again—toward Fitzroy Square.

On the way his thoughts recurred to the letter he had found waiting for him at the lawyer's. It came from Phoebe's cousin, Freddy Tolson. Messrs. Butlin had traced this man anew—to a mining town in New South Wales. He had been asked to come to England and testify—no matter at what expense. In the letter just received—bearing witness in its improved writing and spelling to the prosperous development of the writer—he declined to come, repeating that he knew nothing whatever of his Cousin Phoebe's where-abouts, nor of her reasons for leaving her husband. He gave a fresh and longer account of his conversation with her, as far as he could remember it at this distance of time; and this longer account contained the remark that she had asked him questions about other colonies than Australia, to which he was himself bound. He thought Canada had been mentioned—the length of the passage there, and its cost. He had not paid much attention to it at the time. It had seemed to him that she was glad, poor thing, of some one to have a 'crack' with—'for I guess she'd been pretty lonesome up there.' But she might have had something in her head—he couldn't say. All he could declare was that if she were in Canada, or any other of the colonies, he had had no hand in it, and knew no more than a 'born baby' where she might be hidden.

So now, on this vague hint, a number of fresh inquiries were to be set on foot. Fenwick hoped nothing from them. Yet as he walked fast through the London streets, from which the fog was lifting, his mind wrestled with vague images of great lakes, and virgin forests, and rolling wheat-lands—of the streets of Montreal, or the Heights of Québec—and amongst them, now with one background, now with another, the slender figure of a fair-haired woman with a child beside her. And through his thoughts, furies of distress and fear pursued him—now as always.

'Well, this is a queer go, isn't it?' said Watson, in a half-whispering voice. 'Nature has horrid ways of killing you. I wish she'd chosen a more expeditious one with me.'

Fenwick sat down beside his friend, the lamp-light in the old panelled room revealing, against his will, his perturbed and shaken expression.

'How did this come on?' he asked.

'Of itself, my dear fellow'—laughed Watson, in the same hoarse whisper. 'My right lung has been getting rotten for a year past, and at Marseilles it happened to break. That's my explanation, anyway, and it does as well as the doctor's.—Well, how are you?'

Fenwick shifted uneasily, and made a vague answer.

Watson turned to look at him.

'What pictures have you on hand?'

Fenwick gave a list of the completed pictures still in his studio, and described the arrangements made to exhibit them. He was not as ready as usual to speak of himself; his gaze and his attention were fixed upon his friend. But Watson probed further, into the subjects of his recent work. Fenwick was nearing the end, he explained, of a series of rustic 'Months' with their appropriate occupations—an idea which had haunted his mind for years.

'As old as the hills,' said Watson, 'but none the worse for that.
You've painted them, I suppose, out-of-doors?'

Fenwick shrugged his shoulders.

'As much as possible.'

'Ah, that's where those French fellows have us,' said Watson, languidly. 'One of them said to me in Paris the other day, "It's bad enough to paint the things you've seen—it's the devil to paint the things you've not seen."'

'The usual fallacy,' said Fenwick, firing up. 'What do they mean by "seen"?'

He would have liked this time to go off at score. But a sure instinct told him that he was beside a dying man; and he held himself back, trying instead to remember what small news and gossip he could, for the amusement of his friend.

Watson sat in a deep armchair, propped up by pillows. The room in which they met had been a very distinguished room in the eighteenth century. It had still some remains of carved panelling, a graceful mantelpiece of Italian design, and a painted ceiling half-effaced. It was now part of a lodging-house, furnished with shabby cheapness; but the beauty, once infused, persisted; and it made no unworthy setting for a painter's death.

The signs of desperate illness in Richard Watson were indeed plainly visible. His shaggy hair and thick, unkempt beard brought into relief the waxen or purple tones of the skin. The breath was laboured and the cough frequent. But the eyes were still warm, living, and passionate, the eyes of a Celt, with the Celtic gifts, and those deficiencies, also, of his race, broadly and permanently expressed in the words of a great historian—'The Celts have shaken all States, and founded none!' No founder, no *achiever*, this—no happy, harmonious soul—but a man who had vibrated to life and Nature, in their subtler and sadder aspects, through whom the nobler thoughts and ambitions had passed, like sound through strings, wringing out some fine, tragic notes, some memorable tones. 'I can't last more than a week or two,' he said, presently, in a pause of Fenwick's talk, to which he had hardly listened—'and a good job too. But I don't find myself at all rebellious. I'm curiously content to go. I've had a good time.'

This from a man who had passed from one disappointed hope to another, brought the tears to Fenwick's eyes.

'Some of us may wish we were going with you,' he said, in a low voice, laying his hand a moment on his friend's knee.

Watson made no immediate reply. He coughed—fidgeted—and at last said:

'How's the money?'

Fenwick hastily drew himself up. 'All right.'

He reached out a hand to the tongs and put the fire together.

'Is that so?' said Watson. The slight incredulity in his voice touched some raw nerve in Fenwick.

'I don't want anything,' he said, almost angrily. 'I shall get through.'

Cuningham had been talking, no doubt. His affairs had been discussed.
His morbid pride took offence at once.

'Mine'll just hold out,' said Watson, presently, with a humorous inflexion—'it'll bury me, I think—with a few shillings over. But I couldn't have afforded another year.'

There was silence a while—till a nurse came in to make up the fire. Fenwick began to talk of old friends, and current exhibitions; and presently tea made its appearance. Watson's strength seemed to revive. He sat more upright in his chair, his voice grew stronger, and he dallied with his tea, joking hoarsely with his nurse, and asking Fenwick all the questions that occurred to him. His face, in its rugged pallor and emaciation, and his great head, black or iron-grey on the white pillows, were so fine that Fenwick could not take his eyes from him; with the double sense of the artist, he saw the *subject* in the man; a study in black and white hovered before him.

When the nurse had withdrawn, and they were alone again, in a silence made more intimate still by the darkness of the panelled walls, which seemed to isolate them from the rest of the room, enclosing them in a glowing ring of lamp and firelight, Fenwick was suddenly seized by an impulse he could not master. He bent towards the sick man.

'Watson!—do you remember advising me to marry when we met in Paris?'

'Perfectly.'

The invalid turned his haggard eyes upon the speaker, in a sudden sharp attention.

There was a pause; then Fenwick said, with bent head, staring into the fire:

'Well—I *am* married.'

Watson gave a hoarse 'Phew!'—and waited.

'My wife left me twelve years ago and took our child with her. I don't know whether they are alive or dead. I thought I'd like to tell you. It would have been better if I hadn't concealed it, from you—and—and other friends.'

'Great Scott!' said Watson, slowly, bringing the points of his long, emaciated fingers together, like one trying to master a new image. 'So that's been the secret—'

'Of what?' said Fenwick, testily; but as Watson merely replied by an interrogative and attentive silence, he threw himself into his tale—headlong. He told it at far greater length than Eugénie had ever heard it; and throughout, the subtle, instinctive appeal of man to man governed the story, differentiating it altogether from the same story, told to a woman.

He spoke impetuously, with growing emotion, conscious of an infinite relief and abandonment. Watson listened with scarcely a comment. Midway a little pattering, scuffling noise startled the speaker. He looked round and saw the monkey, Anatole, who had been lying asleep in his basket. Watson nodded to Fenwick to go on, and then feebly motioned to his knee. The monkey clambered there, and Watson folded his bony arms round the creature, who lay presently with his weird face pressed against his master's dressing-gown, his melancholy eyes staring out at Fenwick.

'It was Madame she was jealous of?' said Watson, when the story came to an end.

Fenwick hesitated—then nodded reluctantly. He had spoken merely of 'one of my sitters.' But it was not possible to fence with this dying man.

'And Madame knows?'

'Yes.'

But Fenwick sharply regretted the introduction of Madame de Pastourelles' name. He had brought the story down merely to the point of Phoebe's flight and the search which followed, adding only—with vagueness—that the search had lately been renewed, without success.

Watson pondered the matter for some time. Fenwick took out his handkerchief and wiped a brow damp with perspiration. His story—added to the miseries of the day—had excited and shaken him still further.

Suddenly Watson put out a hand and seized his wrist. The grip hurt.

'Lucky dog!'

'What on earth do you mean?'

'You've lost them—but you've had a woman in your arms—a child on your knee! You don't go to your grave—[Greek: apraktos]—an ignorant, barren fool—like me!'

Fenwick looked at him in amazement. Self-scorn—bitter and passionate regret—transformed the face beside him. He pressed the fevered hand.

'Watson!—dear fellow!'

Watson withdrew his hand, and once more folded the monkey to him.

'There are plenty of men like me,' he muttered. 'We are afraid of living—and art is our refuge. Then art takes its revenge—and we are bad artists, because we are poor and sterilised human beings. But you'—he spoke with fresh energy, composing himself—'don't talk rot!—as though *your* chance was done. You'll find her—she'll come back to you—when she's drunk the cup. Healthy young women don't die before thirty-five;—and by your account she wasn't bad—she had a conscience. The child'll waken it. Don't you be hard on her!'—he raised himself, speaking almost fiercely—'you've no right to! Take her in—listen to her—let her cry it out. My God!'—his voice dropped, as his head fell back on the pillows—'what happiness—what happiness!'

His eyes closed. Fenwick stooped over him in alarm, but the thin hand closed again on his.

'Don't go. What was she like?'

Fenwick asked him whether he remembered the incident of the sketch-book at their first meeting—the drawing of the mother and child in the kitchen of the Westmoreland farm.

'Perfectly. And she was the model for the big picture, too? I see. A lovely creature! How old is she now?'

'Thirty-six—if she lives.'

'I tell you, she *does* live! Probably more beautiful now than she was then. Those Madonna-like women mellow so finely. And the child? *Vois-tu, Anatole*!—something superior to monkeys!'

But he pressed the little animal closer to him as he spoke. Fenwick rose to go, conscious that he had stayed too long. Watson looked up.

'Good-bye, old man—courage! Seek—till you find. She's in the world—and she's sorry. I could swear it.'

Fenwick stood beside him, quivering with emotion and despondency.

Their eyes met steadily, and Watson whispered:

'I pass from one thing to another. Sometimes it's Omar Khayyám—"One thing is certain and the rest is lies—The flower that once is born for ever dies"—and the next it's the Psalms, and I think I'm at a prayer-meeting—a Welsh Methodist again.'

He fell into a flow of Welsh, hoarsely musical. Then, with a smile, he nodded farewell; and Fenwick went.

* * * * *

Fenwick wrote that night to Eugénie de Pastourelles at Cannes, enclosing a copy of the letter received from Freddy Tolson. It meant nothing; but she had asked to be kept informed. As he entered upon the body of his letter, his eyes still recurred to its opening line:

'Dear Madame de Pastourelles.'

For many years he had never addressed her except as 'My dear friend.'

Well, that was all gone and over. The memory of her past goodness, of those walks through the Trianon woods, was constantly with him. But he had used her recklessly and selfishly, and she had done with him. He admitted it now, as often before, in a temper of dull endurance; bending himself to the task of his report.

* * * * *

Eugénie read his letter, sitting on a bench above the blue Mediterranean, in the pine woods of the Cap d'Antibes. She had torn it open in hope, and the reading of it depressed her. In the pine-scented, sun-warmed air she sat for long motionless and sad. The delicate greenish light fell on the soft brown

hair, the white face and hands. Eugénie's deep black had now assumed a slight 'religious' air which disturbed Lord Findon, and kindled the Protestant wrath of her stepmother. That short moment of a revived *mondanité* which Versailles had witnessed, was wholly past; and for the first and only time in her marred life, Eugénie's natural gaiety was quenched. She knew well that in the burden which weighed upon her there were morbid elements; but she could only bear it; she could not smile under it.

Fenwick's letter led her thoughts back to the early incidents of this fruitless search. Especially did she recall every moment of her interview with Daisy Hewson—Phoebe Fenwick's former nursemaid, now married to a small Westmoreland farmer. One of the first acts of the lawyers had been to induce this woman to come to London to repeat once more what she knew of the catastrophe.

Then, after the examination by the lawyers, Eugénie had pleaded that she might see her—and see her alone. Accordingly, a shy and timid woman, speaking with a broad Westmoreland accent, called one morning in Dean's Yard.

Eugénie had won from her many small details the lawyers had been unable to extract. They were not, alack, of a kind to help the search for Phoebe; but, interpreted by the aid of her own quick imagination, they drew a picture of the lost mother and child, which sank deep, deep, into Eugénie's soul.

Mrs. Fenwick, said Mrs. Hewson, scarcely spoke on the journey south. She sat staring out of window, with her hands on her lap, and Daisy thought there was 'soomat wrang'—but dared not ask. In saying good-bye at Euston, Mrs. Fenwick had kissed her, and given the guard a shilling to look after her. She was holding Carrie in her arms, as the train moved away. The girl had supposed she was going to join her husband.

And barely a week later, John Fenwick had been dining in St. James's Square, looking harassed and ill indeed—it was supposed, from overwork; but, to his best friends, as silent as that grave of darkness and oblivion which had closed over his wife.

Yet, as the weeks of thought went on, Eugénie blamed him less and less. Her clear intelligence showed her all the steps of the unhappy business. She remembered the awkward, harassed youth, as she had first seen him at her father's table, with his curious mixture of arrogance and timidity; now haranguing the table, and now ready to die with confusion over some social slip. She understood what he had told her, in his first piteous letter, of his paralysed, tongue-tied states—of his fear of alienating her father and herself. And she went deeper. She confessed the hatefulness of those weakening timidities, those servile states of soul, by which our social machine balances the insolences and cruelties of the strong—its own breeding also; she felt herself guilty because of them; the whole of life seemed to her sick, because a young man, ill at ease and cowardly in a world not his own, had told or lived a foolish lie. It was as though she had forced it from him; she understood so well how it had come about. No, no!—her father might judge it as he pleased. She was angry no longer.

Nor—presently—did she even resent the treachery of those weeks at Versailles, so quick and marvellous was the play of her great gift of sympathy, which was only another aspect of imagination. In recoil from a dark moment of her own experience, of which she could never think without anguish, she had offered him a friend's hand, a friend's heart—offered them eagerly and lavishly. Had he done more than take them, with the craving of a man, for whom already the ways are darkening, who makes one last clutch at 'youth and bloom, and this delightful world'? He had been reckless and cruel indeed. But in its profound tenderness and humility and self-reproach her heart forgave him.

Yet of that forgiveness she could make no outward sign—for her own sake and Phoebe's. That old relation could never be again; the weeks at Versailles had killed it. Unless, indeed, some day it were her blessed lot to find the living Phoebe, and bring her to her husband! Then friendship, as well as love, might perhaps lift its head once more. And as during the months of winter, both before and since her departure from England, the tidings reached her of Fenwick's growing embarrassments, of his increasing coarseness and carelessness of work, his violence of temper, the friend in her suffered profoundly. She knew that she could still do much for him. Yet there, in the way, stood the image of Phoebe, as Daisy Hewson described her,—pale, weary, desperate,—making all speech, all movement, on the part of the woman, for jealousy of whom the wife had so ignorantly destroyed herself and Fenwick, a thing impossible.

