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A
DOZEN WAYS OF LOVE

BY
L. DOUGALL

AUTHOR OF 'BEGGARS ALL,' 'THE ZEITGEIST,' 'THE MADONNA OF A DAY,' ETC.

LONDON
ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK
1897

TO
M. S. E.

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I

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YOUNG LOVE

It was after dark on a November evening. A young woman came down the main street of a small town in the south of Scotland. She was a maid-servant, about thirty years old; she had a pretty, though rather strong-featured, face, and yellow silken hair. When she came toward the end of the street she turned into a small draper's shop. A middle-aged woman stood behind the counter folding her wares.

'Can ye tell me the way to Mistress Macdonald's?' asked the maid.

'Ye'll be a stranger.' It was evident that every one in those parts knew the house inquired for.

The maid had a somewhat forward, familiar manner; she sat down to rest. 'What like is she?'

The shopkeeper bridled. 'Is it Mistress Macdonald?' There was reproof in the voice. 'She is much respectet—none more so. It would be before you were born that every one about here knew Mistress Macdonald.'

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'Well, what family is there?' The maid had a sweet smile; her voice fell into a cheerful coaxing tone, which had its effect.

'Ye'll be the new servant they'll be looking for. Is it walking ye are from the station? Well, she had six children, had Mistress Macdonald.'

'What ages will they be?'

The woman knit her brows; the problem set her was too difficult. 'I couldna tell ye just exactly. There's Miss Macdonald—she that's at home yet; she'll be over fifty.'

'Oh!' The maid gave a cheerful note of interested understanding. 'It'll be her perhaps that wrote to me; the mistress'll be an old lady.'

'She'll be nearer ninety than eighty, I'm thinking.' There was a moment's pause, which the shop-woman filled with sighs. 'Ye'll be aware that it's a sad house ye're going to. She's verra ill is Mistress Macdonald. It's sorrow for us all, for she's been hale and had her faculties. She'll no' be lasting long now, I'm thinking.'

'No,' said the maid, with good-hearted pensiveness; 'it's not in the course of nature that she should.' She rose as she spoke, as if it behoved her to begin her new duties with alacrity, as there

might not long be occasion for them. She put another question before she went. 'And who will there be living in the house now?' [Pg 5]

'There's just Miss Macdonald that lives with her mother; and there's Mistress Brown—she'll be coming up most of the days now, but she dinna live there; and there's Ann Johnston, that's helping Miss Macdonald with the nursing—she's been staying at the house for a year back. That's all that there'll be of them besides the servants, except that there's Dr. Robert. His name is Macdonald, too, ye know; he's a nephew, and he's the minister o' the kirk here. He goes up every day to see how his aunt's getting on. I'm thinking he'll be up there now; it's about his time for going.'

The maid took the way pointed out to her. Soon she was walking up a gravel path, between trim, old-fashioned laurel hedges. She stood at the door of a detached house. It was an ordinary middle-class dwelling—comfortable, commodious, ugly enough, except that stolidity and age did much to soften its ugliness. It had, above all, the air of being a home—a hospitable open-armed look, as if children had run in and out of it for years, as if young men had gone out from it to see the world and come back again to rest, as if young girls had fluttered about it, confiding their sports and their loves to its ivy-clad walls. Now there hung about it a silence and sobriety that were like the shadows of coming oblivion. The gas was turned low in the hall. The old-fashioned omnibus that came lumbering from the railway with a box for the new maid seemed to startle the place with its noise. [Pg 6]

In the large dining-room four people were sitting in dreary discussion. The gas-light flared upon heavy mahogany furniture, upon red moreen curtains and big silver trays and dishes. By the fire sat the two daughters of the aged woman. They both had grey hair and wrinkled faces. The married daughter was stout and energetic; the spinster was thin, careworn and nervous. Two middle-aged men were listening to a complaint she made; the one was Robert Macdonald the minister, the other was the family doctor.

'It's no use Robina's telling me that I must coax my mother to eat, as if I hadn't tried that'—the voice became shrill—'I've begged her, and prayed her, and reasoned with her.'

'No, no, Miss Macdonald—no, no,' said the doctor soothingly. 'You've done your best, we all understand that; it's Mistress Brown that's thinking of the situation in a wrong light; it's needful to be plain and to say that Mistress Macdonald's mind is affected.'

Robina Brown interposed with indignation and authority.

'My mother has always had her right mind; she's been losing her memory. All aged people lose their memories.' [Pg 7]

The minister spoke with a meditative interest in a psychological phenomenon. 'Ay, she's been losing it backwards; she forgot who we were first, and remembered us all as little children; then she forgot us and your father altogether. Latterly she's been living back in the days when her father and mother were living at Kelsey Farm. It's strange to hear her talk. There's not, as far as I know, another being on this wide earth of all those that came and went to Kelsey Farm that is alive now.'

Miss Macdonald wiped her eyes; her voice shook as she spoke; the nervousness of fatigue and anxiety accentuated her grief. 'She was asking me how much butter we made in the dairy to-day, and asking if the curly cow had her calf, and what Jeanie Trim was doing.'

'Who was Jeanie Trim?' asked the minister.

'How should I know? I suppose she was one of the Kelsey servants.'

'Curious,' ejaculated the minister. 'This Jeanie will have grown old and died, perhaps, forty years ago, and my aunt's speaking of her as if she was a young thing at work in the next room!'

'And what did you say to Mistress Macdonald?' the doctor asked, with a cheerful purpose in his tone.

'I explained to her that her poor head was wandering.'

'Nay, now, but, Miss Macdonald, I'm thinking if I were you I would tell her that the curly cow had her calf.' [Pg 8]

'I never'—tearfully—'told my mother a falsehood in my life, except when I was a very little girl, and then'—Miss Macdonald paused to wipe her eyes—'she spoke to me so beautifully out of the Bible about it.'

The married sister chimed in mournfully, 'How often have I heard my mother say that not one of her children had ever told her a lie!'

'Yes, yes, but——' There was a tone in the doctor's voice as if he would like to have used a strong word, but he schooled himself.

'It's curious the notion she has got of not eating,' broke in the minister. 'I held the broth myself, but she would have none of it.'

In the next room the flames of a large fire were sending reflections over the polished surfaces of massive bedroom furniture. The wind blew against this side of the house and rattled the

windows, as if angry to see the picture of luxury and warmth within. It was a handsome stately room, and all that was in it dated back many a year. In a chintz arm-chair by the fireside its mistress sat—a very old lady, but there was still dignity in her pose. Her hair, perfectly white, was still plentiful; her eye had still something of brightness, and there was upon the aged features the cast of thought and the habitual look of intelligence. Beside her upon a small table were such accompaniments of age as daughter and nurse deemed suitable—the large print Bible, the big spectacles and caudle cup. The lady sat looking about her with a quick restless expression, like a prisoner alert to escape; she was tied to her chair—not by cords—by the failure of muscular strength; but perhaps she did not know that. She eyed her attendant with bright furtive glances, as if the meek sombre woman who sat sewing beside her were her jailer.

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The party in the dining-room broke up their vain discussion, and came for another visit of personal inspection.

'Mother, this is the doctor come to see you. Do you not remember the doctor?'

The old lady looked at all four of them brightly enough. 'I haena the pleasure of remembering who ye are, but perhaps it will return to me.' There was restrained politeness in her manner.

The doctor spoke. 'It's a very bad tale I'm hearing about you to-day, that you've begun to refuse your meat. A person of your experience, Mistress Macdonald, ought to know that we must eat to live.' He had a basin of food in his hand. 'Now just to please me, Mistress Macdonald.'

The old dame answered with the air that a naughty child or a pouting maiden might have had. 'I'll no eat it—tak' it away! I'll no eat it. Not for you, no—nor for my mither there'—she looked defiantly at her grey-haired daughter—'no, nor for my father himself!'

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'Not a mouthful has passed her lips to-day,' moaned Miss Macdonald. She wrung excited hands and stepped back a pace into the shadow; she felt too modest to pose as her mother's mother before the curious eyes of the two men.

The old lady appeared relieved when the spinster was out of her sight. 'I don't know ye, gentlemen, but perhaps now my mither's not here, ye'll tell me who it was that rang the door-bell a while since.'

The men hesitated. They were neither of them ready with inventions.

She leaned towards the doctor, strangely excited. 'Was it Mr. Kinnaird?' she whispered.

The doctor supposed her to be frightened. 'No, no,' he said in cheerful tones; 'you're mistaken—it wasn't Kinnaird.'

She leaned back pettishly. 'Tak' away the broth; I'll no' tak' it!'

The discomfited four passed out of the room again. The women were weeping; the men were shaking their heads.

It was just then that the new servant passed into the sick-room, bearing candles in her hands.

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'Jeanie, Jeanie Trim,' whispered the old lady. The whisper had a sprightly yet mysterious tone in it; the withered fingers were put out as if to twitch the passing skirt as the housemaid went by.

The girl turned and bent a look—strong, helpful, and kindly—upon this fine ruin of womanhood. The girl had wit 'Yes, ma'am?' she answered blithely.

'I'll speak with ye, Jeanie, when this woman goes away; it's her that my mither's put to spy on me.'

The nurse retired into the shadow of the wardrobe.

'She's away now,' said the maid.

'Jeanie, is it Mr. Kinnaird?'

'Well, now, would you like it to be Mr. Kinnaird?' The maid spoke as we speak to a familiar friend when we have joyful news.

'Oh, Jeanie Trim, ye know well that I've longed sair for him to come again!'

The maid set down her candles, and knelt down by the old dame's knee, looking up with playful face.

'Well, now, I'll tell ye something. He came to see ye this afternoon.'

'Did he, Jeanie?' The withered face became all wreathed with smiles; the old eyes danced with joy. 'What did ye say to him?'

'Oh, well, I just said'—hesitation—'I said he was to come back again to-morrow.'

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'My father doesn't know that he's been here?' There was apprehension in the whisper.

'Not a soul knows but meself.'

'Ye didna tell him I'd been looking for him, Jeanie Trim?'

'Na, na, I made out that ye didna care whether he came or not.'

'But he wouldna be hurt in his mind, would he? I'd no like him to be affronted.'

'It's no likely he was affronted when he said he'd come back to-morrow.'

The smile of satisfaction came again.

'Did he carry his silver-knobbed cane and wear his green coat, Jeanie?'

'Ay, he wore his green coat, and he looked as handsome a man as ever I saw in my life.'

The coals in the grate shot up a sudden brilliant flame that eclipsed the soft light of the candles and set strange shadows quivering about the huge bed and wardrobe and the dark rosewood tables. The winsome young woman at her play, and the old dame living back in a tale that was long since told, exchanged nods and smiles at the thought of the handsome visitor in his green coat. The whisper of the aged voice came blithely—

'Ay, he is that, Jeanie Trim; as handsome a man as ever trod!'

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The maid rose, and passing out observed the discarded basin of broth.

'What's this?' she said. 'Ye'll no be able to see Mr. Kinnaird to-morrow if ye don't take yer soup the night.'

'Gie it to me, Jeanie Trim; I thought he wasna coming again when I said I wouldna.'

The nurse slipped out of the shadow of the wardrobe and went out to tell that the soup was being eaten.

'Kinnaird,' repeated the minister meditatively. 'I never heard my aunt speak the name.'