Eugénie's only comfort indeed, at this time, was the comfort of religion. Her soul, sorely troubled and very stern with itself, wandered in mystical, ascetic paths out of human ken. Every morning she hurried through the woods to a little church beside the sea, filled with fishing-folk. There she heard Mass, and made the spiritual communion which sustained her.

Once, in the mediaeval siege of a Spanish fortress, so a Spanish chronicler tells us, all the defenders were slaughtered but one man; and he lay dying on the ground, across the gate. There was neither

priest nor wafer; but the dying man raised a little of the soil between the stones to his lips, and so, says the chronicler, 'communicated in the earth itself,' before he passed to the Eternal Presence. Eugénie would have done the same with a like ardour and simplicity; her thought differing much, perhaps, in its perceived and logical elements, from that of the dying Spaniard, but none the less profoundly akin. The act was to her the symbol and instrument of an Inflowing Power; the details of those historical beliefs with which it was connected, mattered little. And as she thus leant upon the old, while conscious of the new, she never in truth felt herself alone. It seemed to her, often, that she clasped hands with a vast invisible multitude, in a twilight soon to be dawn.

CHAPTER XII

A fortnight later Dick Watson died. Fenwick saw him several times before the end, and was present at his last moments. The funeral was managed by Cuningham; so were the obituary notices; and Fenwick attended the funeral and read the notices, with that curious mixture of sore grief and jealous irritation into which our human nature is so often betrayed at similar moments.

Then he found himself absorbed by the later rehearsals of *The Queen's Necklace*; by the completion of his pictures for the May exhibition; and by the perpetual and ignominious hunt for money. As to this last, it seemed to him that each day was a battle in which he was for ever worsted. He was still trying in vain to sell his house at Chelsea, the house planned at the height of his brief prosperity, built and finely furnished on borrowed money, and now apparently unsaleable, because of certain peculiarities in it, which suited its contriver, and no one else. And meanwhile the bank from which he had borrowed most of his building money was pressing inexorably for repayment; the solicitor in Bedford Row could do nothing, and was manifestly averse to running up a longer bill on his own account; so that, instead of painting, Fenwick often spent his miserable days in rushing about London, trying to raise money by one shift after another, in an agony to get a bill accepted or postponed, borrowing from this person and that, and with every succeeding week losing more self-respect and self-control.

The situation would have been instantly changed if only his artistic power had recovered itself. And if Eugénie had been within his reach it might have done so. She had the secret of stimulating in him what was poetic, and repressing what was merely extravagant or violent. But she was far away: and as he worked at the completion of his series of 'Months,' or at various portraits which the kindness or compassion of old friends had procured for him, he fell headlong into all his worst faults.

His handling, once so distinguished through all its inequalities, grew steadily more careless and perfunctory; his drawing lost force and grip; his composition, so rich, interesting, and intelligent in his early days, now meant nothing, said nothing. The few friends who still haunted his studio during these dark months were often struck with pity; criticism or argument was useless; and some of them believed that he was suffering from defects of sight, and was no longer capable of judging his own work.

The portrait commissions, in particular, led more than once to disaster. His angry vanity suspected that while he was now thought incapable of the poetic or imaginative work in which he had once excelled, he was still considered—'like any fool'—good enough for portraits. This alone was enough to make him loathe the business. On two or three occasions he ended by quarrelling with the sitter. Then for hours he would walk restlessly about his room, smoking enormously, drinking—sometimes excessively—out of a kind of excitement and *désoeuvrement*—his strong, grizzled hair bristling about his head, his black eyes staring and bloodshot, and that wild gypsyish look of his youth more noticeable than ever in these surroundings of what promised soon to be a decadent middle age.

One habit of his youth had quite disappeared. The queer tendency to call on Heaven for practical aid in any practical difficulty—to make of prayer a system of 'begging-letters to the Almighty'—which had of ten quieted or distracted him in his early years of struggle, affected him no longer. His inner life seemed to himself shrouded in a sullen numbness and frost.

And the old joy in reading, the old plenitude and facility of imagination, were also in abeyance. He became the fierce critic of other men's ideas, while barren of his own. To be original, successful, happy, was now in his eyes the one dark and desperate offence. Yet every now and then he would have impulses of the largest generosity; would devote hours to the teaching of some struggling student and the correction of his work; or draw on his last remains of credit or influence—pester people with calls, or write reams to the newspapers—on behalf of some one, unduly overlooked, whose work he admired.

But through it all, the shadows deepened, and a fixed conviction that he was moving towards catastrophe. In spite of Watson's touching words to him, he did not often let himself think of Phoebe. Towards her, as towards so much else, his mind and heart were stiffened and voiceless. But for hours in the night—since sleeplessness was now added to his other torments—he would brood on the loss of his child, would try to imagine her dancing, singing, sewing—or helping her mother in the house. Seventeen! Why, soon no doubt they would be marrying her, and he, her father, would know nothing, hear nothing. And in the darkness he would feel the warm tears rise in his eyes, and hold them there, proudly arrested.

The rehearsals in which he spent many hours of the week, generally added to his distress and irritation. The play itself was, in his opinion, a poor vulgar thing, utterly unworthy of the 'spectacle' he had contrived for it. He could not hide his contempt for the piece, and indeed for most of its players; and was naturally unpopular with the management and the company. Moreover, he wanted his money desperately, seeing that the play had been postponed, first from November to February, and then from February to April; but the actor-manager concerned was in somewhat dire straits himself, and nothing could be got before production.

One afternoon, late in March, a rehearsal was nearing its completion, everybody was tired out, and everything had been going badly. One of Fenwick's most beautiful scenes—carefully studied from the Trianon gardens on the spot—had been, in his opinion, hopelessly spoilt in order to bring in some ridiculous 'business' wholly incongruous with the setting and date of the play. He had had a fierce altercation on the stage with the actor-manager. The cast, meanwhile, dispersed at the back of the stage or in the wings, looked on maliciously or chatted among themselves; while every now and then one or other of the antagonists would call up the leading lady, or the conceited gentleman who was to act Count Fersen, and hotly put a case. Fenwick was madly conscious all the time of his lessened consideration and dignity in the eyes of a band of people whom he despised. Two years before, his cooperation would have been an honour and his opinion law. Now, nothing of the kind; indeed, through the heated remarks of the actor-manager there ran the insolent implication that Mr. Fenwick's wrath was of no particular account to anybody, and that he was presuming on a commission he had been very lucky to get.

At last a crowd of stage-hands, setting scenery for another piece in the evening, invaded the stage, and the rehearsal was just breaking up when Fenwick, still talking in flushed exasperation, happened to notice two ladies standing in the wings, on the other side of the vast stage, close to the stage-entrance.

He suddenly stopped talking—stammered—looked again. They were two girls, one evidently a good deal older than the other. The elder was talking with the assistant stage-manager. The younger stood quietly, a few yards away, not talking to any one. Her eyes were on Fenwick, and her young, slightly frowning face wore an expression of amusement—of something besides, also—something puzzled and intent. It flashed upon him that she had been there for some time, that he had been vaguely conscious of her—that she had, in fact, been watching from a distance the angry scene in which he had been engaged.

'Why!—whatever is the matter, Mr. Fenwick?' said the actor beside him, startled by his look.

Fenwick made no answer, but he dropped a roll of papers he was holding and suddenly rushed forward across the stage, through the throng of carpenters and scene-shifters who were at work upon it. Some garden steps and a fountain just being drawn into position came in his way; he stumbled and fell, was conscious of two or three men coming to his assistance, rose again, and ran on, blindly, pushing at the groups in his way, till he ran into the arms of the stage-manager.

'Who were those ladies?—where are they?' he said, panting, and looking round him in despair; for they had vanished, and the stage-entrance was blocked by an outgoing stream of people.

'Don't know anything about them,' said the man, sulkily. Fenwick had been the plague of his life in rehearsals. 'What?—you mean those two girls? Never saw 'em before.'

'But you must know who they are—you must!' shouted Fenwick. 'What's their name? Why did you let them go?'

'Because I had finished with them.'

The manager turned on his heel, and was about to give an order to a workman, when Fenwick caught him by the arm.

'I implore you,' he said, in a shaking voice, his face crimson—'tell me who they are—and where they went.'

The man looked at him astonished, but something in the artist's face made him speak more considerately.

'I am extremely sorry, Mr. Fenwick, but I really know nothing about them. Oh, by the way'—he fumbled in his pocket. 'Yes—one of them did give me a card—I forgot—I never saw the name before.' He extracted it with difficulty and handed it to Fenwick, who stood trembling from head to foot.

Fenwick looked at it.

'Miss Larose.' Nothing else. No address.

'But the other one!—the other one!' he said, beside himself.

'I never spoke to her at all,' said his companion, whose name was Fison. 'They came in here twenty minutes ago and asked to see me. The door-keeper told them the rehearsal was just over and they would find me on the stage. The lady I was talking to wished to know whether we had all the people we wanted for the ballroom scene. Some friend with whom she had been acting in the country had advised her to apply—'

'Acting *where*?' said Fenwick, still gripping him.

The stage-manager rubbed his nose in perplexity.

'I really can't remember. Leeds—Newcastle—Halifax—was it? It's altogether escaped my memory.'

'For God's sake, remember!' cried Fenwick.

The stage-manager shook his head.

'I really didn't take notice. I liked the young lady very well. We got on, as you may say, at once. I talked to her while you were discussing over there. But I had to tell her there was no room for her—and no more there is. Her sister—or her friend—whichever it was—was an uncommonly pretty girl. I noticed that as she went out—which reminds me—she asked me to tell her who you were.'

Fenwick gazed at the speaker in passionate despair.

'And you can't tell me any more—can't help me?' His voice rose again into a shout, then failed him.

'No, I really can't,' said the other, decidedly, pulling himself away.
'You go and ask the door-keeper. Perhaps he'll know something.'

But the door-keeper knew only that he had been asked for 'Mr. Fison' by two nice-spoken young ladies, that he had directed them where to go, and had opened the stage-door for them. He hadn't happened to be in his 'lodge' when they went out, and couldn't say in which direction they had gone.

'Why, lor' bless you, sir, they come here in scores every week!'

Fenwick rushed out into the Strand, and walked from end to end of the theatrical section of it several times, questioning the policemen on duty. But he could discover nothing.

Then, blindly, he made his way down a narrow street to the Embankment.
There he threw himself on a bench, almost fainting, unable to stand.

What should he do? He was absolutely convinced that he had seen Carrie—his child; his little Carrie!—his own flesh and blood. It was her face—her eyes—her movement—changed, indeed, but perfectly to be recognised by him, her father. And by the cruel, the monstrous accidents of the meeting, she had been swept away from him again into this whirlpool of London, before he had had the smallest chance of grasping at the little form as it floated past him on this aimless stream of things. His whole nature was in surging revolt against life—against men's senseless theories of God and Providence. If it should prove that he had lost all clue again to his wife and child, he would put an end, once for all, to his share in the business—he swore, with clenched hands, that he would. The Great Potter had made sport of him long enough; it was time to break the cup and toss its fragments back into the vast common heap of ruined and wasted things. 'Some to honour—and some to dishonour'—the words rang in his ears, mingling with that deep bell of St. Paul's, whereof the echoes were being carried up the river towards him on the light southeasterly wind.

But first—he tried to make his mind follow out the natural implications and consequences of what had happened. Carrie had asked his name. But clearly, when it was given her, it had meant nothing to her. She could not have left her father there—knowing it was her father—without a word. No; Phoebe's first step, of course, would have been to drop her old name, and the child would have no knowledge of it.

But Phoebe? If Carrie was in England, so was Phoebe. He could not believe that she would part with the child. And supposing Carrie spoke of the prating, haranguing fellow she had seen?—mentioned the name, which the stage-manager had given her?—what then? Could Phoebe still have the cruelty, the wickedness to maintain her course of action—to keep Carrie from him? Ah! if he had been guilty towards her in the old days, she had wrung out full payment long ago; the balance of injury had long since dropped heavily on his side. But who could know how she had developed?—whether towards hardness or towards repentance. Still—to-night, probably—she would hear what and whom Carrie had seen. Any post might bring the fruits of it. And if not—he was not without a clue. If a girl whose name is known has been playing recently at an English provincial theatre, it ought to be possible somehow to recover news of her. He looked at his watch. Too late for the lawyers. But he roused himself, hailed a cab, and went to his club, where he wrote at length to his solicitor, describing what had happened, and suggesting various lines of action.

Then he went home, got some charcoal and paper and by lamp-light began to draw the face which he had seen—a very young and still plastic face, with delicate lips open above the small teeth; and eyes—why, they were Phoebe's eyes, of course!—no other eyes like them in the world. He drew them with an eager hand, knowing the way of them. He put the light—the smile—into them; a happy smile!—as of one to whom life has been kind. No sign of fear, distress, or cringing poverty—rather an innocent sovereignty, lovely and unashamed. Then the brow, and the curly hair in its brown profusion; and the small neck; and the thin, straight shoulders. He drew in the curve of the shady hat—the knot of lace at the throat—the spare young lines of the breast.

So it emerged; and when it was done, he put it on an easel and sat staring at it, his eyes blind with tears.

Yes, it was Carrie—he had no doubt whatever that it was Carrie. And behind her, mingling with her image—yet distinct—a veiled, intangible presence, stood Phoebe—Phoebe so like her, and yet so different. But of Phoebe—still—he would not think. It was as when a man, mortally tired, shrinks from some fierce contest of brain and limb, which yet he knows may some day have to be faced. He put his wife aside, and sank himself in the covetous, devouring vision of his child.

Next day there was great activity among the lawyers. They were confident of recovering the clue, and if Fenwick's identification was a just one, the search was near its end.

Only, till they really *were* on the track, better say nothing to Lord Findon and Madame de Pastourelles. This was the suggestion of the Findon's solicitor, and Fenwick eagerly endorsed it.

Presently inquiry had been made from every management in London as to the touring companies of the year; confidential agents had been sent to every provincial town that possessed a theatre; long lists of names had been compiled and carefully scanned. Fenwick's drawing of the girl whom he had seen had been photographed; and some old likenesses of Phoebe and Carrie had been reproduced and attached to it, for the use of Messrs. Butlin's provincial correspondents. The police were appealed to; the best private detectives to be had were employed.

In vain! The smiling child of seventeen had emerged for that one appearance on the stage of her father's life, only, it seemed, to vanish again for ever. No trace could be found anywhere of a 'Miss Larose,' either as a true or a theatrical name; the photographs suggested nothing to those who saw them; or if various hints and clues sometimes seemed to present themselves, they led to no result.

Meanwhile, day after day, Fenwick waited on the post, hurrying for and scanning his letters with feverish, ever-waning hope. Not a sign, not a word from Phoebe. His heart grew fierce. There were moments when he felt something not unlike hatred for this invisible woman, who was still able to lay a ghostly and sinister hand upon his life. And yet, and yet!—suppose, after all, that she were dead?