'Kinnaird,' repeated the daughters; and they too searched in their memories.

'I can remember my grandfather and my grandmother—the married daughter spoke incredulously—'there was never a gentleman called Kinnaird that any of the family had to do with. I'm sure of that, or I'd have as much as heard the name.'

The minister shook his head, discounting the certainty.

'Maybe John will remember the name; your father, and your grandfather too, had great talks with him when he was a lad. I'll write a line and ask him. Poor William or Thomas might have known, if they had lived.'

William and Thomas, grey-haired men, respected fathers of families, had already been laid by the side of their father in the burying-ground. John lived in a distant country, counting himself too feeble now to cross the seas. The daughters, the younger members of this flock, were passing into advanced years. The mother sat by her fireside, and smiled softly to herself as she watched the dancing flame, and thought that her young lover would return on the morrow.

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The days went on.

'I cannot think it right to tamper with my mother in this false way.' The spinster daughter spoke tearfully.

'Would you rather see Mistress Macdonald die of starvation?' The doctor spoke sharply; he was tired of the protest. The doctor approved of the new maid. 'She's a wise-like body,' he said; 'let her have her way.'

'Don't you know us, mother?' the daughters would ask patiently, sadly, day by day. But she never knew them; she only mistook one or the other of them at times for her own mother, of whom she stood in some awe.

'Surely ye've not forgotten Ann Johnston, ma'am?' the nurse would ask, carefully tending her old mistress.

The force of long habit had made the old lady patient and courteous, but no answering gleam came in her face.

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'Ye know who I am?' the new maid would cry in kindly triumph.

'Oh, ay, I know you, Jeanie Trim.'

'And now, look, I brought you a fine cup of milk, warm from the byre.'

'Oh, I canna tak' it; I'm no thinking that I care about eating the day.'

'Well, but I want to tell ye'—with an air of mystery. 'Who d'ye think's downstairs? It's Mr. Kinnaird himself.'

'Did he come round by the yard to the dairy door?'

'That he did; and all to ask how ye were the day.'

The sparkle of the eye returned, and the smile that almost seemed to dimple the wrinkled cheek.

'And I hope ye offered him something to eat, Jeanie; it's a long ride he takes.'

'Bread and cheese, and a cup of milk just like this.'

'What did he say? Did he like what ye gave him?'

'He said a sup of milk sudna cross his lips till you'd had a cupful the like of his; so I brought it in to ye. You'd better make haste and take it up.'

'Did he send ye wi' the cup, Jeanie Trim?'

'Ay, he did that; and not a bit nor sup will he tak till ye've drunk it all, every drop.'

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With evident delight the cup was drained.

'Ye told him I was ailing and couldna see him the day, Jeanie?'

'Maybe ye'll see him to-morrow.' The maid stooped and folded the white shawl more carefully over the dame's breast, and smiled in protective kindly fashion. She had a good heart and a womanly, motherly touch, although many a mistress had called her wilful and pert.

There were times when the minister came and sat himself behind his aunt's chair to watch and to listen. He was a meditative man, and wrote many an essay upon modern theology, but here he found food for meditation of another sort.

There was no being in the world that he revered as he had revered this aged lady. In his childhood she had taught him to lisp the measures of psalm and paraphrase; in his youth she had advised him with shrewdest wisdom; in his ministerial life she had been to him a friend, always holding before him a greater spiritual height to be attained, and now— He thought upon his uncle as he had known him, a very reverent elder of the kirk, a man who had led a long and useful life, and to whom this woman had rendered wifely devotion. He thought upon his cousins, in whose lives their mother's life had seemed unalterably bound up. He would at times emerge from his corner, and, sitting down beside the lady, would take her well-worn Bible and read to her such passages as he knew were graven deep upon her heart by scenes of joy or sorrow, parting or meeting, or the very hours of birth or death, in the lives that had been dearer to her than her own. He was not an emotional man, but yet there was a ringing pathos in his voice as he read the rhythmic words. At such times she would sit as if voice and rhythm soothed her, or she would bow her head solemnly at certain pauses, as if accustomed to agree to the sentiment expressed. Heart and thought were not awake to him, nor to the book he read, nor to the memories he tried to arouse. The fire of the lady's heart sprang up only for one word, that word a name, the name of a man of whose very existence, it seemed, no trace was left in all that countryside.

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The minister would retreat out of the lady's range of vision; and so great did his curiosity grow that he instigated the maid to ask certain questions as she played at the game of the old love-story in her sprightly, pitying way.

'Now I'll tell ye a thing that I want to know,' said the maid, pouring tea in a cup. 'What's his given name? Will ye tell me that?'

'Is it Mr. Kinnaird ye mean?'

'It's Mr. Kinnaird's christened name that I'm speering for.'

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'An' I canna tell ye that, for he never told it to me. It'd be no place of mine to ask him before he chose to speak o' it himsel'.'

'Did ye never see a piece of paper that had his name on it, or a card, maybe?'

'I dinna mind that I have, Jeanie. He's a verra fine gentleman; it's just Mr. Kinnaird that he's called.'

'What for will ye no let me tell the master that he comes every day?'

'Ye must no tell my father, Jeanie Trim'—querulously. 'No, no; nor my mither. They'll maybe be telling him to bide away.'

'Why would they be telling him to bide away?'

'Tuts! How can I tell ye why, when I dinna ken mysel'? Why will ye fret me? I'll tak' no more tea. Tak' it away!'

'I tell ye he'll ask me if ye took it up. He's waiting now to hear that ye took a great big piece of bread tae it. He'll no eat the bread and cheese I've set before him till ye've eaten this every crumb.'

'Is that sae? Well, I maun eat it, for I wouldna have him wanting his meat.'

The meal finished, the maid put on her most winsome smile.

'Now and I'll tell ye what I'll do; I'll go back to Mr. Kinnaird, and I'll tell him ye sent yer *love* tae him.'

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'Ye'll no do sic a thing as that, Jeanie Trim!' All the dignity and authority of her long womanhood

returned in the impressive air with which she spoke. 'Ye'll no do sic a thing as that, Jeanie Trim! It's no for young ladies to be sending sic messages to a gentleman, when he hasna so much as said the word "love."'

Had he ever said the word 'love,' this Kinnaird, whose memory was a living presence in the chamber of slow death? The minister believed that he had not. There was no annal in the family letters of his name, although other rejected suitors were mentioned freely. Had he told his love by look or gesture, and left it unspoken, or had look and gesture been misunderstood, and the whole slight love-story been born where it had died, in the heart of the maiden? 'Where it had died!'—it had not died. Seventy years had passed, and the love-story was presently enacting itself, as all past and all future must for ever be enacting to beings for whom time is not. Then, too, where was he who, by some means, whether of his own volition or not, had become so much a part of the pulsing life of a young girl that, when all else of life passed from her with the weight of years, her heart still remained obedient to him? Where was he? Had his life gone out like the flame of a candle when it is blown? Or, if he was anywhere in the universe of living spirits, was he conscious of the power which he was wielding? Was it a triumph to him to know that he had come, gay and debonair, in the bloom of his youth, into this long-existing sanctuary of home, and set aside, with a wave of his hand, husband, children, and friends, dead and living?

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Whatever might be the psychical aspects of the case, one thing was certain, that the influence of Kinnaird—Kinnaird alone of all those who had entered into relations with the lady—was useful at this time to come between her and the distressing symptoms that would have resulted from the mania of self-starvation. For some months longer she lived in comfort and good cheer. This clear memory of her youth was oddly interwoven with the forgetful dulness of old age, like a golden thread in a black web, like a tiny flame on the hearth that shoots with intermittent brilliancy into darkness. She was always to see her lover upon the morrow; she never woke to the fact that 'to-day' lasted too long, that a winter of morrows had slipped fruitless by.

The interviews between Jeanie Trim and Kinnaird were not monotonous. All else was monotonous. December, January, February passed away. The mornings and the evenings brought no change outwardly in the sick-room, no change to the appearance of the fine old face and still stately figure, suggested no variety of thought or emotion to the lady's decaying faculties; but at the hours when she sat and contentedly ate the food that the maid brought her, her mental vision cleared as it focused upon the thought of her heart's darling. It was she whose questions suggested nearly all the variations in the game of imagination which the young woman so aptly played.

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'Was he riding his black mare, Jeanie Trim?'

'I didna see the beast. He stood on his feet when he was tapping at the door.'

'Whisht! Ye could tell if he wore his boots and spurs, an' his drab waistcoat, buttoned high?'

'Now that ye speak of it, those were the very things he wore.'

'It'd be the black mare he was riding, nae doubt; he'll have tied her to the gate in the lane.' Or again: 'Was it in the best parlour that ye saw him the day? He'd be drinking tea wi' my mither.'

'That he was; and she smiling tae him over the dish of tea.'

'Ay, he looks fine and handsome, bowing to my mither in the best parlour, Jeanie Trim. Did ye notice if he wore silk stockings?'

'Fine silk stockings he wore.'

'And his green coat?'

'As green and smart as a bottle when ye polish, it with a cloth.'

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'Did ye notice the fine frills that he has to his shirt? I've tried to make my father's shirts look as fine, but they never have the same look.' The hands of the old dame would work nervously, as if eager to get at the goffering-irons and try once more. 'An' he'd lay his hat on the floor beside him; it's a way he has. Did my mither tell him that I was ailing? His eyes would be shining the while. Do ye notice how his eyes shine, Jeanie?'

'Ay, do I; his eyes shine and his hair curls.'

'Ye're mistaken there, his hair doesna curl, Jeanie Trim—ye've no' obsairved rightly; his hair is brown and straight; it's his beard and whiskers that curl. Eh! but they're bonny! There's a colour and shine in the curl that minds me of the lights I can see in the old copper kettle when my mither has it scoured and hung up on the nail; but his hair is plain brown.'

'He's a graun' figure of a man!' cried the blithe maid, ever sympathetic.

'Tuts! What are ye saying, Jeanie! He's no' a great size at all; the shortest of my brithers is bigger than him! Ye might even ca' him a wee man; it's the spirit that he has wi' it that I like.'

Thus, by degrees, touch upon touch, the portrait of Kinnaird was painted, and whatever misconceptions they might form of him were corrected one by one. There was little incident depicted, yet the figure of Kinnaird was never drawn passive, but always in action.

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'Did my father no' offer to send him home in the spring-cart? It's sair wet for him to be walking in

the wind and the rain the day.' Or: 'He had a fine bloom on his cheeks, I'll warrant, when he came in through this morning's bluster of wind.' Or again: 'He'll be riding to the hunt with my father to-day; have they put their pink coats on, Jeanie Trim?'

The relations between Kinnaird and the father and mother appeared to be indefinite rather than unfriendly. There were times, it is true, when he came round by the dairy and gave private messages to Jeanie Trim, but at other times he figured as one of the ordinary guests of a large and hospitable household. No special honour seemed to be paid him; there was always the apprehension in the love-sick girl's heart that such timely attentions as the offer of proper refreshment or of the use of the spring-cart might be lacking. The parents were never in the daughter's confidence. She always feared their interference. There was no beginning to the story, no crisis, no culmination.

'Now tell me when you first saw Mr. Kinnaird?' asked the maid.