During these same weeks of torment *The Queen's Necklace* was produced; it was a pretentious failure, and after three weeks of difficult existence flickered to an end. The management went into bankruptcy, and the greater part of Fenwick's payment was irrecoverable. He could hardly now meet his daily living expenses, and there was an execution in his house, put in by the last firm of builders employed.

Close upon this disaster came the opening of his private exhibition. Grimly, in a kind of dogged abstraction, he went through with it. He himself, with the help of a lad who was his man-of-all-work in Chelsea, nailed up the draperies, hung the pictures, and issued the invitations for the private view.

About a hundred people came to the private view. His reputation was not yet dead, and there was much curiosity about his circumstances. But Fenwick, looking at the scanty crowd, considering the faces that were there and the faces that were not there, knew very well that it could be of no practical assistance to him. Not a picture sold; and next day there were altogether seven people in the gallery, of whom five were the relations of men to whom he had given gratuitous teaching at one period or other of his career.

And never, alack, in the case of any artist of talent, was there a worse 'press' than that which dealt with his pictures on the following morning. The most venomous article of all was the work of a man whom Fenwick had treated with conceit and rudeness in the days of his success. The victim now avenged himself, with the same glee which a literary club throws into the black-balling of some evil tongue—some too harsh and too powerful critic of the moment. 'Scamped and empty work,' in which 'ideas not worth stating' find an expression 'not worth criticism.' Mannerisms grown to absurdity; faults of early training writ dismally large; vulgarity of conception and carelessness of execution—no stone that could hurt or sting was left unflung, and the note of meditative pity in which the article came to an end, marked the climax of a very neat revenge. After reading it, Fenwick felt himself artistically dead and buried.

A great silence fell upon him. He spoke to no one in the gallery, and he avoided his club. Early in the afternoon he went to Lincoln's Inn Fields—only to hear from the lawyers that they had done all they could with the new scent, and it was no use pursuing it further. He heard what they had to say in silence, and after leaving their office he visited a shop in the Strand. Just as the light was waning, about seven o'clock on a May evening, he found himself again in his studio. It was now absolutely bare, save for a few empty easels, a chair or two, and some tattered portfolios. The two men representing the execution were in the dining-room. He could hear the voices of a charwoman and of the lad who had helped him to arrange the gallery, talking in the kitchen.

Fenwick locked himself into the studio. On his way thither he had recoiled, shivering, from the empty desolation of the house. In the general disarray of the ticketed furniture and stripped walls, all artistic charm had disappeared. And he said to himself, with a grim twist of the mouth, that if the house had grown ugly and commonplace, that only made it a better setting for the ugly and commonplace thing which he was about to do.

* * * * *

About half an hour later a boy, looking like the 'buttons' of a lodging-house, walked up to the side entrance of Fenwick's ambitious mansion—which possessed a kind of courtyard, and was built round two sides of an oblong. The door was open and the charwoman just inside, so that the boy had no occasion to ring. He carried a parcel carefully wrapped in an old shawl.

'Is this Mr. Fenwick's?' asked the boy, consulting a dirty scrap of paper.

'Aye,' said the woman. 'Well, who's it from? isn't there no note with it?'

The boy replied that there was no note, and his instructions were to leave it.

'But what name am I to say?' the woman called after him as he went down the path.

The boy shook his head.

'Don't know—give it up!' he said, impudently, and went off whistling.

'Silly lout,' said the woman, crossly, and, taking up the package, which was not very large, she went with it to the studio, reflecting as she went that by the feel of it it was an unframed picture, and that if some one would only take away some of the beastly, dusty things that were already in the house—that wouldn't, so the bailiffs said, fetch a halfpenny—it would be better worth while than bringing new ones where they weren't wanted.

There was at first no answer to her knock. She tried the door, and wondered to find it locked. But presently she heard Fenwick moving about inside.

'Well, what is it?'

His voice was low and impatient.

'A parcel for you, sir.'

'Take it away.'

'Very well, sir.'

She turned obediently and was halfway down the passage which led to the dining-room, when the studio door opened with a great crash and Fenwick looked out.

'Bring that here. What is it?'

She retraced her steps.

'Well, it's a picture, I think, sir.'

He held out his hand for it, took it, and instantly withdrew into the studio and again locked the door. She noticed that he seemed to have lit one candle in the big studio, and his manner struck her as strange. But her slow mind followed the matter no further, and she went back to the cooking of his slender supper.

Fenwick meanwhile was standing with the parcel in his hand. At the woman's knock he had risen from a table, where he had been writing a letter. A black object, half-covered with a painting-rag, lay beside the ink-stand.

'I must make haste,' he thought, 'or she will be bothering me again.'

He looked at the letter, which was still unfinished. Meanwhile he had absently deposited the parcel on the floor, where it rested against the leg of the table.

'Another page will finish it. Hôtel Bristol, Rome—till the end of the week?—if I only could be *sure* that was what Butlin said!'

He paced up and down, frowning, in an impotent distress, trying to make his brain work as usual. On his visit of the afternoon he had asked the lawyers for the Findon's address; but his memory now was of the worst.

Suddenly he wheeled round, sat down, and took up a book which had been lying face downwards on the table. It was the 'Memoirs of Benjamin Haydon,' and he opened it at one of the last pages—

'About an hour after, Miss Haydon entered the painting-room, and found her father stretched out dead, before the easel on which stood, blood-sprinkled, his unfinished picture. A portrait of his wife stood on a smaller easel facing his large picture.'

* * * * *

The man reading, paused.

'He had suffered much more than I,' he thought—'but his wife had helped him—stood by him—'

And he passed on to the next page—to the clause in Haydon's will which runs—'My dearest wife, Mary Haydon, has been a good, dear, and affectionate wife to me—a heroine in adversity and an angel in peace.'

'And he repaid her by blowing his brains out,' thought Fenwick, contemptuously. 'But he was mad—of course he was mad. We are all mad—when it comes to this.'

And he turned back, as though in fascination, to the page before, to the last entry in Haydon's Journal.

'21st.—Slept horribly. Prayed in sorrow and got up in agitation. '22d.—God forgive me. Amen.'

'Amen!' repeated Fenwick, aloud, as he dropped the book. The word echoed in the empty room. He covered his eyes with his right hand, leaning his arm on the table.

The other hand, as it fell beside him, came in contact with the parcel which was propped against the table. His touch told him that it contained a picture—an unframed canvas. A vague curiosity awoke in him. He took it up, peered at the address, then began to finger with and unwrap it.

Suddenly—he bent over it. What was it!

He tore off the shawl, and some brown paper beneath it, lifted the thing upon the table, so that the light of the one candle fell upon it, and held it there.

Slowly his face, which had been deeply flushed before, lost all its colour; his jaw dropped a little.

He was staring at the picture of himself which he had painted for Phoebe in the parlour of the Green Nab Cottage thirteen years before. The young face, in its handsome and arrogant vigour, the gypsy-black hair and eyes, the powerful shoulders in the blue serge coat, the sunburnt neck exposed by the loose, turn-down collar above the greenish tie—there they were, as he had painted them, lying once more under his hand. The flickering light of the candle showed him his signature and the date.

He laid it down and drew a long breath. Thrusting his hands into his pockets, he stood staring at it, his brain, under the sharp stimulus, beginning to work more clearly. So Phoebe, too, was alive—and in England. The picture was her token. That was what it meant.

He went heavily to the door, unlocked it, and called. The charwoman appeared.

'Who brought this parcel?'

'A boy, sir.'

'Where's the note?—he must have brought something with it.'

'No, he didn't, sir—there was no note.'

'Don't be absurd!' cried Fenwick. 'There must have been.'

Mrs. Flint, outraged, protested that she knew what she was a-saying of. He questioned her fiercely, but there was nothing to be got out of her rigmarole account, which Fenwick cut short by retreating into the studio in the middle of it.

This fresh check unhinged him altogether—seemed to make a mere fool of him—the sport of gods and men. There he paced up and down in a mad excitement. What in the Devil's name was the meaning of it? The picture came from Phoebe—no one else. But it seemed she had only sent it to him to torment him to punish him yet more? Women were the cruellest of God's creatures. And as for himself—idiot!—if he had only finished his business an hour ago, both she and he would have been released by this time. He worked himself up into a wild passion of rage, stopping every now and then to look at that ghost of his youth, which lay on the table, propped up against some books—and once at the reflexion of his haggard face and grey hair as he passed in front of an old mirror on the wall.

Then suddenly the tension gave way. He sank on the chair beside the table, hiding his face on his arms in an utter exhaustion, while yet, through the physical weakness, something swept and vibrated, which was in truth the onset of returning life.

As he lay there a cab drove up to the front door, and a lady dressed in black descended from it. She rang, and Mrs. Flint appeared.

'Is Mr. Fenwick at home?'

'He is, ma'am,' said the woman, hesitating—'but he did say he wasn't to be disturbed.'

'Will you please give him my card and say I wish to see him at once? I have brought him an important letter.'

Mrs. Flint, wavering between her dread of Fenwick's ill-humour and the impression produced upon her by the gentle decision of her visitor, retreated into the house. The lady followed.

'Well, if you'll wait there, ma'am'—the charwoman opened the door of the dismantled sitting-room —'I'll speak to Mr. Fenwick.'

She shuffled off. Eugénie de Pastourelles threw back her veil. She had arrived only that morning in London after a night journey, and her face showed deep lines of fatigue. But its beauty of expression had never been more striking. Animation—joy—spoke in the eyes, quivered in the lips. She moved restlessly up and down, holding in one hand a parcel of letters. Once she noticed the room—the furniture ticketed in lots—and paused in concern and pity. But the momentary cloud was soon chased by the happiness of the thought which held her. Meanwhile Mrs. Flint knocked at the door of the studio.

'Mr. Fenwick! Sir! There's a lady come, sir, and she wishes to speak to you particular.'

An angry movement inside.

'I'm busy. Send her away.'

'I've got her card here, sir,' said Mrs. Flint, dropping her voice. 'It's a queer name, sir—somethin

furrin—Madam somethin. She says it's *most* pertickler. I was to tell you she'd only got home to-day, from abroad.'

A sudden noise inside. The door was opened.

'Where is she? Ask her to come in.'

He himself retreated into the darkness of the studio, clinging, so the charwoman noticed, to the back of a chair, as though for support. Wondering 'what was up,' she clattered back again down the long passage which led from the sitting-room to the studio.

But Eugénie had heard the opening door and came to meet her.

'Is anything wrong?' she asked, anxiously. 'Is Mr. Fenwick ill?'

'Well, you see, ma'am,' said Mrs. Flint, cautiously—'it's the Sheriff's horficers—though they do it as kind as they can.'

Eugénie looked bewildered.

'A hexecution, ma'am,' whispered the woman as she led the way.

'Oh!' It was a cry of distress, checked by the sight of Fenwick, who stood in the door of his studio.

'I am sorry you were kept waiting,' he said, hoarsely.

She made some commonplace reply, and they shook hands. Mrs. Flint looked at them curiously, and withdrew again into the back premises.

Fenwick turned and walked in front of Eugénie towards the table from which he had risen. She looked at him in sudden horror—arrested—the words she had come to speak stifled on her lips. Then a quick impulse made her shut the door behind her. He turned again, bewildered, and raised his hand to his head.

'My God!' he said, in a low voice; 'I oughtn't to have let you come in here. Go away—please go away.'

Then she saw him totter backward, raise an overcoat which hung across the back of a chair, and throw it over something lying on the table. Terror possessed her; his aspect was so ghastly, his movements so strange. She flew to him, and took his hand in both hers.

'No, no—don't send me away! My friend—my dear friend—listen to me. You look so ill—you've been in trouble! If I'd only known! But I've thought of you always—I've prayed for you. And listen—*listen*!—I've brought you good news.'

She paused, still holding him. Her eyes were bright with tears, but her mouth smiled. He looked at her, trembling. Her pale charm, her pleading grace moved him unbearably; this beauty, this tenderness—the sudden apparition of them in this dark room—unmanned him altogether.

But she came nearer.

'We got home only this morning. It was a sudden wish of my father's—he thought Italy wasn't suiting him. We came straight from Rome. I wrote to you by this morning's post. Then—this afternoon—after we'd settled my father—I drove to Lincoln's Inn Fields. And I found them so excited—just sending off a messenger to you. A letter had arrived by the afternoon post, an hour after you left the office. I have it here—they trusted it to me. Oh, dear Mr. Fenwick, listen to me! They are on the track—it's a *real* clue this time! Your wife has been in Canada—they know where she was three months ago—it's only a question of time now. Oh! and they told me about the theatre—how *wonderful*! Oh! I believe they're not far off—know it—I feel it!'

He had fallen on his chair; she stood beside him.

'And you've been ill,' she said, sadly, 'and in great distress, I'm afraid—about money, was it? Oh, if I'd only known! But you'll let me make that right, won't you?—you couldn't refuse me that? And think! you'll have them again—your wife—your little girl.'

She smiled at him, while the tears slipped down her cheeks. She cherished his cold hands, holding them close in her warm, soft palms.

He seemed to be trying to speak. Then suddenly he disengaged himself, rose feebly, went to the

mantelpiece, lit another candle, and brought it, holding it towards something on a chair—beckoning to her. She went to him—perceived the unframed portrait—and cried out.

'Phoebe sent it me—just now,' he said, almost in a whisper—'without a word—without a single word. It was left here by a boy—with no letter—no address. Wasn't it cruel?—wasn't it horribly cruel?'

She watched him in dismay.

'Are you sure there was nothing—no letter?'

He shook his head. She released herself, took up the picture, and examined it. Then she shook out the folds of the shawl, the fragments of the brown paper, and still found nothing. But as she took the candle and stooped with it to the floor, something white gleamed. A neatly folded slip of paper had dropped among some torn letters beneath the table. She held it up to him with a cry of delight.

He made a movement, then fell back.

'Read it, please,' he said, hoarsely, refusing it. 'There's something wrong with my eyes.'

And he held his hands pressed to them, while she—little reluctantly, wistfully—opened and read:

* * * * *

MY DEAR JOHN,—I have Phoebe safe. She can't write. But she sends you this—as her sign. It's been with her all through. She knows she's been a sinful wife. But there, it's no use writing. Besides, it makes me cry. But come!—come soon! Your child is an angel. You'll forget and forgive when you see her.

[Illustration: '*Be my messenger*']

I brought Phoebe here last week. Do you see the address?—it's the old cottage! I took it with a friend—three years ago. It seemed the right place for your poor wife—till she could make up her mind how and when to let you know.

As to how *I* came to know—we'll tell you all that.

Carrie knows nothing yet. I keep thinking of the first look in her eyes! Come soon!

Ever your affectionate old friend,

ANNA MASON.

There was silence. Eugénie had read the letter in a soft voice that trembled. She looked up. Fenwick was staring straight before him, and she saw him shudder.

'I know it's horrible,' he said, in a low voice—'and cowardly—but I feel as if I couldn't face it—I couldn't bear it.'

And he began feebly to pace to and fro, looking like an old, grey-haired man in the dim grotesqueness of the light. Eugénie understood. She felt, with mingled dread and pity, that she was in the presence of a weakness which represented far more than the immediate emotion; was the culmination, indeed, of a long, disintegrating process.