But to this there was no answer. It had not been love at first sight, its small beginnings had left no impression; nor was there ever any mention of a change in the relation, or of a parting, only that suggestion of a long and weary waiting, given in the beginning of this phase of memory, when she refused to touch her food, and said she was 'sair longing' to see him again. [Pg 24]

The household at Kelsey Farm had flourished in the palmy days of agriculture. Hunters had been kept and pink coats worn, and the mother, of kin with the neighbouring gentry, had kept her carriage to ride in. There had been many pleasures, no doubt, for the daughter of such a house, but only one pleasure remained fixed on her memory, the pleasure of seeing Kinnaird's eyes shining upon her. These days of the lady's youth had happened at a time when religion, if strong, was a sombre thing; and to those who held the pleasures of life in both hands, it was little more than a name and a rite. So it came to pass that no religious sentiment was stirred with the thought of this old joy and succeeding sorrow.

The minister never failed to read some sacred texts when he sat beside her; and when he found himself alone with the old dame, he would kneel and pray aloud in such simple words as he thought she might understand. He did it more to ease his own heart because of the love he bore her than because he supposed that it made any difference in the sight of God whether she heard him or not. He was past the prime of life, and had fallen into pompous and ministerial habits of manner, but in his heart he was always pondering to find what the realities of life might be; he seldom drew false conclusions, although to many a question he was content to find no answer. He wore a serious look—people seldom knew what was passing in his mind; the doctor began to think that he was anxious for the safety of the old dame's soul. [Pg 25]

'I am not without hope of a lucid interval at the end,' he said; 'there is wonderful vitality yet, and it's little more than the power of memory that is impaired.'

At this hope the daughters caught eagerly. They were plain women, narrow and dull, but their mother had been no ordinary woman; her power of love had created in them an affection for her which transcended ordinary filial affection. They had inherited from her such strong domestic feelings that they felt her defection from all family ties for the sake of the absent father and brothers, felt it with a poignancy which the use and wont of those winter months did not seem to blunt.

No sudden shock or fit came to bring about the end. Gradually the old dame's strength failed. There came an hour in the spring time—it was the midnight hour of an April night—when she lay upon her bed, sitting up high against white pillows, gasping for the last breaths that she would ever draw. They had drawn aside the old-fashioned bed-curtains, so that they hung like high dark pillars at the four posts. They had opened wide the windows, and the light spring wind blew through the room fresh with the dews of night. Outside, the moon was riding among her clouds; the night was white. The budding trees shook their twigs together in the garden. Inside the room, firelight and lamplight, each flickering much because of the wind, mingled with the moonlight, but did not wholly obscure its misty presence. They all stood there—the minister, the doctor, the grey-haired daughters sobbing, looking and longing for one glance of recognition, the nurse, and the new maid. [Pg 26]

They all knelt, while the minister said a prayer.

'She's looking differently now,' whispered the home-keeping daughter. She had drawn her handkerchief from her eyes, and was looking with awed solicitude at her mother's face.

'Yes, there's a change coming,' said the married daughter; her large bosom heaved out the words with excited emotion.

'Speak to her of my father—it will bring her mind back again,' they appealed to the minister, pushing him forward to do what they asked.

The minister took the lady's hands in his, and spoke out clearly and strongly in her ear; but he spoke not, at first, of husband or children, but of the Son of God. [Pg 27]

Memories that had lain asleep so long seemed slowly to awaken for one last moment.

'You know what I am saying, auntie?' The minister spoke strongly, as to one who was deaf.

There was a smile on the handsome old face.

'Ay, I know weel: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shallna want ... though I walk through the valley o' the shadow of death."

'My uncle, and Thomas, and William have gone before you, auntie.'

'Ay'—with a satisfied smile—'they've gone before.'

'You know who I am?' he said again.

She knew him, and took leave of him. She took leave of each of her daughters, but in a calm, weak way, as one who had waded too far into the river of death to be much concerned with the things of earth.

The doctor pressed her hand, and the faithful nurse. The minister, feeling that justice should be done to one whose wit had brought great relief, bid the maid go forward.

She was weeping, but she spoke in the free, caressing way that she had used so long.

'Ye know who I am, ma'am?'

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The dying eyes looked her full in the face, but gave no recognition.

'It's Jeanie Trim.'

'Na, na, I remember a Jeanie Trim long syne, but you're not Jeanie Trim!'

The maid drew back discomfited.

The minister began to repeat a psalm that she loved. The daughters sat on the bedside, holding her hands. So they waited, and she seemed to follow the meaning of the psalm as it went on, until suddenly—

She turned her head feebly towards a space by the bed where no one stood. She drew her aged hands from her daughters', and made as if to stretch them out to a new-comer. She smiled.

'Mr. Kinnaird!' she murmured; then she died.

'You might have thought that he was there himself,' said the daughters, awestruck.

And the minister said within himself, 'Who knows but that he was there?'

II

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A MARRIAGE MADE IN HEAVEN

In the backwoods of Canada, about eighty miles north of Lake Ontario, there is a chain of three lakes, linked by the stream of a rapid river, which leads southward from the heart of a great forest. The last of the three lakes is broad, and has but a slow current because of a huge dam which the early Scottish settlers built across its mouth in order to form a basin to receive the lumber floated down from the lakes above. Hence this last lake is called Haven, which is also the name of the settlement at the side of the dam. The worthy Scotsmen, having set up a sawmill, built a church beside it, and by degrees a town and a schoolhouse. The wealth of the town came from the forest. The half-breed Indian lumber-men, toiling anxiously to bring their huge tree-trunks through the twisting rapids, connected all thoughts of rest and plenty with the peaceful Haven Lake and the town where they received their wages; and, perhaps because they received their first ideas of religion at the same place, their tripping tongues to this day call it, not 'Haven,' but 'Heaven.'

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The town thrrove apace in its early days, and no one in it thrrove better than Mr. Reid, who kept the general shop. He was a cheerful soul; and it was owing more to his wife's efforts than his own that his fortune was made, for she kept more closely to the shop and had a sharper eye for the pence.

Mrs. Reid was not cheerful; she was rather of an acrid disposition. People said that there was only one subject on which the shopkeeper and his wife agreed, that was as to the superiority of their daughter in beauty, talent, and amiability, over all other young women far or near. In their broad Scotch fashion they called this daughter Eelan, and the town knew her as 'Bonnie Eelan Reid'; everyone acknowledged her charms, although there might be some who would not acknowledge her preeminence.

Mr. and Mrs. Reid carried their pride in their daughter to a great extent, for they sent her to a boarding-school in the town of Coburgh, which was quite two days' journey to the south. When she came back from this educating process well grown, healthy, handsome, and, in their eyes, highly accomplished, the parents felt that there was no rank in the Canadian world beyond their daughter's reach, if it should be her pleasure to attain it.

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'It wouldn't be anything out of the way even,' chuckled the happy Mr. Reid, 'if our Eelan should marry the Governor-General.'

'Tuts, father, Governors!' said his wife scornfully, not because she had any inherent objection to Governors as sons-in-law, but because she usually cried down what her husband said.

'The chief difficulty would be that they are usually married before they come to this country—aren't they, father?' Eelan spoke with a twinkling smile. She did not choose to explain to any one what she really thought; she had fancies of her own, this pretty backwoods maiden.

'Well, well, there are lads enough in town, and I'll warrant she'll pick and choose,' said the jolly father in a resigned tone. He was not particular as to a Governor, after all.

That conversation happened when Eelan first came home; but a year or two after, the family conferences took a more serious tone. She had learnt to keep her father's books in the shop, and had become deft at housework; but there was no prospect of her settling in a house of her own; many of the best young men in the place had offered themselves as lovers and been refused.

'Oh! what's the use o' talking, father,' cried Mrs. Reid; 'if the girl won't, she won't, and that's all.—But I can tell *you*, Eelan Reid, that all your looks and your manners won't save you from being an old maid, if you turn your back on the men.'

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'I wasn't talking,' said Mr. Reid humbly; 'I was only saying to the lassie that I didn't want her to hurry; but I'd be right sorry when I'm getting old not to have some notion where I was going to leave my money—it'll more than last out Eelan's day, if it's rightly taken care of.'

'But I can't marry unless I should fall in love,' said Eelan wistfully. Her parents had a vague notion that this manner of expressing herself was in some way a proof of her high accomplishments.

Life was by no means dull in the little town. There were picnics in summer, sleigh-drives in winter, dances, and what not; and Eelan was no recluse. Still, she loved the place better than the people, and there was not a spot of ground in the neighbourhood that she did not know by heart.

In summer, the sparkling water of the lake rippled under a burning sun, and the thousand tree-trunks left floating in it, held near to the edge by the floating boom of logs, became hot and dry on the upper side, while the green water-moss caught them from beneath. It was great fun for the school children to scamper out daringly on these floating fields of lumber; and Eelan liked to go with them, and sometimes walk far out alone along the edge of the boom. She would listen to the birds singing, the children shouting, to the whir of the saws in the mill, and the plash of the river falling over the dam; and she would feel that it was enough delight simply to live without distressing herself about marriage yet awhile.

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When winter came, Eelan was happier still. All the roughness and darkness of the earth was lost in a downy ocean of snow. Where the waterfall had been there was a fairy palace of icicles glancing in the sun, and smooth white roads were made across the frozen lake. Eelan never drew back dazzled from the glittering landscape; she was a child of the winter, and she loved its light. She would often harness her father's horse to the old family sleigh and drive alone across the lake. She took her snow-shoes with her, and, leaving the horse at some friendly farmhouse, she would tramp into the woods over the trackless snow. The girl would stand still and look up at the solemn pines and listen, awed by their majestic movement and the desolate loveliness all around. At such time, if the thought of marriage came, she did not put it aside with the light fancy that she wished still to remain free; she longed, in the drear solitude, for some one to sympathise with her, some one who could explain the meaning of the wordless thoughts that welled up within her, the vague response of her heart to the mystery of external beauty. Alas! among all her suitors there was not such a friend.

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There was no one else in the town who cared for country walks as Eelan did—at least, no one but the schoolmaster. She met him occasionally, walking far from home; he was a quaint, old-looking man, and she thought he had a face like an angel's. She might have wished sometimes to stop and speak to him, but when they met he always appeared to have his eyes resting on the distant horizon, and his mind seemed wrapped in some learned reverie, to the oblivion of outward things. The schoolmaster lived in the schoolhouse on the bank of the curving river, a bit below the waterfall. He took up his abode there a few months before Eelan Reid came home from school. He had come from somewhere nearer the centres of education—had been imported, so to speak, for the special use of Haven Settlement, for the leading men of the place were a canny set and knew the worth of books. His testimonials had told of a higher standard of scholarship than was usual in such schools, and the keen Scots had snapped at the chance and engaged him without an interview; but when he arrived they had been grievously disappointed. He was a gentle, unsophisticated man, shy as a girl, and absent-minded withal.

'Aweel, I'll not say but he'll do to put sums and writing into the youngsters' heads and teach them to spout their poems; but he's not just what I call a *man*.' This was the opinion which Macpherson, the portly owner of the mill, had delivered to his friends.

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'There's something lacking, I'm thinking,' said one; 'he's thirty-six years old, and to see him driving his cow afield, you'd say he was sixty, and him not sickly either.'

'I doubt he's getting far too high a salary,' said Macpherson solemnly. 'To pass examinations is all very well; but he's not got the grit in him that I'd like to see.'

So they had called a school committee meeting, and suggested to the new schoolmaster, as delicately as they could, that they were much disappointed with his general manner and

appearance, but that, as he had come so far, they were graciously willing to keep him if he would consent to take a lower salary than that first agreed on. At this the schoolmaster grew very red, and, with much stammering, he managed to make a speech. He said that he liked the wildness and extreme beauty of the country, and the children appeared to him attractive; he did not wish to go away; and as to salary, he would take what they thought him worth.

In this way they closed the bargain with him on terms quite satisfactory to themselves.

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'But hoots,' said the stout Macpherson as he ambled home from the meeting, 'I've only half a respect for a man that can't stand up for himself;' and this sentiment was more or less echoed by them all.

Happily, the schoolmaster did not desire society. The minister's wife asked him to tea occasionally; and he confided to her that, up to that time, he had always lived with his mother, and that it was because of her death that he had left his old home, where sad memories were too great a strain upon him, and come farther west. No one else took much notice of him, partly because he took no notice of them. At the ladies' sewing meeting the doctor's wife looked round the room with an injured air and asked: 'How is it possible to ask a gentleman to tea when you know that he'll meet you in the street next morning and won't remember who you are?'

'A lady who respected herself couldn't do it,' replied Mrs. Reid positively; and then in an undertone she remarked to herself, 'The gaby!'

Miss Ann Blakely pursed her lips and craned her thin neck over her work. 'As to that I don't know, Mrs. Reid; no one could visit the school, as I have done, and fail to observe that the youth of the town are more obedient than formerly. In my opinion, a gentleman who can command the respect of the growing masculine mind——' She finished the sentence only by an expressive wave of her head.

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'There is much truth in Miss Blakely's remark,' said a timid little mother of six sons.

People married early, as a general thing, in Haven Settlement, and Miss Blakely, having been accidentally overlooked, had, before he came, indulged in some soft imaginations of her own with regard to the new schoolmaster; like others, she was disappointed in him; but she had not yet decided 'whether,' to use her own phrase, 'he would not, after all, be better than none.' She poised this question in her mind with a nice balancing of reasons for and against for about three years, and the man who was thus the object of her interest continued to live peacefully, ignorant alike of hostile criticism and tender speculation.

It was a terrible day for the schoolmaster when the honest widow who lived with him as housekeeper was called by the death of a daughter-in-law to go and keep the house of her son in another town. She could only tell of her intention two weeks before it was necessary to leave; and very earnestly did the schoolmaster consult with her in the interval as to what he could possibly do to supply her place, for servants in Haven Settlement were rare luxuries.

'I don't know, I'm sure, sir, what you can do,' said Mrs. Sims hopelessly. 'The girls in these parts are far too proud to be hired to work in a house. Why, the best folks in town mostly does their own work; there's Mrs. Reid, so rich, just has a woman to do the charing; and Eelan—that's the beauty, you know—makes the pies and keeps the house spick-and-span. But you couldn't keep your own house clean, could you, sir?—let alone the meals; and you wouldn't live long if you hadn't *them*.'

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As the days wore on, the schoolmaster became more urgent in his appeals for advice, but he did not get encouragement to expect to find a servant of any sort, for the widow was too sincere to suggest hope when she felt none, and the difficulty was not an easy one to solve. She made various inquiries among her friends. It was suggested that the master should go to 'the boarding-house,' which was a large barn-like structure, in which business men who did not happen to have families slept in uncomfortable rooms and dined at a noisy table. Mrs. Sims reported this suggestion faithfully, and added: 'But it's my belief it would kill you outright.'

The schoolmaster looked at his books and the trim arrangements of his neat house, and negatived the proposition with more decision than he had ever shown before.

After a while, Mrs. Sims received another idea of quite a different nature; but she did not report this so hastily—it required more finesse. It was entrusted to her care with many injunctions to be 'tactful,' and it was suggested that if there was a mess made of it, it would be her fault. The idea was nothing less than that it would be necessary for the master to marry; and it was the gaunt Miss Ann Blakely herself who confided to his present housekeeper that she should have no objections to become his bride, provided he wrote her a pretty enough, humble sort of letter that she could show to her friends.

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'For, mind you, I'd not go cheap to the like of him,' she said, raising an admonishing finger, as she took leave of her friend: 'I'd rather remain single, far.'

'I think he could write the letter,' replied Mrs. Sims; 'leastways, if he can't do that, I don't know what he can do, poor man.'

Having been solemnly enjoined to be careful, Mrs. Sims thought so long over what she was to say before she said it, that she made herself quite nervous, and when she began, she forgot the half. Over her sewing in the sitting-room one evening she commenced the subject with a flustered

little run of words. 'I'm sure such an amiable man as you are, sir, almost three years I've been in this house and never had a word from you, not one word'—it is to be remarked that the widow did not intend to assert that the schoolmaster had been mute—'and you are nice in all your ways, too; if I do say it, quite the gentleman.'

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'Oh!' said the schoolmaster, in a tone of surprise, not because he had heard what she said, but because he was surprised that she should begin to talk to him when he was correcting his books.

'And not a servant to be had far or near,' she went on with agitated volubility; 'and as for another like myself, of course that's too much to be hoped for.' She did not say this out of conceit, but merely as representing the actual state of affairs.

The schoolmaster began to look frightened. He was not a matter-of-fact person, but, as long as a man is a man, the prospect of being left altogether without his meals must be appalling.

'So, why you shouldn't get married, I don't know.' She added this in tremulous excitement, speaking in an argumentative way, as if she had led him by an ordered process of thought to an inevitable conclusion.

'Oh!' exclaimed the schoolmaster in surprise again, this time because he *had* heard what was said.

The worst was over now; and Mrs. Sims, having once suggested the desperate idea of the necessity of marriage, could proceed more calmly. She found, however, that she had to explain the notion at length before he could at all grasp it, and then she was obliged to urge its necessity for some time before he was willing to consider it. He became agitated in his turn, and, rising, walked up and down the room, his arms folded and an absent look in his eyes, as though he were thinking of things farther off.

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'I do not mind telling you, for I believe you are a motherly woman, Mrs. Sims, that it is not the first time that the thought of marriage has crossed my mind' (with solemn hesitation). 'I *have* thought of it before; but I have always been hindered from giving it serious consideration from the belief that no woman would be willing to—ah—to marry me.'

'Well, of course there's some truth in that, sir,' said his faithful friend, reluctantly obliged by her conscience to say what she thought.

'Just so, Mrs. Sims,' said the schoolmaster with a patient sigh; 'and therefore, perhaps it will be unnecessary to discuss the subject further.'

'Still, there's no accounting for tastes; there might be some found that would.'

'It would not be necessary to find more than one,' said he, with a quiet smile.

'No, that's true, sir, which makes the matter rather easier. It's always been my belief that while there is life there is hope.'

'True, true,' he replied; and then he indulged in a long fit of musing, which she more than suspected had little to do with the immediate bearing of the subject on his present case. It was necessary to rouse him, for there was no time to be lost.

'Of course I don't say that there's many that would have you; there's girls enough—but laws! they'd all make game of you if you were to go a-courting to them, and, I take it, courting's not the sort of thing you're cleverest at.'

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'True,' said the schoolmaster again, and again he sighed.

'But now, a good sensible woman, like Miss Blakely, as would keep you and your house clean and tidy, not to speak of cooking—I make bold to say you couldn't do better than to get such a one, if she might be so minded.'

'Who is Miss Blakely?' he asked wonderingly.

'It's her that visits the school so often; you've seen her time and again.'

'I recollect,' he said; 'but I have not spoken much with her.'

'That's just what I said,' she observed triumphantly. 'You'd be no more up to courting than cows are up to running races. Now, as to Miss Blakely, not being as young as some, nor to say good-looking, she might not stand on the ceremony of much courting; if you just wrote her one letter, asking her quite modest, and putting in a few remarks about flowers and that sort of thing, as you could do so well, being clever at writing, I give it as my opinion it's not unlikely she'd take you out of hand; not every one would, of course, but she has a kind heart, has Miss Blakely.'

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'Kind is she?' said he, with a tone of interest; 'and sweet-tempered?'

Mrs. Sims said more in favour of the scheme; it required that she should say much, for the schoolmaster was not to be easily persuaded. She had, however, three strong arguments in its favour, which she reiterated again and again, with more and more assurance of certitude as she warmed to the subject. The first point was, that if he did not marry, he must either starve at home or go to the boarding-house, and at the latter place she assured him again, as she had done at first, he would probably soon die. Her second point was, that no one else would be willing to marry him except Miss Blakely; and her third—although in this matter she expressed herself with

some mysterious caution—that Miss Blakely would marry him if asked. Mrs. Sims bridled her head, spoke in lower tones than was her wont, and said that she had the secret of Miss Blakely's partiality from good authority. She sighed; and he heard her murmur over her sewing that the heart was always young. In fact, without saying it in so many words, she gave her listener to understand clearly that Miss Blakely had conceived a very lively affection for him. And this last, if she had but known it, was the only argument that carried weight, for the schoolmaster could have faced either the prospect of starvation or a lingering death in the rude noise of a boarding-house; but he was tender-hearted, and, moreover, he had a beautiful soul, and supposed all women to be like his mother, whom he had loved with all his strength.

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'You'd better make haste, sir,' said Mrs. Sims, 'for I must leave on Thursday, and now it's Saturday night. There's not overmuch time for everything—although, indeed, Mrs. Graham, that goes out charing, might come in and make you your meals for a week, though it will cost you half a quarter's salary, charing is that expensive in these parts.'

The schoolmaster proceeded to think over the matter—that is to say, he proceeded to muse over it; by which process he did not face the facts as they were—did not become better acquainted with the real Miss Blakely, but made some sort of progress in another way, for he conjured up an ideal Miss Blakely, gentle and good, cheerful, with intellectual tastes like his own, a person who, like himself, had not fared very happily in the world until now, and for whom his love and protection would make a paradise. It did occur to him, occasionally, that the picture he was drawing might not be quite correct, and at those times he would seek Mrs. Sims, and ask a few questions of this oracle by way of adjusting his own ideas to the truth. Poor Mrs. Sims, between her extreme honesty and her desire to see the schoolmaster, whom she really loved, assured of future comfort, had much ado to be 'tactful' and say the right thing. She naturally regarded comfort as pertaining solely to the outer man, and fully believed that this marriage was the best step he could take; so her answers, when they could not be satisfactory, were vague.

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'How can you doubt, sir, that you'll be much happier with a wife to cook your meals regular, and no more bother about changements all your life? I'm sure if I were you, sir, I wouldn't hesitate between the joys of matrimony and single life.'

'Perhaps not, Mrs. Sims; but I, being I, do hesitate. It is a very important step to take, just because, as you say, there will be no more change.'

'And it's just you that have been telling me that the very thing you dislike most in this world is change. And there are other advantages, too, in having kith and kin, for it's lonesome without when you're old; and just think how beautiful for a wife to weep over you when you're a-dying—and she'll do all that, Miss Blakely will, sir; I'm sure, as her friend, I can answer for it.'

'The wills above be done,' murmured the schoolmaster, 'but I would fain die a dry death.'