She hesitated—moved—wavered—then took courage again.

'Come and sit down,' she said, gently.

And, going up to him, she took him by the arm and led him back to his chair.

He sank upon it, his eyes hanging on her. She stooped over him.

'Shall I,' she said, uncertainly—'shall I—go first? Oh, I *oughtn't* to go! Nobody ought to interfere—between husband and wife. But if you wish it—if I could do any good—'

Her eyes sought the answer of his.

Her face, framed in the folds of her black veil, shone in the candle-light; her voice was humble, yet brave.

The silence continued a moment. Then his lips moved.

'Be my messenger!' he said, just breathing it.

She made a sign of assent. And he, feebly lifting her hands, brought them to his lips. Close to them—unseen by her—for the moment unremembered by him—lay the revolver with which he had meant to take his life—and the letter in which he had bid her a last farewell.

CHAPTER XIII

Great Langdale was once more in spring. After the long quiet of the winter, during which these remoter valleys of the Lakes resume their primitive and self-dependent life, there were now a few early tourists in the two Dungeon Ghyll hotels, and the road traffic had begun to revive. Phoebe Fenwick, waiting and listening for the post in an upper room of Green Nab Cottage, ran hurriedly to the window several times in vain, drawn by the sound of wheels. The cart which clattered past was not that which bore Her Majesty's mails.

At the third of these false alarms she lingered beside the open casement window, looking out into the valley. It was a very weary woman who stood thus—motionless and drooping; a woman so tired, so conscious of wasted life and happiness, that although expectation held her in a grip of torture, there was in it little or nothing of hope.

Twelve years since she had last looked on those twin peaks, those bare fields and winding river! Twelve years! Time, the inexorable, had dealt with her, and not softly. All that rounded grace which Fenwick had once loved to draw had dropped from her, as the bloom drops from a wild cherry in the night. Phoebe was now thirty-five—close on thirty-six; and twelve years of hard work, joyless struggle, and pursuing remorse had left upon her indelible marks. She had grown excessively thin, and lines of restlessness, of furtive pain and suspicion, had graven themselves, delicately, irrevocably, about her eyes and mouth, on her broad brow and childish neck. There were hollows in the cheeks, the cutting of the face seemed to be ruder and the skin browner than of old. Nevertheless, the leanness of the face was that of energy, not that of emaciation. It pointed to life in the open air, a strenuous physical life; and, but for the look of fretting, of ceaseless and troubled longing with which it was associated, it would rather have given beauty than taken it away.

Her eyes were more astonishing than ever; but there was a touch of wildness in them, and they were grown, in truth, too big and staring for the dwindled face. A pathetic face!—as of one in whom the impulse to weep is always present, yet for ever stifled. It had none of that noble intimacy with sorrow which so often dignifies a woman's whole aspect; it spoke rather of the painful, struggling, desiring will, the will of passion and regret, the will which fights equally with the past and with the future, and is, for Buddhist and Christian alike, the torment of existence.

Again a sound of wheels drew her eyes to the road. But it was only the Hawkshead butcher going his rounds. He stopped below the cottage, and Miss Anna's servant went out to him. Phoebe sighed afresh in disappointment, her ears still strained the while to catch the first sound of that primitive horn, wherewith the postman in his cart, as he mounts the Langdale Valley, summons the dwellers in the scattered farms and cottages to come and take their letters.

But very likely there would be no letter at all. This was Thursday. On Saturday Miss Anna had met her and Carrie at Windermere, and had brought them to the old place. Sunday and Monday had been filled with agitated consultations. Then, on Tuesday, a neighbour living in Elterwater, and an old friend of Miss Anna's, had gone up to London, bearing with her a parcel addressed to 'John Fenwick, Constable House, East Road, Chelsea,' which she had promised to deliver, either personally or through one of the servants of the boarding-house whither she was bound.

This lady must have delivered it on Wednesday—some time on Wednesday—she would not pledge herself. But probably not till the afternoon or evening. If so, there could be no letter. But if not a letter, a telegram; unless, indeed, John were determined not to take her back; unless her return were in his eyes a mere trouble and burden; unless they were to be finally and for ever separated. Then he would take his time—and write.

But—*Carrie*! Phoebe resumed her wandering from room to room and window to window, her mind deafened as it were by the rush of her own thoughts—unable to rest for a moment. He must want to see Carrie! And that seeing must and should carry with it at least one interview with his wife, at least the permission to tell her story, face to face.

Was it only a week since, under a sudden impulse, she had written to Miss Anna?—from the Surrey lodging, where for nearly two months she had hidden herself after their landing in England. Each day since then had been at once the longest and the shortest she had ever known. Every emotion of which she was capable had been roused into fresh life, crowding the hours; while at the same time each day had flown on wings of flame, bringing the moment—so awful, yet so desired—when she should see John's face again. After the slow years of self-inflicted exile; after the wavering weeks and months of repentance, doubt, and changing resolution, life had suddenly become breathless—a hurrying rush down some Avernian descent, towards crashing pain and tumult. For how could it end well? She was no silly girl to suppose that such things can be made right again with a few soft words and a kiss.

Idly her mind wandered through the past; through the years of dumb, helpless bitterness, when she would have given the world to undo what she had done, and could see no way, consistently with the beliefs which still held her; and through the first hours of sharp reaction, produced partly by events in her own history and partly by fresh and unexpected information. She had thought of John as hard, prosperous, and cruel; removed altogether out of her social ken, a rich and fashionable gentleman who might have and be what he would. The London letter of a Canadian weekly paper had given her the news of his election to the Academy. Then, from the same source, she had learnt of the quarrel, the scene with the Hanging Committee, the noisy resignation, and all the controversy surrounding it. She read and re-read every line of this scanty news, pondering and worrying over it. How like John, to ruin himself by these tempers! And yet, of course, he had been abominably treated!—any one could see that. From her anger and concern sprang new growths of feeling in a softened heart. If she had only been there!

Well!—what did it matter? The great lady who advised and patronised him no doubt had been there. If she had not been able to smooth out the tangle, what chance would his despised wife have had with him?

Then—last fall—there had come to the farm in the green Ontario country, a young artist, sent out on a commission from an English publishing firm who were producing a great illustrated book on Canada. The son of the house, who was at college in Montreal, had met him, and made friends with him; had brought him home to draw the farm, and the apple-orchards, heavy with fruit. And there, night after night, he had sat talking in the rich violet dusk; talking to this sad-faced Mrs. Wilson, this Englishwoman, who understood his phrases and his ways, and had been in contact with artists in her youth.

John Fenwick! Why, of course, he knew all about John Fenwick! Quarrelsome, clever chap! Had gone up like a rocket, and was now nowhere. What call had he to quarrel with the Academy? The Academy had treated him handsomely enough—much better than it had treated a lot of other fellows. The public wouldn't stand his airs and his violence. He wasn't big enough. A Whistler might be insolent, and gain by it; but the smaller men must keep civil tongues in their heads. Oh, yes, talent of course—enormous talent!—but a poor early training, and a man wants all his time to get the better of *that*—instead of spouting and scribbling all over the place. No—John Fenwick would do nothing more of importance. Mrs. Wilson might take his word for that—sorry if he had said anything unpleasant of a friend of hers. General report, besides, made him an unhappy, moody kind of fellow, living alone, with very few friends, taking nobody's advice—and as obstinate as a pig about his work.

So said this young Daniel-come-to-judgement, between the whiffs of his pipe, in the Canadian farm-garden, while the darkness came down and hid the face of the silent woman beside him.

And so Remorse, and anguished Pity, sprang up beside her—grey and stern comrades—and she walked between them night and day. John, a lonely failure in England—poor and despised. And she, an exile here, with her child. And this dumb, irrevocable Time, on which she had stamped her will, so easily, so fatally, flowing on the while, year by year, towards Death and the End!—and these voices of 'Too late!' in her ears!

But still the impulse of return grew—mysteriously it seemed—independently. And other facts and experiences came strangely to its aid. In the language of Evangelicalism which had been natural to her youth, Phoebe felt now, as she looked back, that she had been wonderfully 'led.' It was this sense, indeed, which had softened the humiliation and determined the actual steps of her homeward pilgrimage; she seemed to have been yielding to an actual external force in what she had done.

For it had not been easy, this second uprooting. Carrie, especially, had had her own reasons for making it difficult. And Phoebe had never yet had the courage to tell her the truth. She had spoken vaguely of 'business' obliging them to take a journey to England—had asked the child to trust her—and taken refuge in tears and depression from Carrie's objections. In consequence, she had seen the first shadow descend on Carrie's youth; she had been conscious of the first breach between herself and her daughter.

In a sudden agony, she walked back to the window in her own room, looking this time, not towards Elterwater and the post, but towards Dungeon Ghyll and the wild upper valley.

Anna Mason had taken Carrie for a walk. At that moment, on Phoebe's prayer, she was telling the child the story of her father and mother.

Phoebe's eyes filled. She was, in truth, waiting for judgement—at the hands of her husband—and her daughter. Ever since their flight together, Carrie had been taught to regard her father as dead. As the years went on, 'poor papa' was represented to her by a few fading memories, by the unframed picture which her mother kept jealously locked from sight, which she had been only once or twice allowed to see.

And now? Phoebe recalled the anguish of that night, when Carrie, returning to her mother in Surrey, from a day's expedition to town, with a Canadian friend, described the queer, passionate, grey-haired man—'Mr. Fenwick, they called him'—whom she had seen directing the rehearsal at the Falcon Theatre. Phoebe had a vision of herself leaning back in her chair, wrapped in shawls, feigning the exhaustion and blindness of nervous headache—while the child gave her laughing account of the scene, in the intervals of kissing and comforting 'poor mummy.'

And that drive from Windermere, beside Miss Anna, with Carrie opposite!—Carrie excitable, happy, talkative—her father's child—now absorbed in a natural delight, exclaiming at the beauty of the mountains, the trees, the river, catching her mother's hand, to make her smile too, and then in a sudden shyness and hardness, looking with her deep jealous eyes at the unknown friend opposite, wondering clearly what it all meant, resenting that she was told so little, and too proud to insist on more—or, perhaps, afraid to pierce what might turn out to be the unhappy or shameful secret of their life?

Yet Phoebe had tried to make it plausible. They were going to stay with an old friend, in a place which Carrie and her parents had lived in when she was a baby, near to the town where she was born. She knew already that her mother was from Westmoreland, from a place called Keswick; but she understood that her mother's father was dead, and all her people scattered.

Until they came actually in sight of the cottage, the child had betrayed no memory of her own; though as they entered Langdale her chatter ceased, and her eyes sped nervously from side to side, considering the woods and fells and whitewashed farms. As they stopped, however, at the foot of the steep pitch leading to the little house, Carrie suddenly caught sight of it—the slate porch, the yew-tree to the right, the sycamore in front. She changed colour, and as she jumped down, she wavered and nearly fell.

And without waiting for the others she ran up the hill and through the gate. When she met them again at the house-door, her eyes were wet.

'I've been into the kitchen,' she said, breathlessly—'and it's so strange! I remember sitting there, and a man'—she drew her hand across her brow—'a man, feeding me. That—that was father?'

Phoebe could not remember how she had answered her; only some trembling words from Anna Mason, and an attempt to draw the child away—that her mother might enter the cottage alone and unwatched. And she had entered it alone—had walked into the little parlour.

The next thing she recollected—amid that passion of desperate tears which had seemed to dissolve her, body and soul—were Carrie's arms round her, Carrie's face pressed against hers.

'Mother! mother! Oh! what is the matter? Why did we come here? You've been keeping things from me all these weeks—for years even. There is something I don't know—I'm sure there is. Oh, it *is* unkind. You think I'm not old enough—but I am. Oh! you ought to tell me, mother!'

How had she defended herself? staved off the inevitable once again? All she knew was that Miss Anna had again come to the rescue, had taken the child away, whispering to her. And since then, in these last forty-eight hours—oh! Carrie had been good! So quiet, so useful—unpacking their clothes, helping Miss Anna's maid with the supper, cooking, dusting, mending, as a Canadian girl knows how—only stopping sometimes to look round her, with that clouded, wondering look, as though the past invaded her.

Oh! she was a darling! John would see that—whatever he might feel towards her mother. 'I stole her—but I've brought her back. I may be a bad wife—but there's Carrie! I've not neglected her—I've done the best by her.'

It was in incoherent, unspoken words like this that Phoebe was for ever pleading with her husband,

even now.

Presently, in her walk about the room, she came to stand before the mantelpiece, where a photograph had been propped up against the wall by Carrie—of a white walled farm, with its out-buildings and orchards—and, gleaming beneath it, the wide waters of Lake Ontario. Phoebe shuddered at the sight of it. Twelve years of her life had been wasted there.

Carrie, indeed, took a very different view.

Restlessly the mother left her room and wandered into Carrie's. It was already—by half-past nine—spotlessly clean and neat; and Eliza, the girl from Hawkshead, had not been allowed to touch it. On the bed lay a fresh 'waist,' which Carrie had just made for herself, and on the dressing-table stood another photograph—not a place this time, but a person—a very evident and very good-looking young man!

Phoebe stood looking at it forlornly. Carrie's young romance—and her own spoilt life—these two images held her. Carrie would go back, in time, across the sea—would marry, would forget her mother.

'And I'm not old, neither—I'm not old.'

Trembling she left the room. The door of Miss Anna's was open. Phoebe stood on the threshold, looking in. It had been her room and John's in the old days. Their very furniture was still there—as in the parlour, too. For John had sold it all to their landlord, when he wound up affairs. Miss Anna knew even what he had got for it—poor John!

She dared not go in. She stood leaning against the door-post, looking from outside, like one in exile, at the low-raftered room, with its oak press, and its bed, and its bit of green carpet. Thoughts passed through her mind—thoughts which shook her from head to foot.

The cottage was now enlarged. Miss Mason, when she took it on lease three years before this date, had built two new rooms, or got the Hawkshead landlord to build them. She had retired now, on her savings; and there lived with her an old friend, a tired teacher like herself. It was one of those spinster marriages—honourable and seemly *ménages*—for which the Lakes have always been famous. But Miss Wetherby was now away, visiting her relations in the South. Had she been there, Phoebe could never have made up her mind to accept Miss Anna's urgent invitation. She shrank from everybody—strangers, or old acquaintance—it was all one. The terror which ranked, in her mind, next to the disabling, heart-arresting terror of the first meeting with her husband, was that of the first moment when she must discover herself to her old acquaintance in Langdale or Elterwater—in Kendal or Keswick—as Phoebe Fenwick. She had arrived, closely veiled, as 'Mrs. Wilson,' and she had never yet left the cottage door.

Then again she caught her breath, remembering that at that very moment Carrie was learning her true name from Miss Anna—was realising that she had seen her father without knowing it—was hearing the story of what her mother had done.