Time pressed; the schoolmaster procrastinated; the very evening before the widow's departure had arrived, and yet nothing was done. Then it happened, as is frequently the case when the mind is balancing between two opinions, that a very small circumstance determined him to write the all-important note. The circumstance was none other than his having a convenient opportunity of sending it; for to him, as to many other unpractical minds, the small difficulties in the way of any action had as great a deterring power as more important considerations. Miss Blakely happened to live on the other side of the town, and though the master walked much farther than that himself every day, he felt that in this case it would hardly be dignified to be his own messenger.

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It was early in the evening, and the master's window was open to the soft spring air that came in full of the freshness of young leaves and the joyous splash of the flooded river. Two of his schoolboys were loitering under the window, wishing to speak to him, yet too bashful; he got up and sat on the window-sill, smiled at them, and they smiled back. They had a tale to tell; but, as it was of a somewhat delicate nature and hard to explain, he had to listen very patiently. They had a dollar—a brown and green paper dollar—which they gave him with an air of solemn importance. They said that they and some of their comrades had been a long way from home gathering saxifrage, and that they had met one of the young ladies of the town. She had her arms full of flowers, and her pocket quite full of moss, so full that she had had to take her purse and handkerchief out and hold them in her hand with the flowers because the moss was wet. When she came upon them, they were trying to get some saxifrage that was on a ledge of rock; they could only climb half-way up the rock, and were none of them tall enough to reach it; so she put down all her flowers and things and climbed up and got it for them; but in the meantime one of them opened the purse and took out the dollar. She never found it out, and went away.

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'Not either of you?' said the schoolmaster.

'No, sir; one of the other fellows did it. But he's sorry, and wants to give it back; so we said that we would tell you, and perhaps you would give it to her.'

'Why couldn't you go and give it to her, just as you have given it to me?'

'Because we knew you'd b'lieve us that it was just the way we said; and her folks, you know, might think we'd done it when we said we hadn't. Or, mother said, if you didn't want to be troubled, perhaps you'd just write a line to say how it was, and we'll go and leave it at the house after dark and come away quick.'

The master had no objection to this; so he brought the boys in and got out his best note-paper—he was fastidious about some things—and wrote a note beginning 'Dear Madam,' telling in a few lines that the money had been stolen and restored.

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'What is the lady's name?' he asked, taking up the envelope.

'It was Eelan Reid, sir; Mr. Reid's daughter that keeps the shop.'

So the schoolmaster wrote 'Miss Eelan Reid' in a fair round hand, and then he paused for a moment. He was making up his mind to the all-decisive action.

'Perhaps you can wait for another note and take that for me at the same time,' he said. He gave them some picture papers to look at. Then he wrote the note of such moment to himself, beginning, as before, 'Dear Madam,' and doing his best to follow the many instructions which the faithful Mrs. Sims had given him. It was a curious specimen of literature, in which a truly elegant mind and warm heart were veiled, but not hidden, by an embarrassed attempt at conventional phrases—a letter that most women would laugh at, and that the best women would reverence. He addressed that envelope too, and sealed the notes and sent away the boys.

There was no sleep for the schoolmaster that night. With folded arms he paced his room in restless misery. Now that the die was cast, the ideal Miss Blakely faded from his mind; he felt instinctively that she was mythical. He saw clearly that he had forfeited the best possibilities of life for the sake of temporary convenience, that he had sold his birthright for a mess of pottage.

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The long night passed at length, as all nights pass. The sun rose over purple hills to glow upon the spring-stirred forest and to send golden shafts deep down into the clear heart of lake and stream. The fallen beauty of past woodland summers had tinged the water till it glowed like nut-brown wine; so brown it was that the pools of the river, where it swirled and rushed past the schoolhouse bend, seemed to greet the sun with the soft dark glances of fawn-eyed water-sprites. The glorious sky, the tender colours of the budding wood, the very dandelions on the untrimmed bank, contrived their hues to accord and rejoice with the laughing water, and the birds swelled out its song. In the rapture of spring and of morning there was no echo of grief; for the unswerving law of nature, moving through the years, had set each thing in its right home. It is only the perplexed soul that is forced to choose its own way and suffer from the choice, and the song of our life is but set to the accompaniment of a sad creed if we may not trust that, above our human wills, there is a Power able to overrule the mistakes of true hearts, to lead the blind by unseen paths, and save the simple from their own simplicity.

Very early in the morning the schoolmaster, haggard and worn, slipped out of his own door to refresh himself in the sunlight that gleamed down upon his bit of green through the budding willow trees that grew by the river-side. He stood awhile under the bending boughs, watching the full stream as it tossed its spray into the lap of the flower-fringed shore. He looked, as he stood there, like a ghost of the preceding night, caught against his will and embraced by the joyous morning. Just then he had a vision.

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A girl came towards him across the grass and stood a few paces distant. The slender willow twigs, with their hanging catkins and tiny golden leaves, made a sort of veil between them. She was very beautiful, at least so the schoolmaster thought; perhaps she was the personification of the morning, perhaps she was a wood-nymph—it did not matter much; he felt, in his excitement and exhaustion, that her beauty and grace were not real, but only an hallucination of moving sun and shade. She took the swaying willow-twigs in her pretty hands and looked through them at him and stroked the downy flowers.

'Why did you send me that letter?' she said at last, with a touch of severity in her voice.

'The letter,' he stammered, wondering what she could mean.

He remembered, with a sort of dull return of consciousness, that he *was* guilty of having sent a letter—terribly guilty in his own estimation—but it was sent to Miss Blakely, and this was not Miss Blakely. That one letter had so completely absorbed all his mind that he had quite forgotten any others that he might have written in the course of his whole life.

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'Do not be angry with me,' he said imploringly. He had but one idea, that was, to keep this radiant dream of beauty with him as long as possible.

'I'm not angry; I am not angry at all—indeed'—and here she looked down at the twigs in her hand and began pulling the young leaves rather roughly—'I am not sure but that I am rather pleased. I have so often met you in the woods, you know; only I didn't know that you had ever noticed me.'

'I never did,' said the schoolmaster; but happily his nervous lips gave but indistinct utterance to the words, and his tone was pathetic. She thought he had only made some further pleading.

'I—I—I like you very much,' she said. 'I suppose, of course, everybody will be very much surprised, and mother may not be pleased, you know, just at first; but she's good and dear, mother is, in spite of what she says; and father will be glad about anything that pleases me.'

He did not understand what she said; but he felt distressed at the moment to notice that she was twisting the tender willow leaves, albeit he saw that she only did so because, in her embarrassment, her fingers worked unconsciously. He came forward and took her hands gently, to disentangle them from the twigs. She let them lie in his, and looked up in his face and smiled.

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'I will try to be a good wife, and manage all the common things, and not tease you to be like other men, if you will sometimes read your books to me and explain to me what life means, and why it is so beautiful, and why things are as they are.'

'I'm afraid I don't understand these matters myself very well,' he said; 'but we can talk about them together.'

While he held her hands, she drooped her head till it touched his shoulder.

He had kissed no one since his mother died, and the great joy that took possession of his heart brought, by its stimulus, a sudden knowledge of what had really happened to his mind. In a marvellously tender way, for a man who could not go a-courting, he put his hand under the pretty chin and looked down wonderingly, reverently, at the serious upturned face. 'And this is Bonnie Eelan Reid?'

Then Eelan, thinking that he was teasing her gently for being so easily won when she had gained the reputation of being so proud, cast down her eyes and blushed.

So they were married, and lived happily, very happily, although they had their sorrows, as others have. The schoolmaster was man enough to keep the knowledge of his blunder a secret between himself and God. [Pg 55]

As for Miss Blakely, she never quite understood who had stolen the dollar, or when, or where; but she was glad to get it back. She never forgave Mrs. Sims for having managed her trust so ill, although the widow declared, with tears in her eyes, that she had done her best.

'He would have taken in the knowingest person, he would indeed, Ann Blakely; and, to my notion, a straightforward woman like you is well quit of a man who, while he looked so innocent, could act so deep.'

III

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THRIFT

The end of March had come. The firm Canadian snow roads had suddenly changed their surface and become a chain of miniature rivers, lakes interspersed by islands of ice, and half-frozen bogs.

A young priest had started out of the city of Montreal to walk to the suburb of Point St. Charles. He was in great haste, so he kilted up his long black petticoats and hopped and skipped at a good pace. The hard problems of life had not as yet assailed him; he had that set of the shoulders that belongs to a good conscience and an easy mind; his face was rosy-cheeked and serene.

Behind him lay the hill-side city, with its grey towers and spires and snow-clad mountain. All along his way budding maple trees swayed their branches overhead; on the twigs of some there was the scarlet moss of opening flowers, some were tipped with red buds and some were grey. The March wind was surging through them; the March clouds were flying above them,—light grey clouds with no rain in them,—veil above veil of mist, and each filmy web travelling at a different pace. The road began as a street, crossed railway tracks and a canal, ran between fields, and again entered between houses. The houses were of brick or stone, poor and ugly; the snow in the fields was sodden with water; the road— [Pg 60]

'I wish that the holy prophet Elijah would come to this Jordan with his mantle,' thought the priest to himself.

This was a pious thought, and he splashed and waded along conscientiously. He had been sent on an errand, and had to return to discharge a more important duty in the same afternoon.

The suburb consisted chiefly of workmen's houses and factories, but there were some ambitious-looking terraces. The priest stopped at a brick dwelling of fair size. It had an aspect of flaunting respectability; lintel and casements were shining with varnish; cheap starched curtains decked every window. When the priest had rung a bell which jingled inside, the door was opened by a young woman. She was not a servant, her dress was fur-belowed and her hair was most elaborately arranged. She was, moreover, evidently Protestant; she held the door and surveyed the visitor with an air that was meant to show easy independence of manner, but was, in fact, insolent. [Pg 61]

The priest had a slip of paper in his hand and referred to it. 'Mrs. O'Brien?' he asked.

'I'm not Mrs. O'Brien,' said the young woman, looking at something which interested her in the street.

A shrill voice belonging, as it seemed, to a middle-aged woman, made itself heard. 'Louisy, if it's a Cath'lic priest, take him right in to your gran'ma; it's him she's expecting.'

A moment's stare of surprise and contempt, and the young woman led the way through a gay and cheaply furnished parlour, past the door of a best bedroom which stood open to shew the frills on the pillows, into a room in the back wing. She opened the door with a jerk and stared again as

the priest passed her. She was a handsome girl; the young priest did not like to be despised; within his heart he sighed and said a short prayer for patience.

He entered a room that did not share the attempt at elegance of the front part of the house; plain as a cottage kitchen, it was warm and comfortable withal. The large bed with patchwork quilt stood in a corner; in the middle was an iron stove in which logs crackled and sparkled. The air was hot and dry, but the priest, being accustomed to the atmosphere of stoves, took no notice, in fact, he noticed nothing but the room's one inmate, who from the first moment compelled his whole attention.

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In a wooden arm-chair, dressed in a black petticoat and a scarlet bedgown, sat a strong old woman. Weakness was there as well as strength, certainly, for she could not leave her chair, and the palsy of excitement was shaking her head, but the one idea conveyed by every wrinkle of the aged face and hands, by every line of the bowed figure, was strength. One brown toil-worn hand held the head of a thick walking-stick which she rested on the floor well in front of her, as if she were about to rise and walk forward. Her brown face—nose and chin strongly defined—was stretched forward as the visitor entered; her eyes, black and commanding, carried with them something of that authoritative spell that is commonly attributed to a commanding mind. Great physical size or power this woman apparently had never had, but she looked the very embodiment of a superior strength.

'Shut the door! shut the door behind ye!' These were the first words that the youthful confessor heard, and then, as he advanced, 'You're young,' she said, peering into his face. Without a moment's intermission further orders were given him: 'Be seated; be seated! Take a chair by the fire and put up your wet feet. It is from Father M'Leod of St. Patrick's Church that ye've come?'

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The young man, whose boots were well soaked with ice-water, was not loth to put them up on the edge of the stove. It was not at all his idea of a priestly visit to a woman who had represented herself as dying, but it is a large part of wisdom to take things as they come until it is necessary to interfere.

'You wrote, I think, to Father M'Leod, saying that as the priests of this parish are French and you speak English—'

Some current of excitement hustled her soul into the midst of what she had to say.

"Twas Father Maloney, him that had St. Patrick's before Father M'Leod, who married me; so I just thought before I died I'd let one of ye know a thing concerning that marriage that I've never told to mortal soul. Sit ye still and keep your feet to the fire; there's no need for a young man like you to be taking your death with the wet because I've a thing to say to ye.'

'You are not a Catholic now,' said he, raising his eyebrows with intelligence as he glanced at a Bible and hymn-book that lay on the floor beside her.

He was not unaccustomed to meeting perverts; it was impossible to have any strong emotion about so frequent an occurrence. He had had a long walk and the hot air of the room made him somewhat sleepy; if it had not been for the fever and excitement of her mind he might not have picked up more than the main facts of all she said. As it was, his attention wandered for some minutes from the words that came from her palsied lips. It did not wander from her; he was thinking who she might be, and whether she was really about to die or not, and whether he had not better ask Father M'Leod to come and see her himself. This last thought indicated that she impressed him as a person of more importance and interest than had been supposed when he had been sent to hear her confession.

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All this time, fired by a resolution to tell a tale for the first and last time, the old woman, steadying as much as she might her shaking head, and leaning forward to look at the priest with bleared yet flashing eyes, was pouring out words whose articulation was often indistinct. Her hand upon her staff was constantly moving, as if she were about to rise and walk; her body seemed about to spring forward with the impulse of her thoughts, the very folds of the scarlet bedgown were instinct with excitement.

The priest's attention returned to her words.

'Yes, marry and marry and marry—that's what you priests in my young days were for ever preaching to us poor folk. It was our duty to multiply and fill the new land with good Cath'lics. Father Maloney, that was his doctrine, and me a young girl just come out from the old country with my parents, and six children younger than me. Hadn't I had enough of young children to nurse, and me wanting to begin life in a new place respectable, and get up a bit in the world? Oh, yes! but Father Maloney he was on the look-out for a wife for Terry O'Brien. He was a widow man with five little helpless things, and drunk most of the time was Terry, and with no spirit in him to do better. Oh! but what did that matter to Father Maloney when it was the good of the Church he was looking for, wanting O'Brien's family looked after? O'Brien was a good, kind fellow, so Father Maloney said, and you'll never hear me say a word against that. So Father Maloney got round my mother and my father and me, and married me to O'Brien, and the first year I had a baby, and the second year I had another, so on and so on, and there's not a soul in this world can say but that I did well by the five that were in the house when I came to it.'

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'Oh! "house"!— d'ye think it was one house he kept over our heads? No, but we moved from one room to another, not paying the rent. Well, and what sort of a training could the children get?'

Father Maloney he talked fine about bringing them up for the Church. Did he come in and wash them when I was a-bed? Did he put clothes on their backs? No, and fine and angry he was when I told him that that was what he ought to have done! Oh! but Father Maloney and I went at it up and down many a day, for when I was wore out with the anger inside me, I'd go and tell him what I thought of the marriage he'd made, and in a passion he'd get at a poor thing like me teaching him duty.

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'Not that I ever was more than half sorry for the marriage myself, because of O'Brien's children, poor things, that he had before I came to them. Likely young ones they were too, and handsome, what would they have done if I hadn't been there to put them out of the way when O'Brien was drunk, and knocking them round, or to put a bit of stuff together to keep them from nakedness?

"Well," said Father Maloney to me, "why isn't it to O'Brien that you speak with your scolding tongue?" Faix! and what good was it to spake to O'Brien, I'd like to know? Did you ever try to cut water with a knife, or to hurt a feather-bed by striking at it with your fist? A nice good-natured man was Terry O'Brien—I'll never say that he wasn't that,—except when he was drunk, which was most of the time—but he'd no more backbone to him than a worm. That was the sort of husband Father Maloney married me to.

'The children kept a-coming till we'd nine of them, that's with the five I found ready to hand; and the elder ones getting up and needing to be set out in the world, and what prospect was there for them? What could I do for them? Me always with an infant in my arms! Yet 'twas me and no other that gave them the bit and sup they had, for I went out to work; but how could I save anything to fit decent clothes on them, and it wasn't much work I could do, what with the babies always coming, and sick and ailing they were half the time. The Sisters would come from the convent to give me charity. 'Twas precious little they gave, and lectured me too for not being more submiss!' And I didn't want their charity; I wanted to get up in the world. I'd wanted that before I was married, and now I wanted it for the children. Likely girls the two eldest were, and the boy just beginning to go the way of his father.'

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She came to a sudden stop and breathed hard; the strong old face was still stretched out to the priest in her eagerness; the staff was swaying to and fro beneath the tremulous hand. She had poured out her words so quickly that there was in his chest a feeling of answering breathlessness, yet he still sat regarding her placidly with the serenity of healthy youth.

She did not give him long rest. 'What did I see around me?' she demanded. 'I saw people that had begun life no better than myself getting up and getting up, having a shop maybe, or sending their children to the "Model" School to learn to be teachers, or getting them into this business or that, and mine with never so much as knowing how to read, for they hadn't the shoes to put on—'

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'And I had it in me to better them and myself. I knew I'd be strong if it wasn't for the babies, and I knew, too, that I'd do a kinder thing for each child I had, to strangle it at it's birth than to bring it on to know nothing and be nothing but a poor wretched thing like Terry O'Brien himself—'

At the word 'strangle' the young priest took his feet from the ledge in front of the fire and changed his easy attitude, sitting up straight and looking more serious.

'It's not that I blamed O'Brien over much, he'd just had the same sort of bringing up himself and his father before him, and when he was sober a very nice man he was; it was spiritiness he lacked; but if he'd had more spiritiness he'd have been a wickeder man, for what is there to give a man sense in a rearing like that? If he'd been a wickeder man I'd have had more fear to do with him the thing I did. But he was just a good sort of creature without sense enough to keep steady, or to know what the children were wanting; not a notion he hadn't but that they'd got all they needed, and I had it in me to better them. Will ye dare to say that I hadn't?

'After Terry O'Brien went I had them all set out in the world, married or put to work with the best, and they've got ahead. All but O'Brien's eldest son, every one of them have got ahead of things. I couldn't put the spirit into *him* as I could into the littler ones and into the girls. Well, but he's the only black sheep of the seven, for two of them died. All that's living but him are doing well, doing well' (she nodded her head in triumph), 'and their children doing better than them, as ought to be. Some of them ladies and gentlemen, real quality. Oh! ye needn't think I don't know the difference' (some thought expressed in his face had evidently made its way with speed to her brain)—'my daughter that lives here is all well enough, and her girl handsome and able to make her way, but I tell you there's some of my grandchildren that's as much above her in the world as she is above poor Terry O'Brien—young people that speak soft when they come to see their poor old grannie and read books, oh! I know the difference; oh! I know very well—not but what my daughter here is well-to-do, and there's not one of them all but has a respect for me.' She nodded again triumphantly, and her eyes flashed. 'They know, they know very well how I set them out in the world. And they come back for advice to me, old as I am, and see that I want for nothing. I've been a *good* mother to them, and a good mother makes good children and grandchildren too.'

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There was another pause in which she breathed hard; the priest grasped the point of the story; he asked—

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'What became of O'Brien?'

'I drowned him.'

The priest stood up in a rigid and clerical attitude.

'I tell ye I drowned him.' She had changed her attitude to suit his; and with the supreme excitement of telling what she had never told, there seemed to come to her the power to sit erect. Her eagerness was not that of self-vindication; it was the feverish exaltation with which old age glories over bygone achievement.

'I'd never have thought of it if it hadn't been O'Brien himself that put it into my head. But the children had a dog, 'twas little enough they had to play with, and the beast was useful in his way too, for he could mind the baby at times; but he took to ailing—like enough it was from want of food, and I was for nursing him up a bit and bringing him round, but O'Brien said that he'd put him into the canal. 'Twas one Sunday that he was at home sober—for when he was drunk I could handle him so that he couldn't do much harm. So says I, "And why is he to be put in the canal?"

'Says he, "Because he's doing no good here."

'So says I, "Let the poor beast live, for he does no harm."

'Then says he, "But it's harm he does taking the children's meat and their place by the fire."

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'And says I, "Are ye not afraid to hurry an innocent creature into the next world?" for the dog had that sense he was like one of the children to me.

'Then said Terry O'Brien, for he had a wit of his own, "And if he's an innocent creature he'll fare well where he goes."

'Then said I, "He's done his sins, like the rest of us, no doubt."

'Then says he, "The sooner he's put where he can do no more the better."

'So with that he put a string round the poor thing's neck and took him away to where there was holes in the ice of the canal, just as there is to-day, for it was the same season of the year, and the children all cried; and thinks I to myself, "If it was the dog that was going to put their father into the water they would cry less." For he had a peevish temper in drink, which was most of the time.

'So then, I knew what I would do. 'Twas for the sake of the children that were crying about me that I did it, and I looked up to the sky and I said to God and the holy saints that for Terry O'Brien and his children 'twas the best deed I could do; and the words that we said about the poor beast rang in my head, for they fitted to O'Brien himself, every one of them.

'So you see it was just the time when the ice was still thick on the water, six inches thick maybe, but where anything had happened to break it the edges were melting into large holes. And the next night when it was late and dark I went and waited outside the tavern, the way O'Brien would be coming home.

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'He was just in that state that he could walk, but he hadn't the sense of a child, and we came by the canal, for there's a road along it all winter long, but there were places where if you went off the road you fell in, and there were placards up saying to take care. But Terry O'Brien hadn't the sense to remember them. I led him to the edge of a hole, and then I came on without him. He was too drunk to feel the pain of the gasping. So I went home.

'There wasn't a creature lived near for a mile then, and in the morning I gave out that I was afraid he'd got drowned, so they broke the ice and took him up. And there was just one person that grieved for Terry O'Brien. Many's the day I grieved for him, for I was accustomed to have him about me, and I missed him like, and I said in my heart, "Terry, wherever ye may be, I have done the best deed for you and your children, for if you were innocent you have gone to a better place, and if it were sin to live as you did, the less of it you have on your soul the better for you; and as for the children, poor lambs, I can give them a start in the world now I am rid of you!" That's what I said in my heart to O'Brien at first—when I grieved for him; and then the years passed, and I worked too hard to be thinking of him.