'Perhaps she'll hate me!' thought Phoebe, miserably. Through the window came the soft spring air. The big sycamore opposite was nearly in full leaf, and in the field below sprawled the helpless, new-born lambs, so white beside their dingy mothers. The voice of the river murmured through the valley, and sometimes, as the west wind blew stronger, Phoebe's fine and long-practised ear could distinguish other and more distant sounds, wafted from the leaping waterfalls which threaded the ghyll, perhaps even from the stream of Dungeon Ghyll itself, thundering in its prison of rocks. It was a characteristic Westmoreland day, with high grey cloud and interlacing sun, the fells clear from base to top, their green or reddish sides marked with white farms or bold clumps of fir; with the blackness of scattered yews, landmarks through generations; or the purple-grey of the emerging limestone. Fresh, lonely, cheerful—a land at once of mountain solitude, and of a long-settled, long-humanised life—it breathed kindly on this penitent, anxious woman; it seemed to bid her take courage.

Ah! the sound of a horn echoing along the fell. Phoebe flew down to the porch; then, remembering she might be seen, perhaps recognised, by the postman, she stepped back into the parlour, listening, but out of sight.

The servant, who had run down to fetch the letters, seemed to be having something of an argument with the postman. In a few minutes she reappeared, breathless.

'There's no letters, mum,' she said, seeing Phoebe at the parlour window—'and I doan't think this has owt to do here.' She held up a telegram, doubtfully—yet with an evident curiosity and excitement in her look. It was addressed to 'Mrs. John Fenwick.' The postman had clearly made some remark upon it.

Phoebe took it.

'It's all right. Tell him to leave it.'

The girl, noticing her agitation and her shaking fingers, ran down the hill again to give the message. Phoebe carried the telegram upstairs to her room, and locked the door.

For some moments she dared not open it. If it said that he refused to come?—that he would never see her again? Phoebe felt that she should die of grief—that life must stop.

At last she tore it open:

Sending messenger to-day. Hope to follow immediately. Welcome.

She gasped over the words, feeling them in the first instance as a blow—a repulse. She had feared—but also she had hoped—she scarcely knew for what—yet at least for something more, something different from this.

He was not coming, then, at once! A messenger! What messenger could a man send to his wife in such a case? Who knew them both well enough to dare to come between them? Old fiercenesses woke up in her. Had the word been merely cold and unforgiving it would have crushed her indeed; but there was that in her which would have scarcely dared complain. An eye for an eye—no conscience-stricken creature but admits the wild justice of that.

But a 'messenger'!—when she that was lost is found, when a man's wife comes back to him from the dead! Phoebe sat voiceless, the telegram on her lap, a kind of scorn trembling on her lip.

Then her eye caught the word 'welcome,' and it struck home. She began to sob, her angry pride melting. And suddenly the door of her room opened, and there on the threshold stood Carrie—Carrie, who had been crying, too—with wide, startled eyes and flushed cheeks. She looked at her mother, then flew to her, while Phoebe instinctively covered the telegram with her hand.

'Oh, mother! mother!—how could you? And I *laughed* at him—I did—I *did*!' she cried, wringing her hands. 'And he looked so tired! And on the way home Amélie mimicked him—and his voice—and his queer ways; and I laughed. Oh, what a beast I was! Oh, mother, and I told you his name, and you never—never—said a word!'

The child flung herself on the floor, her feet tucked under her, her hands clasped round her knees, swaying backwards and forwards in a tempest of excited feeling, hardly knowing what she said.

Phoebe looked at her, bewildered; then she removed her hand, and Carrie saw the telegram. She threw herself on it, read the address, gulping, then the words:

'A messenger!' She understood that no more than her mother. It meant a letter, perhaps? But she fastened on 'immediately'—'welcome.'

And presently—all in a moment—she leapt to her feet, and began to dance and spring about the room. And as Phoebe watched her, startled and open-mouthed, wondering if this was all the reproach that Carrie was ever going to make her, the flushed and joyous creature came and flung her arms round Phoebe's neck, so that the fair hair and the brown were all in a confusion together, and the child's cheek was on her mother's.

'Mummy!—and I was only five, and you weren't so very old—only seven years older than I am now—and you thought father was tired of you—and you went off to Canada right away. My!—it was plucky of you—I will say that for you. And if you hadn't gone, I should never have seen George. But—oh, mummy, mummy!'—this between laughing and crying—'I do guess you were just a little fool! I guess you were!'

Miss Anna sat downstairs listening to the murmur of those hurrying voices above her in Phoebe's room. She was darning a tablecloth, with the Manchester paper beside her; and she sat peculiarly erect, a little stern and pinched,—breathing protest.

It was extraordinary how Carrie had taken it. These were your Canadian ways, she supposed. No horror of anything—no shyness. Looking a thing straight in the face, at a moment's notice—with a kind of humorous common sense—refusing altogether to cry over spilt milk, even such spilt milk as this—in a hurry, simply, to clear it up! A mere metaphorical refusal to cry, this—for, after all, there had been tears. But the immediate rebound, the determination to be cheerful, though the heavens fell, had been so amazing! The child had begun to laugh before her tears were dry—letting loose a flood of sharp, shrewd questions on her companion; wondering, with sparkling looks, how 'George' would take it; and quite refusing to provide that fine-drawn or shrinking sentiment, that 'moral sense,' in short, with which, as it seemed to the elder woman, half-hours of this quality in life should be decently accompanied. Little heathen! Miss Anna thought grimly of all the precautions she had taken to spare

the young lady's feelings—of her own emotions—her sense of a solemn and epoch-making experience. She might have saved her pains!

But at this point the door upstairs opened, and the 'little heathen' descended presently to the parlour, bringing the telegram. She came in shyly, and it might perhaps have been seen that she was conscious of her disgrace with Miss Anna. But she said nothing; she merely held out the piece of pink paper; and Miss Anna, surprised out of her own 'moral sense,' fell upon it, hastily adjusting her spectacles to a large and characteristic nose.

She read it frowning. A messenger! What on earth did they want with such a person? Just like John!—putting the disagreeables on other people. She said to herself that one saw where the child's levity came from.

'It's nice of father, isn't it?' said Carrie, rather timidly, touching the telegram.

'He'd better have come himself,' said Miss Anna, sharply.

'But he is coming!' cried Carrie. 'He's only sending a letter—or a present—or something—to smooth the way—just as George does with me. Well, now then'—she bent down and brought her resolute little face close to Miss Anna's—'where's he to sleep?'

Miss Anna jumped, pushed back her chair, and said, coldly, 'I'll see to that.'

'Because, if he's going into my room,' said Carrie, thoughtfully, 'something'll have to be done to lengthen that bed. The pillow slips down, and even I hung my feet out last night. But, if you'll let me, I could fix it up—I could make that room real nice.'

Miss Anna told her to do what she liked. 'And where'll you sleep to-night, pray?'

'Oh, I'll go in to mother.'

'There's a second bed in my room,' said Miss Anna, stiffly.

'Ah! but that would crowd you up,' said the girl, softly; and off she went.

Presently there was a commotion upstairs—hammering, pulling, pushing.

Miss Anna wondered what on earth she was doing to the bed.

Then, Phoebe came down, white and fluttered enough to satisfy the most exacting canons. Miss Anna tried not to show that she was dissatisfied with the terms of the telegram, and Phoebe did not complain. But her despondency was very evident, and Miss Anna was extremely sorry for her. In her restlessness she presently said that she would go out to the ghyll and sit by the water a little. If anybody came, they were to shout for her. She would only be a stone's throw from the house.

She went away along the fell-side, her head drooping—so tall and thin, in her plain dress of grey Carmelite and her mushroom hat trimmed with black.

Miss Anna looked after her. She knew very little indeed, as yet, of what it was that had really brought the poor thing home. Her own fault, no doubt. Phoebe would have poured out her soul, without reserve, on that first night of her return to her old home. But Miss Anna had entirely refused to allow it. 'No, no!' she had said, even putting her hand on the wife's trembling lips; 'you shan't tell me. Keep that for John—it's his right. If you've got a confession—it belongs to *John*!'

On the other hand, of the original crisis—of the scene in Bernard Street, the spoilt picture, and the letters of Madame de Pastourelles—Miss Anna had let Phoebe tell her what she pleased; and in truth—although Phoebe seemed to be no longer of a similar opinion—it appeared to the ex-schoolmistress that John had a good deal to explain—John and the French lady. If people are not married, and not relations, they have no reasonable call whatever to write each other long and interesting letters. In spite of her education and her reading, Miss Anna's standards in these respects were the small, Puritanical standards of the English country town.

The gate leading to the steep pitch of lane opened and shut. Miss Anna rose hastily and looked out.

A lady in black entered the little garden, walked up to the door, and knocked timidly. Was this the 'messenger'? Miss Anna hurried into the little hall.

'Is Mrs. Fenwick in?' asked a very musical voice.

'Mrs. Fenwick is sitting a little way off on the fell,' said Miss

Anna, advancing. 'But I can call her directly. What name, please?'

The lady took out her card.

'It's a French name,' she said, with smiling apology, handing it to Miss Anna.

Miss Anna glanced at it, and then at the bearer.

'Kindly step this way,' she said, pointing to the parlour, and holding her grey-capped head rather impressively high.

Madame de Pastourelles obeyed her, murmuring that she had sent her carriage on to the Dungeon Ghyll Hôtel, whence it would return for her in an hour.

Eugénie had made her first speech—her first embarrassed explanation. She and Miss Anna sat on either side of the parlour table, their eyes on each other. Eugénie felt herself ill at ease under the critical gaze of this handsome, grey-haired woman, with her broad shoulders and her strong brows. She had left London in hurry and agitation, and was, after all, but very slenderly informed as to the situation in Langdale. Had she inadvertently said something to set this formidable-looking person against her and her mission?

On her side Miss Anna surveyed the delicate refinement of her visitor; the black dress so plain, yet so faultless; the mass of brown hair, which even after a night's railway journey was still perfectly dressed, no doubt by the maid without whom these fine ladies never venture themselves abroad; the rings which sparkled on the thin fingers; the single string of pearls, which alone relieved the severity of the black bodice. She noticed the light, distinguished figure, the beauty of the small head; and her hostility waxed within her. John's smart friend belonged to the pampered ones of the earth, and Miss Anna did not intend to be taken in by her, not for a moment.

'Mr. Fenwick has been terribly overworked,' Eugénie repeated, colouring against her will, 'and yesterday he was quite broken down by your letter. It seemed too much for him. You will understand, I'm sure. When a person is so weak, they shrink—don't they?—even from what they most desire. And so he asked me—to—to come and tell Mrs. Fenwick something about his health, and his circumstances these last two years—just to prepare the way. There is so much—isn't there?—Mrs. Fenwick cannot yet know; and I'm afraid—it will pain her to hear.'

The speaker's voice faltered and ceased. She felt through every nerve that she was in a false position, and wondered how she was to mend it.

'Do I understand you that John Fenwick is coming to see his wife to-night?' said Miss Mason at last, in a voice of battle.

'He arrives by the afternoon train,' said Eugénie, looking at her questioner with a slight frown of perplexity.

'What is the matter with him?' said Miss Anna, dryly.

Eugénie hesitated; then she bent forward, the colour rushing again into her cheeks.

'I think'—her voice was low and hurried, and she looked round her to see that the door was shut and they were really alone—'I think it has been an attack of depression—perhaps—perhaps melancholia. He has had great misfortunes and disappointments. Unfortunately, my father and I were abroad, and did not understand. But, thank God!'—she clasped her hands involuntarily—'I got home yesterday—I went to see him—just in time—'

She paused, looking at her companion as though she asked for the understanding which would save her further words. But Miss Anna sat puzzled and cold.

'Just in time?' she repeated.

'I didn't understand at first,' said Eugénie, with emotion; 'I only saw that he was ill and terribly broken. But he has told me since—in a letter I got just before I started. And I want you to advise me—to tell me whether you think Mrs. Fenwick should know—'

'Know what?' cried Miss Anna.

Madame de Pastourelles bent forward again, and said a few words under her breath.

Anna Mason recoiled.

'Horrible!' she said; 'and—and so cowardly! So like a man!'

Eugénie could not help a tremulous smile; then she resumed:

'The picture had come—just come. It was that which saved him. Ah, yes'—the smile flashed out again—'I had forgotten! Of course Mrs. Fenwick must know! It was the picture—it was *she* that *saved* him. But your note, by some strange accident, had escaped him. It had fallen out, among some other papers on the floor—and he was nearly beside himself with disappointment. I was lucky enough to find it and give it him. But oh! it was pitiful to see him.'

She shaded her eyes with her hand a moment, waiting for composure.
Miss Anna watched her, the strong mouth softening unconsciously.

'And so, when he asked me to come and see his wife first—to tell her about his troubles and his breakdown—I felt as if I could not refuse—though, of course, I know'—she looked up appealingly—'it may well seem strange and intrusive to Mrs. Fenwick. But perhaps when she understands how we have all been searching for her these many months—'

'Searching!' exclaimed Miss Anna. 'Who has been searching?'

Her question arrested her companion. Eugénie drew herself more erect, collecting her thoughts.

'Shall we face the facts as they are?' she said at last, quietly. 'I can tell you very shortly how the case stands.'

Miss Anna half-rose, looked at the door, sat down again.

'Mrs. Fenwick, you understand, may return at any time!'

'I will be very short. We must consult—mustn't we?—for them both?'

Timidly, her eyes upraised to the vigorous old face beside her, Eugénie held out her delicate hand. With a quick, impulsive movement, wondering at herself, Miss Anna grasped it.

A little while later Miss Anna emerged from the parlour. She went upstairs to find Carrie.

Carrie was sitting beside the open door of her room, calmly ripping up a mattress. The bed behind her had been substantially lengthened, apparently by the help of a packing-case in which Mrs. Fenwick had brought some of her possessions across the Atlantic. A piece of white dimity had been tacked round the packing-case.

'Carrie, what on earth are you doing?' cried Miss Anna, in dismay.

'It's all right,' said Carrie—'I'm only making it over. It's got lumpy.' Then she laid down her scissors, flushed, and looked at Miss Anna. 'Who's that downstairs?'

'It's a lady who wants to see your mother. Will you go and fetch her?'

'Father's "messenger"?' cried Carrie, springing up, and breathing quick.

Miss Anna nodded.

'Your mother should be very grateful to her,' she said, in rather a shaky voice.

Carrie put on her hat in silence, and descended. The door of the parlour was open, and between it and the parlour window stood the strange lady, staring at the river and the fell opposite, apparently deep in thought.

At the sound of the girl's step Eugénie turned.

'Carrie!' she cried, involuntarily—'you are Carrie!' And she came forward, impetuously holding out both her hands. 'How like the picture—how like!'

And Eugénie gazed in delight at the small, slight creature, so actively and healthily built, in spite of her fairy proportions, at the likeness to Fenwick in hair and skin, at the apple-freshness of her colour, the beauty of her eyes, the lightness of her pretty feet.

Twelve years!—and then to find *this*, dropped into your arms by the gods—this living, breathing promise of all delight! Deep in Eugénie's heart there stirred the pang of her own pitiful motherhood, of the child who had just flickered into life, and out of it, through one summer's day.

She shyly put her arm round the girl.

'May I,' she said, timidly—'may I kiss you?'

Carrie, with down-dropped eyes, a little grave, submitted.

'I am going to tell my mother. Father sent you, didn't he?'

Eugénie said 'Yes' gently, and released her. The child ran off.

Phoebe came slowly into the room, with an uncertain gait, touching the door and the walls like one groping her way.

'Oh, Mrs. Fenwick!'

It was a little cry from Eugénie—deprecating, full of pain.

Phoebe took no notice of it. She went straight to her visitor.

'Where is my husband, please?' she said, in a strong, hoarse voice, mechanically holding out her hand, which Eugénie touched and then let drop—so full of rugged, passionate things were the face and form she looked at.

'He's coming by the afternoon train.' Eugénie threw all her will into calmness and clearness. 'He gets to Windermere before five—and he thought he might be here a little after six. He was so ill yesterday—when I found him—when I went to see him! That's what he wanted me to tell you before you saw him again—and so I came first—by the night train.'

'You went to see him—yesterday?' said Phoebe, still in the same tense way.

She had never asked her guest to sit, and she stood herself, one hand leaning heavily on the table.

'I had heard from the lawyers—the lawyers my father had recommended to Mr. Fenwick—that they had found a clue—they had discovered some traces of you in Canada—and I went to tell him.'

'Lawyers?' Phoebe raised her left hand in bewilderment. 'I don't understand.'

Eugénie came a little nearer. Hurriedly, with changing colour, she gave an account of the researches of the lawyers during the preceding seven months—interrupted in the middle by Phoebe.

'But why was John looking for us, after—after all this time?' she said, in a fainter, weaker voice, dropping at the same time into a chair.

Eugénie hesitated; then said, firmly, 'Because he wished to find you, more than anything else in the world. And my father and I helped him all we could—'

'But you didn't know?'—Phoebe caught piteously at her dress—'you didn't know—?'

'That Mr. Fenwick was married? No—never!—till last autumn. That was his wrong-doing, towards all his old friends.'

Phoebe looked at the dignity and pureness of the face before her, and shrank a little.

'And how was it found out?' she breathed, turning away.

'There was a Miss Morrison—'

'Bella Morrison!' cried Phoebe, suddenly, clasping her hands—'Bella!
Of course, she did it to disgrace him.'

'We never knew what her motive was. But she told—an old friend—who told us.'

'And then—what did John say?'

The wife's hands shook—her eyes were greedy for an answer.

'Oh! it was all miserable!' said Eugénie, with a gesture of emotion. 'It made my father very angry, and we could not be friends any more—as we had been. And Mr. Fenwick had a wretched winter. He was ill—and his painting seemed to go wrong—and he was terribly in need of money—and then came that day at the theatre—'

'I know,' whispered Phoebe, hanging on the speaker's lips—'when he saw Carrie?'

'It nearly killed him,' said Eugénie, gently. 'It was like a light kindled, and then blown out.'

Phoebe leant her head against the table before her, and began to sob—

'If I'd never let her go up that day! When we first landed I didn't know what to do—I couldn't make up my mind. We'd taken lodgings down at Guildford—near some acquaintances we'd made in Canada. And the girl was a great friend of Carrie's—we used to stay with them sometimes in Montreal. She had acted a little at Halifax and Montreal—and she wanted an opening in London—and somebody told her to apply at that theatre—I forget its name.'

'Halifax!' cried Eugénie—'Halifax, Nova Scotia? Oh, now I understand! We have searched England through. The stage-manager said one of the young ladies mentioned Halifax. Nobody ever thought—'

She paused. Phoebe said nothing; she was grappling with some of the new ideas presented to her.

'And this was his second search, you know,' said Eugénie, laying a hand timidly on Phoebe's shoulder. 'He had done all he could—when you left him. But when he lost sight of Carrie again—and so of you both—it wore his heart out. I can see it did. He is a broken man.' Her voice trembled. 'Oh, you will have to nurse—to comfort him. He has been in despair about his art—in despair about everything. He—'

But she checked herself. The rest was for him to tell.

'For a long time he seemed so—so—successful,' said Phoebe, plucking at the tablecloth, trying to compose voice and features.

'Yes—but it didn't last. He seemed to get angry with himself—and everybody else. He quarrelled with the Academy—and his work didn't improve—it went back. But then—when one's unhappy—'

Her smile and the pressure of her hand said the rest.

'He'll never forgive me!' said Phoebe, her voice thick and shaking.
'It can never be the same again. I was a fool to come home.'

Eugénie withdrew her hand. Unconsciously, a touch of sternness showed itself in her bearing, her pale features.

'No, no!'—she said, with energy. 'You will comfort him, Mrs. Fenwick—you will give him heart and hope again. It was a cruel thing—forgive me if I say it once!—it was a cruel thing to leave him! A man like that—with his weaknesses and his temperament—which are part of his gift really—its penalty—wants his wife at every turn—the woman who loves him—who understands. But to desert him for a suspicion!—a dream! Oh! Mrs. Fenwick, there are those who—who are really starved—really forsaken—really trampled under foot—by those they love!'

Her voice broke. She stood gazing straight before her, quivering with the passion of recollection. Phoebe looked up—awed—remembering what John had said, so long ago, of the unhappy marriage, the faithless and cruel husband. But Eugénie's hand touched her again.

'And I know that you thought—*I*—had made Mr. Fenwick—forget you. That was so strange! At that time—and for many years afterwards—my husband was still alive. If he had sent me a word—any day—any hour—I would have gone to him—to the ends of the world. I don't mean—I don't pretend—that my feeling for him remained unchanged. But my pride was—my duty was—that he should never find *me* lacking. And last year—he turned to me—I was able to help him—through his death. I had been his true wife—and he knew it.'

She spoke quietly, brushing the tears from her eyes. But with the last words, her voice wavered a little. Phoebe had bowed her head upon the hand which held hers, and there was no spectator of the feeling in Eugénie's face. Was her pure conscience tormented with the thought that she had not told all, and could never tell it? Her innocent tempting of Fenwick—as an act, partly, of piteous self-defence against impulses of quite another quality and power—this must remain her secret to the end. Sad evasions, which life forces upon even the noblest worshippers of truth!

After a minute she stooped and kissed Phoebe's golden hair.

'I was so glad to help Mr. Fenwick—he interested me so. If I had only known of you—and the child—why, how happy we might all have been!'

She withdrew her hand, and walked away to the window, trying to calm herself.

Phoebe rose and followed her.

'Do you know?'—she said, piteously—'can't you tell me?—will John take me back?'

Eugénie paused just a moment; then said, steadily, 'He is coming here, because you are his wife—because he is faithful to you—because he wants you. Don't agitate him too much! He wants resting and healing. And so do you!' She took Phoebe's hands again in hers. 'And how do you think anybody is to deny you anything, when you bring such a gift as that?'

Carrie and Miss Mason were entering the little garden. Eugénie's smile, as she motioned towards the girl, seemed to reflect the May sunshine and Carrie's young charm.

But after Madame de Pastourelles was gone, a cloud of nervous dread fell upon the little cottage and its inmates. Phoebe wandered restlessly about the garden, waiting—and listening—hour after hour.

The May evening drew towards sunset. Flame descended on the valley, striking athwart the opening which leads to its furthest recess, superbly guarded by the crags of Bowfell, and turning all the mountain-side above the cottage, still dyed with the fern of 'yesteryear,' to scarlet. A fresh breeze blew through the sycamore leaves, bringing with it the cool scents of rain-washed grass. All was hushed—richly hued—expectant—like some pageant waiting for its king.

Alas—poor king! In the full glory of the evening light, a man alighted from a wagonette at the foot of the cottage hill, and dragged his weary limbs up the steep ground. He opened the gate, looking round him slowly to right and left.

Then, in the porch, Fenwick saw his wife. He walked up to her, and gripped her wrists. She fell back with a stifled cry; and they stood there—speechless and motionless—looking into each other's eyes.

CHAPTER XIV

Phoebe first withdrew herself. In that first moment of contact, Fenwick's changed aspect had pierced her to the heart. But the shock itself brought self-control.

'Come in,' she said, mechanically; 'Miss Anna's gone out.'

'Where's Carrie?'

He followed her in, glancing from side to side.

'She—she'll be here directly.'

Phoebe's voice stumbled over the words.

Fenwick understood that the child and Anna Mason were leaving them to themselves, out of delicacy; and his exhaustion of mind and body recoiled impatiently from the prospect of a 'scene,' with which he felt himself wholly unable to cope. He had been sorely tempted to stay at Windermere, and telegraph that he was too ill to come that day. Such a course would at least have given him the night's respite. But a medley of feelings had prevailed over the impulse; and here he was.

They entered the little parlour, and he looked round him in amazement, muttering, 'Why, it looks just as it did—not a thing changed.'

Phoebe closed the door, and then turned to him, trembling.

'Won't you—won't you say you're glad to see me, John?'

He looked at her fixedly, then threw himself down beside the table, and rested his head on his hands.

'It's no good to suppose we can undo these twelve years,' he said, roughly; 'it's no good whatever to suppose that.'

'No,' said Phoebe—'I know.'

She too sat down on the other side of the table, deadly pale, not knowing what to say or do.

Suddenly he raised his head and looked at her, with his searching painter's eyes.

'My God!' he said, under his breath. 'We are changed, both of us—aren't we?'

She too studied the face before her—the grey hair, the red-rimmed eyes, of which the lids fluttered perpetually, shrinking from the light, the sombre mouth; and slowly a look of still more complete dismay overspread her own; reflected, as it were, from that half-savage discouragement and weariness which spoke from the drawn features, the neglected dress, and slouching figure, and seemed to make of the whole man one sore, wincing at a touch. Her heart sank—and sank.

'Can't we begin again?' she said, in a low voice, while the tears rose in her eyes. 'I'm sorry for what I did.'

'How does that help it?' he said, irritably. 'I'm a ruined man. I can't paint any more—or, at any rate, the world doesn't care a ha'p'orth *what* I paint. I should be a bankrupt—but for Madame de Pastourelles—'

'John!' cried Phoebe, bending forward—'I've got a little money—I saved it—and there are some shares a friend advised me to buy, that are worth a lot more than I gave for them. I've got eight hundred pounds—and it's all yours, John,—it's all yours.' She stretched out her hands in a yearning anguish, and touched his.

'What friend?' he said, with a quick, suspicious movement, taking no notice of her statement; 'and where have you been—all these years?'

He turned and looked at her sharply.

'I've been in Canada—on a farm—near Montreal.'

She held herself erect, speaking slowly and carefully, as though a moment had arrived for which she had long prepared; through rebellion, and through yielding; now in defiance, and now in fear: the moment when she should tell John the story of her flight. Her manner, indeed—for one who could have understood it—proved a curious thing; that never, throughout their separation, had she ceased to believe that she should see her husband again. There had been no finality in her action. In her eyes the play had been always going on, the curtain always up.

'You know I told you about Freddy—Freddy Tolson's—coming to see me—that night? Well, it was the things he said about Canada made me do it. Of course I didn't want to go where he was going. But he said that one could get to Canada for a few pounds, and it took about nine days. And it was a fine place, and any one could find work. He'd thought of it, he said, but as he had friends in Australia, he was going there. And so, when he'd left the cottage, I thought—if, when I came up to town—I—I did find what I expected—I'd take Carrie—and go to Canada.'

Fenwick rose, and, thrusting his hands into his pockets, began to walk up and down excitedly.

'And of course—as you expected it—you found it,' he said, bitterly. 'Who could ever have *conceived* that a woman could act in such a way! Why, I had been kissing your photograph the minute before! Lord Findon had been there, to tell me my pictures were in the Academy all right, and he'd given me five hundred pounds for them—and the cheque'—he stopped in front of her, rapping the table with his finger for emphasis—'the cheque was actually in the drawer!—under your hand—where I'd left it. It was too late to catch the North post for a letter to you, so I went out to tell one or two people, and on the way I bought some things for you at a shop—prettinesses that I'd never been able to give you. Why, I thought of nothing but you.'

His voice had risen to a cry. He stooped, bending over the table, his haggard face close to hers.

She recoiled, and burst into a wild sob:

'John, I—I couldn't know!'

'Well, go on,' he said, abruptly, raising himself—'go on. You found that picture in my room—I'll tell you about that presently—and you wrote me the letter. Well, then you went back to Euston, and you sent Daisy away. After that?'

His stern, sharp tone, which was really the result of a nerve-tension hardly to be borne, scared her. It was with painful difficulty that she collected her forces enough to meet his gaze and to reply.

'I took Carrie to Liverpool. We had to wait three days there. Then we got on a steamer for Québec. The voyage was dreadful. Carrie was ill, and I was so—so miserable! We stopped at Québec a little. But I felt so strange there, with all the people speaking French—so we went on to Montreal. And the

Government people there who look after the emigrants found me a place. I got work in an hotel—a sort of housekeeper. I looked after the linen, and the servants, and after a bit I learnt how to keep the accounts. They paid me eight dollars a week, and Carrie and I had a room at the top of the hotel. It was awfully hard work. I was so dead tired at night, sometimes, I couldn't undress. I would sit down on the side of my bed to rest my feet; and then the next thing I'd know would be waking in the morning, just as I was, in my clothes. But so long as I slept, it was all right. It was lying awake—that killed me!'

The trembling of her lips checked her, and she began to play nervously with the fringe of the tablecloth, trying to force back emotion. He had again seated himself opposite to her, and was observing her with a half-frowning attention, as of one in whom the brain action is physically difficult. He led her on, however, with questions, seeing how much she needed the help of them.

From Montreal, it appeared, she had gone to a fruit-farm in the Hamilton district, Ontario, as housekeeper to a widower with a family of children varying in age from five to sixteen. She had made the acquaintance of this man—a decent, rough, good-tempered fellow, Canadian-born—through the hotel. He had noticed her powers of management, and her overwork; and had offered her equal pay, an easier task, and country air, instead of the rush of Montreal.

'I accepted for Carrie's sake. It was an apple-farm, running down to Lake Ontario. I had to look after the house and the children—and to cook—and wash—and bake—and turn one's hand to anything. It wasn't too hard—and Carrie went to school with the others—and used to run about the farm. Mr. Crosson was very kind. His old mother was living there—or I—wouldn't have gone'—she flushed deeply—'but she was very infirm, and couldn't do anything. I took in two English papers—and used to get along somehow. Once I was ill, with congestion of the lungs, and once I went to Niagara, with some people who lived near. And I can hardly remember anything else happening. It was all just the same—day after day—I just seemed to be half-alive.'

'Ah! you felt that?' he said, eagerly—'you felt that? There's a stuff they call curare. You can't move—you're paralysed—but you feel horrible pain. That's what I used to feel like—for months and months. And then sometimes—it was different—as if I didn't care twopence about anything, except a little bit of pleasure—and should never vex myself about anything again. One was dead, and it didn't matter—was rather pleasant indeed.'

She was silent. Her seeking, pitiful eyes were on him perpetually, trying to make him out, to acquaint herself with this new personality, which spoke in these harsh staccato phrases—to reconcile it with the exciteable, sanguine, self-confident man whom she had deserted in his youth.