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'And now, when I sit here facing the death for myself, I can look out of my windows there back and see the canal, and I say to Terry again, as if I was coming face to face with him, that I did the best deed I could do for him and his. I broke with the Cath'lic Church long ago, for I couldn't go to confess; and many's the year that I never thought of religion. But now that I am going to die I try to read the books my daughter's minister gives me, and I look to God and say that I've sinned on my soul, but the drowning of O'Brien, as far as I know right from wrong, isn't one of them.'

The young priest had an idea that the occasion demanded some strong form of speech. 'Woman,' he said, 'what have you told me this for?'

The strength of her excitement was subsiding. In its wane the afflictions of her age seemed to be let loose upon her again. Her words came more thickly, her gaunt frame trembled the more, but not for one moment did her eye flinch before his youthful severity.

'I hear that you priests are at it yet. "Marry and marry and marry," that's what ye teach the poor folks that will do your bidding, "in order that the new country may be filled with Cath'lics," and I thought before I died I'd just let ye know how one such marriage turned; and as he didn't come himself you may go home and tell Father M'Leod that, God helping me, I have told you the truth.'

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The next day an elderly priest approached the door of the same house. His hair was grey, his shoulders bent, his face was furrowed with those benign lines which tell that the pain which has

graven them is that sympathy which accepts as its own the sorrows of others. Father M'Leod had come far because he had a word to say, a word of pity and of sympathy, which he hoped might yet touch an impenitent heart, a word that he felt was due from the Church he represented to this wandering soul, whether repentance should be the result or not.

When he rang the bell it was not the young girl but her mother who answered the door; her face, which spoke of ordinary comfort and good cheer, bore marks of recent tears.

'Do you know,' asked the Father curiously, 'what statement it was that your mother communicated to my friend who was here yesterday?'

'No, sir, I do not.'

'Your mother was yesterday in her usual health and sound mind?' he interrogated gently.

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'She was indeed, sir,' and she wiped a tear.

'I would like to see your mother,' persisted he.

'She had a stroke in the night, sir; she's lying easy now, but she knows no one, and the doctor says she'll never hear or see or speak again.'

The old man sighed deeply.

'If I may make so bold, sir, will you tell me what business it was my mother had with the young man yesterday or with yourself?'

'It is not well that I should tell you,' he replied, and he went away.

IV

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A TAIN IN THE BLOOD

CHAPTER I

The curate was walking on the cliffs with his lady-love. All the sky was grey, and all the sea was grey. The soft March wind blew over the rocky shore; it could not rustle the bright green weed that hung wet from the boulders, but it set all the tufts of grass upon the cliffs nodding to the song of the ebbing tide. The lady was the vicar's daughter; her name was Violetta.

'Let us stand still here,' said the curate, 'for there is something I must say to you to-day.' So they stood still and looked at the sea.

'Violetta,' said the curate, 'you cannot be ignorant that I have long loved you. Last night I took courage and told your father of my hope and desire that you should become my wife. He told me what I did not know, that you have already tasted the joy of love and the sorrow of its disappointment. I can only ask you now if this former love has made it impossible that you should love again.'

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'No,' she answered; 'for although I loved and sorrowed then with all the strength of a child's heart, still it was only as a child, and that is past.'

'Will you be my wife?' said the curate.

'I cannot choose but say "yes," I love you so much.'

Then they turned and went back along the cliffs, and the curate was very happy. 'But tell me,' he said, 'about this other man that loved you.'

'His name was Herbert. He was the squire's son. He loved me and I loved him, but afterwards we found that his mother had been mad——' Violetta paused and turned her sweet blue eyes upon the sea.

'So you could not marry?' said the curate.

'No,' said Violetta, casting her eyes downward, 'because the taint of madness is a terrible thing.' She shuddered and blushed.

'And you loved him?'

'Dearly, dearly,' said Violetta, clasping her hands. 'But madness in the blood is too terrible; it is like the inheritance of a curse.'

'He went away?' said the curate.

'Yes, Herbert went away; and he died. He loved me so much that he died.'

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'I do not wonder at that,' said the curate, 'for you are very lovely, Violetta.'

They walked home hand in hand, and when they had said good-bye under the beech trees that

grew by the vicarage gate, the curate went down the street of the little town. The shop-keepers were at their doors breathing the mild spring air. The fishermen had hung their nets to dry in the market-place near the quay. The western cloud was turning crimson, and the steep roofs and grey church-tower absorbed in sombre colours the tender light. The curate was going home to his lodgings, but he bethought him of his tea, and turned into the pastry-cook's by the way.

'Have you any muffins, Mrs. Yeander?' he asked.

'No, sir,' said the portly wife of the baker, in a sad tone, 'they're all over.'

'Crumpets?' said he.

'Past and gone, sir,' said the woman with a sigh. She had a coarsely poetical cast of mind, and commonly spoke of the sale of her goods as one might speak of the passing of summer flowers. The curate was turning away.

'I would make bold, sir,' said the woman, 'to ask if you've heard that we've let our second-floor front for a while. It's a great thing for us, sir, as you know, to 'ave it let, not that you'll approve the person as 'as took it.'

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'Oh!' said the curate, 'how is that?'

'He's the new Jewish rabbi, sir, being as they've opened the place of their heathenish worship again. It's been shut this two year, for want of a Hebrew to read the language.'

'Oh, no, Mrs. Yeander; you're quite mistaken in calling the Jews heathens.'

'The meeting-place is down by the end of the street, sir—a squarish sort of house. It's not been open in your time; likely you'll not know it. The new rabbi's been reading a couple of weeks to them. They do say it's awful queer.'

'Oh, indeed!' said the curate; 'what are their hours of service?'

'Well, to say the truth, sir, they'll soon be at it now, for it's Friday at sunset they've some antics or other in the place. The rabbi's just gone with his book.'

'I think I'll look them up, and see what they're at,' said he, going out.

He was a thin, hard-working man. His whole soul was possessed by his great love for Violetta, but even the gladness of its success could not turn him from his work. When the day was over he would indulge in brooding on his joy; until then the need of the world pressed. He stepped out again into the evening glow. The wind had grown stronger, and he bent his head forward and walked against it towards the west. He felt a sudden sympathy for this stranger who had come to minister in his own way to the few scattered children of the Jews who were in the town. He knew the unjust sentiment with which he would be surrounded as by an atmosphere. The curate was broad in his views. 'All nations and all people,' thought he, 'lust for an excuse to deem their neighbour less worthy than themselves, that they may oppress him. This is the selfishness which is the cause of all sin and is the devil.' When he got to this point in his thoughts he came to a sudden stand and looked up. 'But, thank God,' he said to himself, 'the True Life is still in the world, and as we resist the evil we not only triumph ourselves, but make the triumph of our children sure.' So reasoned the curate; he was a rather fanatical fellow.

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The people near gave him 'good-day' when they saw him stop. All up and down the street the children played with shrill noises and pattering feet. The sunset cloud was brighter, and the dark peaked roofs of tile and thatch and slate, as if compelled to take some notice of the fire, threw back the red where, here and there, some glint of moisture gave reflection to the coloured light. He had come near the end of the town, and, where the houses opened, the red sky was fretted with dark twigs and branches of elm trees which grew on the grassy slope of the cliff. The elm trees were in the squire's park, and the curate looked at them sadly and thought of Herbert who had died.

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Up a little lane at the end of the street he found the entrance to a low square hall. There was a small ante-room to the place of service, and in this a dull-looking man was seated polishing a candlestick. He was a crossing-sweeper by trade and a friend of the curate.

'Well, Issachar; so you've got your synagogue open again!'

The man Issachar made some sound meant for a response, but not intelligible.

'How many Jews will there be in the town?'

'Twenty that are heads of families, and two grown youths,' said Issachar.

'That's enough to keep up a service, for some of them will be rich?'

'Some are very rich,' said Issachar, wrinkling his face with satisfaction when he said the words.

'Then how is it you don't always keep up the service?'

But Issachar had no explanation to give. He polished his candlestick the more vigorously, and related at some length what he knew of the present reader, which was, in fact, nothing, except that he was a foreigner and had only offered to read while he was visiting the town.

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'I have come for the service,' said the curate.

'Better not,' said Issachar; 'it's short to-night, and there'll not be many.'

The curate answered by opening the inner door and entering. There were some high pews up and down the sides of the room. There was a curtain at the farther end and a reading desk in the centre, both of which were enclosed in a railing ornamented by brass knobs, and in which were set high posts supporting gas-lamps, nine in all, which were lit, either for heat or ceremony, and turned down to a subdued light. The evening light entered through the domed roof. Hebrew texts which the curate could not decipher were painted on the dark walls. He took off his hat reverently and sat down. There was no one there. He felt very much surprised at finding himself alone. To his impressible nervous nature it seemed that he had suddenly entered a place far removed in time and space from the every-day life with which he was so familiar. He sat a long time; it was cold, and the evening light grew dim, and yet no one came. Issachar entered now and then, and made brief remarks about sundry things as he gave additional polish to the knobs on the railing, but he always went out again.

At length a side door opened and the reader came in from his vestry. He had apparently waited in hope of a congregation, but now came in to perform his duty without their aid. Perhaps he was not so much disappointed as the curate was. It would have been very difficult to tell from looking at him what his emotions were. He was a stout large man with a coarse brown beard. There was little to be seen of his face but the hair upon it, and one gathered the suggestion, although it was hard to know from what, that the man and his beard were not as clean as might be. He wore a black gown and an ordinary high silk hat, although pushed much farther back on his head than an Englishman would have worn it. He walked heavily and clumsily inside the railing, and stood before the desk, slowly turning over backward the leaves of the great book. Then suddenly he began to chant in the Hebrew tongue. His voice fell mellow and sweet upon the silence, filling it with drowsy sound, as the soft music of a humble-bee will suddenly fill the silence of a woodland glade. There was no thought, only feeling, conveyed by the sound.

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Issachar had gone out, and the Anglican priest sat erect, gazing at the Jew through the fading light, his attention painfully strained by the sense of loneliness and surprise. From mere habit he supposed the chant to be an introduction to a varied service, but no change came. On and on and on went the strange music, like a potent incantation, the big Jew swaying his body slightly with the rhythm, and at long intervals came the whisper of paper with the turning of the leaf.

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The curate gazed and wondered until he forgot himself. Then he tried with an effort to recall who he was, and where he was, and all the details of the busy field of labour he had left just outside the door. He wished that the walls of the square room were not so thick, that some sound from the town might come in and mingle with the chant. He strained his ear in vain to catch a word of the Hebrew which might be intelligible to him. He wondered much what sort of a man this Jew might be, actuated by what motives, impelled by what impulses to his lonely task. All the sorrow of a hope deferred through ages, and a long torture patiently borne, seemed gathered in the cadence; but the man—surely the man was no refined embodiment of the high sentiment of his psalm! And still the soft rich voice chanted the unknown language, and the daylight grew more dim.