'Well,' he resumed, 'and what was your farmer like?' Then, suddenly—lifting his eyes—'Did he make love to you?'

She coloured hotly, and threw back her head.

'And if he did, it was no one's fault!—neither his nor mine. He wasn't a bad fellow!—and he wanted some one to look after his children.'

'Naturally. Quite content also to look after mine!' said Fenwick, with a laugh which startled her—resuming his agitated walk, a curious expression of satisfaction, triumph even, on his dark face. 'So *you* found yourself in a false position?'

He stopped to look at her, and his smile hurt her sorely. But she had made up her mind to a long patience, and she struggled on.

'It was partly that made me come home—that, and other things.'

'What other things?'

'Things—I saw—in some of the papers about you,' she said, with difficulty.

'What—that I was a flat failure?—a quarrelsome ass, and that kind of thing? You began to pity me?'

'Oh, John, don't talk to me like that?' She held out her hands to him in appealing misery. 'I was *sorry*, I tell you!—I saw how I'd behaved to you. I thought if you hadn't been getting on, perhaps it was my fault. It upset me altogether!'

But he didn't relent. He stood still—fiercely interrogative—his hands in his pockets, on the other side of the table.

'And what else was there?'

Phoebe choked back her tears.

'There was a woman—who came to live near us—who had been a maid—'
She hesitated.

'Please go on!'

'Maid to Madame de Pastourelles'—she said, hastily, stumbling over the French name.

He exclaimed:

'In Ontario!'

'She married a man she had been engaged to for years; he'd been making a home for her out there. I liked her directly I saw her; and she was too delicate for the life; she came in the fall, and the winter tried her dreadfully. I used to go in to nurse her—she was very much alone—and she told me all about herself—and about—'

'Madame?'

Phoebe nodded, her eyes swimming again in tears.

'And you found out you'd been mistaken?'

She nodded again.

'You see—she talked about her to me a great deal. Of course I—I never said anything. She'd been with her fifteen years—and she just worshipped her. And she told me about her bad husband—how she'd nursed him, and that—and how he died last year!'

A wild colour leapt into Fenwick's cheeks.

'And you began to think—there might be a false position—there too—between her and me?'

His cruel, broken words stung her intolerably. She sprang up, looking at him fiercely.

'And if I did, it wasn't all selfishness. Can't you understand, I might have been afraid for her—and you—as well as for myself?'

He moved again to the window, and stood with head bent, twisting his lip painfully.

'And to-day you've seen her?' he said, still looking out.

'Yes—she was very, very kind,' said Phoebe, humbly.

He paused a moment, then broke out—

'And now you see—what you did!—what a horrible thing!—for the most ridiculous reasons! But after you'd left me—in that way—you couldn't expect me to give her up—her friendship—all I had. For nine or ten years, if I prospered at all, I tell you it was her doing—because she upheld me—because she inspired me—because her mere existence shamed me out of doing—well, what I could never have resisted, but for her. If I ever did good work, it was her doing—if I have been faithful to you, in spite of everything, it was her doing too!'

He sank down upon the window-seat—his face working. And suddenly
Phoebe was at his knees.

'Oh, John—John—forgive me!—do, John!—try and forgive me!' She caught his hands in hers, kissing them, bathing them with her tears. 'John, we *can* begin again!—we're not so old. You'll have a long rest—and I'll work for you night and day. We'll go abroad with some of my money. Don't you know how you always said, if you could study abroad a bit, what good it'd do you? We'll go, won't we? And you'll paint as well as ever—you'll get everything back. Oh, John! don't hate me!—don't hate me! I've loved you always—always—even when I was so mad and cruel to you. Every night in Canada, I used to long for it to be morning—and then in the morning I longed for it to be night. Nothing was any good to me, or any pleasure—without you. But at first, I was just in despair—I thought I'd lost you for ever—could never, never come back. And then afterwards—when I wanted to come back—when I knew I'd been wicked—I didn't know how to do it—how to face it. I was frightened—frightened of what you'd say to me—how you'd look!'

She paused, her arms flung round him, her tear-stained face upraised. In her despair, and utter sincerity, she was once more beautiful—with a tragic beauty of character and expression, not lost for

one moment upon the man beside her.

He laid his right hand on her head amid the masses of her fair hair, and held it there, forcing her head back a little, studying her in a bitter passion—the upper lip drawn back a little over the teeth, which held and tormented the lower.

'Twelve years!' he said, slowly, after a minute, his eyes plunging into hers—'twelve years! What do you know of me now?—or I of you? I should offend you twenty times a day. And—perhaps—it might be the same with me.'

Phoebe released herself, and laid her head against his knee.

'John!—take me back—take me back!'

'Why did you torture me?' he said, hoarsely. 'You sent me Carrie six weeks ago—and then swept her away again.'

She cried out. 'It was the merest accident!' And volubly—abjectly—she explained.

He listened to her, but without seeming to understand—his own mind working irrelevantly all the time. And presently he interrupted her.

'Besides—I'm unhinged—I'm not fit to have women dependent on me. I can't answer for myself. Yesterday—if that picture had come at eight o'clock instead of seven—it would have been too late!'

His voice altered strangely.

Phoebe fell back upon the floor, huddled together—staring at him.

'What do you mean?'

'I should have destroyed myself. That's what I mean. I had made up my mind. It was just touch and go.'

Phoebe sat speechless. It seemed as though her eyes—so wide and terrified—were fixed in their places, and could not release him. He moved impatiently; the appeal, the horror of them, were more than he could bear.

'And much better for you if I had!—and as for Carrie!—Ah!—good
Heavens! there she is.'

He sprang up in agitation, looking through the open window, yet withdrawing from it. Phoebe too rose, the colour rushing back into her cheeks. This was to be her critical, her crucial moment. If she recovered him, she was to owe it to her child.

Carrie and Miss Mason came along the path together. They had been in a wood beside the Elterwater road; not knowing how to talk to each other; wandering apart, and gathering flowers idly, to pass the time. Carrie held a large bunch of bluebells in her hand. She wore a cotton dress of greyish-blue, just such a dress as Phoebe might have worn in her first youth. The skirt was short, and showed her tripping feet. Under her shady hat with its pink rose, her eyes glanced timidly towards the house, and then withdrew themselves again. Fenwick saw that the eyes were in truth darker than Phoebe's, and the hair much darker—no golden mist like her mother's, but nearer to his own—a warm brown, curly and vigorous. Her face was round and rosy, but so delicately cut and balanced, it affected him with a thrill of delight. He perceived also that she was very small—smaller than he had thought, in the theatre. But at the same time, her light proportions had in them no hint of weakness or fragility. If she were a fairy, she was no twilight spirit, but rather a cheerful dawn-fairy—one of those happy household sprites that help the work of man.

He went and opened the door for them, trembling.

Carrie saw him there—paused—and then walked on quickly—ahead of
Miss Mason.

'Father!' she said, gravely, and looking at him, she held out her hand.

He took it, and then, drawing her to him, he kissed her hurriedly.

Carrie's cheeks grew very red, and her eyes moist, for a moment. But she had long since determined not to cry—because poor mummy would be sure to.

'I guess you'll be wanting your tea,' she said, shyly, looking from him to her mother; 'I'll go and see to it.'

Miss Anna came up behind, concealing as best she could the impression made upon her by the husband and wife as they stood in the porch, under the full western light. Alack! here was no happy meeting!—and it was no good pretending.

[Illustration: *Robin Ghyll Cottage*]

Fenwick greeted her with little or no demonstration of any sort, though he and she, also, had never met since the year of Phoebe's flight. His sunken eyes indeed regarded her with a look that seemed to hold her at bay—a strange look full of bitterness. She understood it to mean that he was not there to lend himself to any sham sentimental business; and that physically he was ill, and could stand no strain, whatever women might wish.

After a few questions about his journey, Miss Anna quietly begged him to come in and rest. He hesitated a moment, then with his hands in his pockets followed her to the parlour; while Phoebe, with Carrie's arm round her, went falteringly upstairs.

Miss Anna made no scene and asked for no information. She and Carrie bustled to and fro, preparing supper. Fenwick at his own request remained alone in the parlour. But when supper-time came, it was evident that he was too feeble to face an ordinary meal. He lay back in Miss Anna's armchair with closed eyes, and took no notice of Phoebe's timid summons. The women looked in upon him, alarmed and whispering together. Then Miss Anna drew Phoebe away, and mixing some milk and brandy sent Carrie in with it. 'He will go away to-morrow!' she said, in Phoebe's ear, referring to a muttered saying of the patient,—'we shall see!'

As Carrie entered the parlour with the milk and brandy, Fenwick looked up.

'Where am I to sleep?' he asked her, abruptly, his eyes lingering on her.

'In my room,' she said, softly; 'I'm going in to Miss Anna. I've lengthened the bed!'

A faint smile flickered over his face.

'How did you do that?'

'I nailed on a packing-case. Isn't it queer?—Miss Anna hadn't any tools. I had to borrow some at the farm—and they were the poorest scratch lot you ever saw. Why, everybody in Canada has tools.'

He held her with a shaking hand, still looking intently at her bright face.

'Did you like Canada?'

She smiled.

'Why, it's *lovely*!'

Then her lips parted eagerly. She would have liked to go on talking, to make acquaintance. But she refrained. This man—this strange new father—was 'sick'—and must be kept quiet.

'Will you help me up to bed?' he murmured—as she was just going away.

She obeyed, and he leant on her shoulder as they mounted the steep cottage stair. Her physical strength astonished him—the amount of support that this child of seventeen was able to give him.

She led him into his room, where she had already brought his bag, and unpacked his things.

'Is it all right, father? Do you want anything else? Shall I send mother?'

'No, no,' he said, hastily—'I'm all right. Tell them I'm all right; I only want to go to sleep.'

She turned at the door, and looked at him wistfully.

'I did make that mattress over—part of it. But it's a real bad one.'

He nodded, and she went.

'A dream!' he said to himself—'*a dream*!'

He was thinking of the child as she stood bathed in the mingled glory of sunset and moonlight flowing

in upon her from the open window; for the long day of northern summer was still lingering in the valley.

'Ah! if I could only *paint*!—oh, God, if I could *paint*!' he groaned aloud, rubbing his hands together in a fever of impotence and misery.

Then he tumbled into bed, and lay there weak and passive, feeling the strangeness of the remembered room, of the open casement window, of the sycamore outside, and the mountain forms beyond it; of this pearly or golden light in which everything was steeped.

In the silence he heard the voice of the beck, as it hurried down the ghyll. Twelve years since he had heard it last; and the eternal water 'at its priestlike task' still murmured with the rocks, still drank the rain, and fed the river. No rebellion there, no failure; no helpless will!

He tried to think of Phoebe, to remember what she had said to him. He wondered if he had been merely brutal to her. But his heart seemed a dry husk within him. It was, as it had been. He could neither think nor feel.

Next day he was so ill that a doctor was sent for. He prescribed long rest, said all excitement must be avoided, all work put away.

Four or five dreary weeks followed. Fenwick stayed in bed most of the day, struggled down to the garden in the afternoon, was nursed by the three women, and scarcely said a word from morning till night that was not connected with some bodily want or discomfort. He showed no repugnance to his wife, would let her wait upon him, and sit beside him in the garden. But he made no spontaneous movement towards her whatever; and the only person who evidently cheered him was Carrie. He watched the child incessantly—in her housework, her sewing, her gardening, her coaxing of her pale mother, her fun with Miss Anna, who was by now her slave. There was something in the slight foreignness of her ways and accent, in her colonial resource and independence that delighted and amused him like a pleasant piece of acting. She had the cottage under her thumb. By now she had cleaned all the furniture, 'coloured' most of the walls, and mended all the linen, which had been in a sad condition—Miss Anna's powers being rather intellectual than practical. And through it all she kept a natural daintiness and refinement, was never clumsy, or loud, or untidy. She came and went so lightly —and always bringing with her the impression of something hidden and fragrant, a happiness within, that gave a dancing grace and perfume to all her life.

To her father she chattered mostly of Canada, and he would sit in the shade of the cottage, listening to her while she described their life; the big, rambling farm, the children she had been brought up with, the great lake with its ice and its storms, the apple-orchards, the sleighing in winter, the beauty of the fall, the splendour of the summers, the boom that was beginning 'up west.' Cunningly, in fact, she set the stage for an actor to come; but his 'cue' was not yet.

It was only from her, indeed, that he would hear of these things. If Phoebe ventured on them his manner stiffened at once. Miss Anna's strong impression was, still, that with his wife he was always on his guard against demands he felt himself physically unable to meet. Yet it seemed to her, as time went on, that he was more and more aware of Phoebe, more sensitive to her presence, her voice.

She too watched Phoebe, and with a growing, involuntary respect. This changed woman had endured 'hardness,' had at last followed her conscience; and, rebuffed and unforgiven as she seemed to be, she was clothed none the less in a new dignity, modest and sad, but real. She might be hopeless of recovering her husband; but all the same, the law which links that strange thing, spiritual peace, with certain surrenders, had already begun to work, unknown even to herself.

As she moved about the cottage and garden, indeed, new contacts, new relations, slowly established themselves, unseen and unexpressed, between her and the man who scarcely noticed her in words, from morning till night. 'I should offend you twenty times a day,' he had said to her—'and perhaps it might be the same with me!' But they did not offend each other!—that was the merciful new fact, asserting itself through this silent, suspended time. She was still beautiful. The mountain air restored her clear, pure colour; and what time had robbed her of in bloom it had given her back in *character*—the artist's supreme demand. Self-control, bitterly learnt—fresh capacities, moral or practical—these expressed themselves in a thousand trifles. Not only in her tall slenderness and fairness was she presently a challenge to Fenwick's sharpening sense; she began, in a wholly new degree, to interest his intelligence. Her own had blossomed; and in spite of grief, she had brought back with her some of the ways of a young and tiptoe world. Soon he was, in secret, hungry for her history—the history he had so far refused to hear. Who was this man who had made love to her?—how far had it gone?—he tossed at nights thinking of it. There came a time when he would gladly have exchanged Carrie's gossip for hers; and through her soft silence, as she sat beside him, he would hear suddenly, in memory, the echoes of her girlish voice, and make a quick movement towards her—only to check himself in shyness or pride.

Meanwhile he could not know that he too had grown in her eyes, as she in his. In spite of all his errors and follies, he had not wrestled with his art, he had not lived among his intellectual peers, he had not known Eugénie de Pastourelles through twelve years, for nothing. Embittered he was, but also refined. The nature had grown harsher and more rugged—but also larger, more complex, more significant, better worth the patiences of love. As for his failure, the more she understood it, the more it evoked in her an angry advocacy, a passionate championship, a protesting faith—which she had much ado to hide.

And all this time letters came occasionally from Madame de Pastourelles—indifferently to her or to him—full of London artistic gossip, the season being now in full swim, of sly stimulus and cheer. As they handed them to each other, without talking of them, it was as though the shuttle of fate flew from life to life—these in Langdale, and that in London—weaving the three into a new pattern which day by day replaced and hid away the old.

The days lengthened towards midsummer. After a spell of rain, June descended in blossom and sunshine on the Westmoreland vales. The hawthorns were out, and the wild cherries. The bluebells were fading in the woods, but in the cottage gardens the lilacs were all fragrance, and the crown-imperials showed their heads of yellow and red. Each valley and hillside was a medley of soft and shimmering colour, save in the higher, austerer dales, where, as in Langdale, the woods scarcely climb, and the bare pastures have only a livelier emerald to show, or the crags a warmer purple, as their testimony to the spring.

Fenwick was unmistakeably better. The signs of it were visible in many directions. His passive, silent ways, so alien to his natural self and temperament, were at last breaking down.

One evening, Carrie, who had been to Elterwater, brought back some afternoon letters. They included a letter from Canada, which Carrie read over her mother's shoulder, laughing and wondering. Phoebe was sitting on a bench in the garden, an old yew-tree just above her on the slope. The heads of both mother and child were thrown out sharply on the darkness of the yew background—Phoebe's profile, upturned, and the abundant coils of her hair, were linked in harmonious line with the bending figure and beautiful head of the girl.

Suddenly Fenwick put down the newspaper which Carrie had brought him. He rose, muttered something, and went into the house. They could hear him rummaging in his room, where Phoebe had lately unpacked some boxes forwarded from London. He had never so far touched brush or crayon during his stay at the cottage.

Presently he returned with a canvas and palette.

'Don't go!' he said, peremptorily, to Carrie, raising his hand. 'Stand as you were before.'

'You don't want me?' asked Phoebe, startled, her pale cheeks suddenly pink.

'Yes, yes, I do!' he said, impatiently. 'For God's sake, don't move, either of you!'

He went back for an easel, then sat down and began to paint.

They held themselves as still as mice. Carrie could see her mother's hands trembling on her lap.

Suddenly Fenwick said, in emotion:

'I don't know how it is—but I *see* much better than I did.'

Miss Anna looked up from the low wall on which she was sitting.

'The doctor said you would, John, when you got strong,' she put in, quickly. 'He said you'd been suffering from your eyes a long time without knowing it. It was nerves like the rest.'

Fenwick said nothing. He went on painting, painting fast and freely—for nearly an hour. All the time Phoebe could hardly breathe. It was as though she felt the doors opening upon a new room in the House of Life.

[Illustration: *Fenwick stood looking at the canvas*]

Then the artist threw his canvas on the grass, and stood looking at it.

'By Jove!' he said, presently. 'By Jove!—that'll do.'

Phoebe said nothing. Carrie came up to him and put her hand in his arm.

'Father, that's enough. Don't do any more.'

'All right. Take it away—and all these things.'

She lifted the sketch, the palette and brushes, and carried them into the house.

Then Fenwick looked up irresolutely. His wife was still sitting on the bench. She had her sewing in her hands.

'Your hair's as pretty as ever, Phoebe,' he said, in a queer voice. Phoebe raised her deep lids slowly, and her eyes spoke for her. She would offer herself no more—implore no more—but he knew in that moment that she loved him more maturely, more richly, than she had ever loved him in the old days. A shock, that was also a thrill, ran through him. They remained thus for some seconds gazing at each other. Then, as Carrie returned, Phoebe went into the house.

Carrie studied her father for a little, and then came to sit down on the grass beside him. Miss Anna had gone for a walk along the fell.

'Are you feeling better, father?'

'Yes—a good deal.'

'Well, then—now—I can tell you *my* news.'

And she deliberately drew out a photograph from her pocket, and held it up to him.

'Well'—said Fenwick, mystified. 'Who's the young man?'

'He's *my* young man'—was Carrie's entirely self-possessed reply.
'I'm going to marry him.'

'*What*?' cried Fenwick. 'Show him to me.'

Carrie yielded up her treasure rather timidly.

Fenwick looked at the picture, then put it down angrily.

'What nonsense are you talking, Carrie! Why, you're only a baby. You oughtn't to be thinking of any such things.'

Carrie shook her head resolutely. 'I'm not a baby. I've been in love with him more than a year.'

'Upon my word!' said Fenwick; 'who allowed you to be in love with him? And has it never occurred to you—lately—that you'd have to ask my leave?'

Carrie hesitated. 'In Canada I wouldn't have to,' she said, at last, decidedly.

'Oh! they've abolished the Fifth Commandment there, have they?'

'No, no. But the girls choose for themselves!' said Carrie, tossing back her brown curls with the slightest touch of defiance.

Fenwick observed her, his brow clouding.

'And you suppose that I'm going to say "Yes" at once to this mad proposal?—that I'm going to give you up altogether, just as I've got you back? I warn you at once, I shall not consent to any such thing!'

There was silence. Fenwick sat staring at her, his lips moving, angry sentences of authority and reproach forming themselves in his mind—but without coming to speech. It was intolerable, inhuman—that at this very moment, when he wanted her most, this threat of fresh loss should be sprung upon him. She was *his*—his property. He would not give her up to any Canadian fellow, and he altogether disapproved of such young love-affairs.

'Father,' said Carrie, after a moment, 'when George asked me—we didn't know—'

'About me? Well, now you do know,' said Fenwick, roughly. 'I'm here—and I have my rights.'

He put out his hand and seized her arm, looking at her, devouring her, in a kind of angry passion.

Carrie grew a little pale, and, coming nearer, she laid her head against his knee.

'Father, you don't understand what we propose.'

'Well, out with it, then!'

'We wouldn't think about being married for three years. Why, of course we wouldn't! I don't want to be all settled that soon. And, besides, we're going abroad—you and mummy and I. I'm going to take you!' She sat up, tossing her pretty head, her eyes as bright as stars.

'And be thinking all the time of the Canadian chap?—bored with everything!' growled Fenwick.

Carrie surveyed him. A film of tears sparkled.

'I'm never bored. Father!'—she held herself erect, throwing all her soul into every word—'George is—*awfully—nice!*'

Ah! the 'life-force'! There it was before him, embodied in this light, ardent creature, on whose brown head and white dress the June sun streamed through the sycamore-leaves. With a groan—suddenly—Fenwick weakened.

'What's his horrid name?—who is he?—quick!'

Carrie gave a little crow—and began to talk, sitting there on the grass, with her hands round her knees. The interloper, it appeared, had every virtue and every prospect. What was to be done? Presently Carrie crept up to him again.

'Father!—he wants to come to Europe. When you've found a plan—if we let him come and hitch up alongside of us somewhere—why, he wouldn't be any trouble!—*I'd* see to that! And you don't know whether—whether a son—mightn't suit you! Why!—you've never tried!'

He made an effort, and held her at arm's length.

'I tell you, I can say nothing about it—nothing—till George has written to *me*!'

'But he has—this mail!' And in triumph she hastily dragged a letter out of the little bag at her waist, and gave it him. 'It came this afternoon, only I didn't know if you might have it.'

He laughed excitedly, and took it.

An hour later Fenwick rose. The day had grown cool. A fresh breeze was blowing from the north down the fell-side. He put his arm round Carrie as she stood beside him, kissed her, and in a gruff, unintelligible voice, murmured something that brought the tears again to her eyes. Then he announced that he was going for a short walk. Neither Phoebe nor Miss Anna were to be seen. Carrie protested on the score of his health.

'Nonsense! The doctor said I might do what I felt I could do.'

'Then you must say good-bye to me. For Miss Anna and I are going directly.'

Fenwick looked scared, but was soon reminded that Miss Anna was to drive the child that evening to Bowness, where Carrie was to be introduced to some old friends of Miss Anna's and stay with them a couple of days. He evidently did not like the prospect, but he made no audible protest against it, as he would perhaps have done a week before.

Carrie watched him go—followed his figure with her eyes along the road.

'And I'm glad *we're* off!'—she said to herself, her small feet dancing—'we've been cumbering this ground, Miss Anna and I—a deal too long!'

He was soon nearly a mile from home; rejoicing strangely in his recovered power of movement, and in the freshness of the evening air. He found himself on a hill above Elterwater, looking back on the lake, and on a wide range of hills beyond, clothed, in all their lower slopes, with the full leaf of June. Wood rose above wood, in every gradation of tone and loveliness, creeping upwards through blue haze, till they suddenly lost hold on the bare peaks, which rose, augustly clear, into the upper sky. The lake with its deep or glowing reflexions—its smiling shore—the smoke of its few houses—lay below him; and between him and it, glistening sharply, in a sun-steeped magic, upon the blue and purple background of the hills and woods—a wild cherry, in its full mantle of bridal white.

What tranquillity!—what colour!—what infinite variety of beauty! His heart swelled within him. Life of the body—and life of the soul—seemed to be flowing back upon him, lifting him on its wave, steeping him in its freshening strength. 'My God!' he thought, remembering the sketch he had just made, and the mastery with which he had worked—'if I am able to paint again!—if I am!'

An ecstasy of hope arose in him. What if really there had been something wrong with his eyes!—something that rest might set right? What if he had wanted rest for years?—and had gone on defying nature and common sense?

And in a moment, as he sat there, looking out into the evening, the old whirl of images invaded him—the old tumult of ideas—clamouring for shape and form—flitting, phantom-like, along the woods and over the bosom of the lake. He let himself be carried along, urging his brain, his fancy, filled with indescribable happiness. It was years since the experience had last befallen him! Did it mean the return of youth?—conception?—creative power? What matter!—years, or hardship?—if the mind could still imagine, the hand still shape?

He thought of his own series of the 'Months'—which he had planned among these hills, and had carried out perfunctorily and vulgarly, in the city, far from the freshness and infinity of Nature. All the faults of his designs appeared to him, and the poverty of their execution. But he was only exultant, not depressed. Now that he could judge himself, now that his brain had begun to react once more, with this vigour, this wealth of idea—surely all would be well.

Then for the first time he thought of the money which Phoebe had saved. Abroad! Italy?—or France? To go as a wanderer and a student, on pilgrimage to the sources of beauty and power. What was old, or played out? Not Beauty!—not the mind within him—not his craftsman's sense. He threw himself on the grass, face downwards, praying as he had been wont to do in his youth, but in a far more mystical, more inward way; not to a far-off God, invited to come down and change or tamper with external circumstance; but to something within himself, identified with himself, the power of beauty in him, the resurgent forces of hope—and love.

At last, after a long time, as the summer twilight was waning, there struck through his dream the thought of Phoebe—alone in the cottage—waiting for him. He sprang up, and began to hurry down the hill.

Phoebe was quite alone. The little servant who only came for the day had gone back to the farm where she slept, and Carrie and Miss Anna had long since departed on their visit.

Carrie had told her mother that 'father' had gone for a walk. And strangely enough, though he was away two hours, and she knew him still far from his usual strength, Phoebe was not anxious. But she was mortally tired—as though of a sudden a long tension had been loosened, a long effort relaxed.

So she had gone upstairs to bed. But she had not begun to undress, and she sat in a low chair near the window, with the casements wide open, and the twin-peaks visible through them under a starry sky. Her head had fallen back against the chair; her hands were folded on her lap.

Then she heard Fenwick come in and his step coming up the stairs.

It paused outside her door, and her heart beat so that she could hardly bear it.

'May I come in?'

It seemed to her that he did not wait for her low reply. He came in, and shut the door. There was a bright colour in his face, and his breath came fast, as he stood beside her, with his hands on his sides.

'Are you sure you like my coming?' he said, brusquely.

She did not answer in words, but she put out her hand, and drew him towards her.

He knelt down by her, and she flung an arm round his neck, and laid her fair head on his shoulder with a long sigh.

'You are very tired?'

'No. I knew you would come.'

A silence. Then he said, waveringly, stooping over her:

'Phoebe—I was very hard to you. But there was a black pall on me—and now it's lifting. Will you forgive me?—my dear—my dear!'

She clung to him with a great cry. And once more the torrent of love and repentance was unsealed, which had been arrested through all these weeks. In broken words—in mutual confession—each helping, each excusing the other—the blessed healing time passed on its way; till suddenly, as her hand dropped again upon her knee, he noticed, as he had often bitterly noticed before, the sham wedding-ring on the third finger.

She saw his eyes upon it, and flushed.

'I had to, John,' she pleaded. 'I had to.'

He said nothing, but he thrust his hand into the breast-pocket of his coat, and brought out the same large pocket-book which still held her last letter to him. He took out the letter, and offered it to her. 'Don't read it,' he said, peremptorily. 'Tear it up.'

She recognised it, with a sob, and, trembling, did as he bade her. He gathered up the small fragments of it, took them to the grate, and lit a match under them. Then he returned to her—still holding the open pocket-book.

'Give me your hand.'

She held it out to him, bewildered. He slowly drew off the ring, put it aside; then from the inmost fold of the pocket-book he took another ring, slipt it on her finger, and kissed the hand. After which he knelt down again beside her, and they clung to each other—close and long.

'I return it'—he murmured—'after twelve years! God bless you for Carrie. God bless you for coming back to me. We'll go to Italy. You shall do that for me. But I'll repay you—if I live. Now, are you happy? Why, we're young yet!'

And so they kissed; knowing well that the years are irreparable, and yet defying them; conscious, as first youth is never conscious, of the black forces which surround our being, and yet full of passionate hope; aware of death, as youth is never aware of it, and yet determined to shape something out of life; sad and yet rejoicing, 'cast down, but not destroyed.'

EPILOGUE

Of Eugénie, still a few words remain to say. About a year after Fenwick's return she lost her father. A little later Elsie Welby died. To the end of her life she had never willingly accepted Eugénie's service, and the memory of this, alack, is for Eugénie among the pains that endure. What influence it may have had upon her later course can hardly be discussed here. She continued to live in Westminster, and to be the friend of many. One friend was tacitly accepted by all who loved her as possessing a special place and special privileges. Encouraged and inspired by her, Arthur Welby outlived the cold and academic manner of his later youth, and in the joy of richer powers, and the rewards of an unstained and pure affection, he recovered much that life seemed once to have denied him. Eugénie never married him. In friendship, in ideas, in books, she found the pleasures of her way. Part of her life she spent—with yearning and humility—among the poor. But with them she never accomplished much. She was timid in their presence, and often unwise; neither side understood the other. Her real sphere lay in what a great Oxford preacher once enforced at St. Mary's, as—'our duty to our equals'—the hardest of all. Her influence, her mission, were with her own class; with the young girls just 'out,' who instinctively loved and clung to her; with the tired or troubled women of the world, who felt her presence as the passage of something pure and kindling which evoked their better selves; and with those men, in whom the intellectual life wages its difficult war with temperament and circumstance, for whom beauty and truth are realities, and yet—great also is Diana of the Ephesians! Thus in her soft, glancing, woman's way, she stood with 'the helpers and friends of mankind.' But she never knew it. In her own opinion, few persons were so unprofitable as she; and but for her mystical belief, the years would have brought her melancholy. They left her smile, however, undimmed. For the mystic carries within a little flame of joy, very hard to quench. The wind of Death itself does but stir and strengthen it.

[Illustration: *Robin Ghyll Cottage*]

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