The curate was conscious that again he tried to remember who he was, and where; and then the surroundings of the humble synagogue fell away, and he himself was standing looking at a jewel. It was a purple stone, oval-shaped and polished, perhaps about as large as the drop of dew which could hang in a harebell's heart. The stone was the colour of a harebell, and there was a ray of light in it, as if in the process of its formation the jewel had caught sight of a star, and imprisoned the tiny reflection for ever within itself. The curate moved his head from side to side to see if the ray within the stone would remain still, but it did not, turning itself to meet his eye as if the tiny star had a life and a light of its own. Then he looked at the setting, for the stone was set in steel. A zigzag-barred steel frame held it fast, and outside the zigzag bars there was a smooth ring, with some words cut upon it in Hebrew. The characters were very small; he knew, rather than saw, that they were Hebrew; but he did not know what they meant. All this time he had been stooping down, looking at this thing as if it lay very near the ground. Then suddenly he noticed upon what it was lying. There was a steel chain fastened to it, and the chain was around the neck of a woman who lay upon the earth; the jewel was upon her breast. But how white and cold the breast was! Surely there was no life in it. And he observed with horror that the garments which had fallen back were oozing with water, and that the hair was wet. He hardly saw the face; for a moment he thought he saw it, and that it was the face of a Jewess, young and beautiful, but the vision passed from him. The chant had ceased, and the rabbi was kissing his book.

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Very solemnly the Jew bowed himself three times and kissed the book, and then in the twilight of the nine dim lamps he stumbled out and shut the door, without giving a glance to his one listener.

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As for the young Christian priest, he was panic-stricken. When our senses themselves deceive us we are cut off from our cheerful belief in the reality of material things, or forced to face the unpleasant fact that we hold no stable relationship to them. He rushed out into the street. Issachar was at the entrance as he passed, and he fancied he saw the face of the reader peeping at him from the vestry window, but he crushed his hat hard down on his head and strode away, courting the bluster of the wind, striving by the energy of action to cast off the trance that seemed to enslave him.

When he reached his own door he found the baker's wife sitting on the doorstep. It was quite

dusk; perhaps that was the reason he did not recognise her at first.

'La, sir, I found them two muffins lying unbeknown in the corner of the shelf, so I brought them round, thinking you mightn't 'ave 'ad your tea.'

'Muffins?' said the curate, as if he were not quite sure what muffins might be. Then he began to wonder if he was really losing his wits, and he plunged into talk with the woman, saying anything and everything to convince himself that he was not asleep or mad. 'Do you know, Mrs. Yeander, that I am going to be married?'

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'Well, I am sure, sir,' said she, curtseying and smiling. 'It's a great compliment to me to hear it from your own lips; not that it's unexpected. Miss Violetta's a sweet saint, just like her ma, she is, an' her ma's a saint if there ever was one. Mr. Higgs, the verger, says that to see her pray that length of time on her knees after the service is over in church is a touching sight.'

'But I don't think Miss Violetta is like her mother,' said the curate.

'Well no, sir; now that you mention it, perhaps she's not—at least, not in looks. But lor' sir, she's wonderful like her ma when it comes to paying a bill, not but what they're to be respected for keeping a heye on the purse. I often tell Yeander that if we were a bit more saving, like the vicar's lady, we'd lay by a bit for our old age.'

'Yes, Mrs. Yeander, yes; that would be an excellent plan,' said the curate, fumbling with his latch-key in the door. 'Suppose you come in and make my tea for me, Mrs. Yeander. I'm all alone to-night.'

'I bethought I might do that, sir, when I came along. Yeander was in the shop, and I said, Mrs. Jones having gone to see her son, that you'd 'ave no one, so I just says to Yeander, "I'll step round, an' if I'm asked I'll make tea."'

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The curate lit his lamp and poked his fire, and the portly woman began to toast his muffins. The flame lit up the placid wrinkles of her face as she knelt before it:

'But I don't think Miss Violetta is in the least like her mother,' said he again.

'Lor' sir, don't you? Well, you ought to know best. They do say what's bred in the bone comes out in the flesh; but it'll be none the worse for you if she looks sharp after the spending. You're not much given to saving.'

The curate walked nervously up and down his small room.

'Make the tea strong to-night,' he said.

'Mr. Higgs, the verger, do hate the vicar's lady, sir—he do, and no mistake—but he says anybody could see with 'alf a heye that she was a real saint. The subscriptions she puts down to missions and church restorings—it's quite wonderful.'

The curate ran his hand wearily through his hair. He felt called upon to say something. 'I have the highest respect for Mrs. Moore,' he began. 'I know her to be a most devoted helpmeet to the vicar, and a truly good woman. At the same time'—he coughed—'at the same time, I should wish to say distinctly that after being niggardly in her domestic affairs, which is unfortunately the case, I do not think it adds to her stock of Christian virtues to give the money thus saved to church work.'

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The curate cleared his throat. It was because he was flying from himself that he had let the woman talk until this speech of his had been made necessary; but at all times his humble friends in this town were well nigh irrepressible in their talk. This woman was in full tide now.

'They do say, sir, there's a difference between honest saving and greed. Mr. Higgs said to Yeander one day, says he, "Mrs. Moore's folks far back made their money by sharp trading, and greed's in the family, and it's the worst sort of greed, for it grasps both at 'eaven and earth, both at this life and the 'eavenly. And," says he, "no one could doubt that the lady's that way constituted that she couldn't cut a loaf of bread in 'alf without giving herself the largest share, even if it were the bread of life.'"

'My good Mrs. Yeander——' began the curate in stern rebuke.

'Oh, no, sir, Mr. Higgs don't mean no harm. He only gets that riled at Mrs. Moore sometimes that he kind of lets off to Yeander and me.'

'And I don't think, Mrs. Yeander,' said the curate, for the third time, 'that Miss Violetta is at all like her mother.'

'She's young yet, sir,' said the woman. Then she went away, leaving the curate to interpret her last remark as he chose.

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CHAPTER II

About a week after that there was a fine dinner given at the vicarage to welcome the curate into

the family. The old squire was invited, but he refused to come. Violetta's mamma wrote and asked some of her relatives to come down from town. 'Our chosen son-in-law is not rich,' she wrote, 'but he comes of an old family, and that is a great thing. Dear Violetta will, of course, inherit my own fortune, which will be ample for them, and his good connections, with God's blessing, will complete their happiness.' So they came down. There was the vicar's brother, who was a barrister, and his wife. Then there were two sisters of Mrs. Moore, who were both very rich. One was an old maid, and one was married to a dean—she brought her husband. 'You see,' said Violetta's mamma to the curate, 'our relatives are all either law or clergy.'

There were very grand preparations made for the dinner, and Mrs. Higgs, the wife of the verger, came to the curate's rooms the day before and took away his best clothes, that she might see they were well brushed for the occasion. She did up his collar and wristbands herself, and gave them a fine gloss. Higgs brought them back just in time for the dinner.

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'It's just about five years since they had such a turn-out at the vicarage,' said Higgs in a crisp little voice. 'Miss Violetta was nineteen then; she'll be twenty-four now.'

'Yes,' said the curate absently; 'what was up then?'

'Twas a dinner much of a muchness to this. Mrs. Higgs, she was just reminding me of it. But that was in honour of Mr. Herbert, of the 'All. You'll 'ave heard of him?'

'Oh, yes,' said the curate, 'all that was very sad.'

'The more so,' said Higgs briskly, 'that when it was broke hoff, Mr. Herbert died of love. He went to some foreign countries and took up with low company, and there he died. Squire hasn't held his head up straight since that day.'

'All that was before I came,' said the curate very gravely, for he did not know exactly what to say.

'Lor' bless you, sir,' said Higgs, 'I was in no way blaming you. There's no blame attaching to any, that I know; squire's wife was as mad as a hare. Miss Violetta, she cried her pretty eyes nigh out for Mr. Herbert; it's time she'd another.'

The curate went to the dinner, and it was a very fine affair indeed. Violetta wore a silk gown and looked charming. She does not look a day older than she did when I saw her five years ago,' said the dean to the curate, meaning to be very polite, but the curate did not smile at the compliment.

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'How fine your flowers are!' said the maiden aunt to Violetta. 'Where did you get them, my dear?'

'The squire sent them to me,' said Violetta, with a droop of her eyelids which made her look more charming than ever. Then they had dinner, and after dinner Violetta gave them some music. It was sacred music, for Mrs. Moore did not care for anything else.

When the song was over Mrs. Moore said to the curate, 'It has been my wish to give dear Violetta a little gift as a slight remembrance of this happy occasion, and I thought that something of my own would be more valuable than——' Here the mother's voice broke with very natural emotion, and she pressed her handkerchief to her eyes. 'You must excuse me,' she murmured, 'she is such a dear—such a very dear girl, and she is our only child.'

'Indeed, I can well understand,' said he, with earnest sympathy.

'Such a dear—such a very dear girl,' murmured Mrs. Moore again. Then she rose and embraced Violetta and wept, and the aunts all shed tears, and the vicar coughed. Violetta's own blue eyes over-flowed with very pretty tears.

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The curate felt very uncomfortable indeed, and said again that he quite understood, and that it was quite natural. The dean and the barrister both said what they ought. The dean remarked that these dear parents ought not to sorrow at losing a daughter, but rejoice at finding a son. The barrister pointed out that as the bride was only expected to move into the next house but one after her marriage, all talk of parting was really quite absurd. The vicar did not say anything; he rarely did when his wife was present. Then Mrs. Moore became more composed, and put a ring on her daughter's finger. The curate did not see the ring at the moment. He was leaning against the mantel-shelf, feeling very much overcome by the responsibility of his new happiness.

'Oh, mamma, how lovely!' cried Violetta. 'How perfectly beautiful!'

'A star-amethyst!' said the barrister in a tone of surprise.

'Is it a star-amethyst indeed?' said the dean, looking over the shoulders of the group with his double eye-glass. 'I am not aware that I ever saw one before; they are a very rare and beautiful sort of gem.'

'Where did you get it, sister Matilda?' asked the maiden aunt.

Now, although Mrs. Moore was in a most gracious humour, she never liked being asked questions at any time. 'I am surprised that you should ask me that, Eliza. I have had it for many years.'

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'But you must have got it somewhere at the beginning of the years,' persisted Eliza, who was of a more lively disposition.

Mrs. Moore gave her a severe glance for the frivolous tone of her answer. 'I was just about to

explain that this stone has been lying for years among the jewellery which poor uncle Ford bequeathed to me. I thought it a pity that such a beautiful stone should lie unnoticed any longer.'

'Oh, a great pity!' they all cried.

'I should not have supposed that poor dear uncle Ford possessed such a rare thing,' said the wife of the dean.

'It is very curious you never mentioned it before,' said Eliza.

But Eliza was not in favour.

'Not at all,' said Mrs. Moore; 'I take very little interest in such things. Life is too short to allow our attention to be diverted from serious things by mere ornaments.'

'That is very true,' said the dean.

Violetta broke through the little circle to show her lover the ring. 'Look,' she said, holding up her pretty hand. 'Isn't it lovely? Isn't mamma very kind?'

The curate turned his eyes from the fire with an effort. He had been listening to all they said in a state of dreamy surprise. He did not wish to look at the stone, and the moment he saw it he perceived it was what he had seen before. It was not exactly the same shade of purple, but it appeared to him that he had seen it before by daylight, and now the lamps were lit. It was the same shape and size, and the tiny interior star was the same. He moved his head from side to side to see if the ray moved to meet his eye, and he found that it did so. He looked at Violetta. How beautiful she was in her white gown, with her little hand uplifted to display the shining stone, and her face upturned to his! The soft warm curve of the delicate breast and throat, the red lips that seemed to breathe pure kisses and holy words, the tender eyes shining like the jewel, dewy with the sacred tears she had been shedding, and the yellow hair, smooth, glossy, brushed saintly-wise on either side of the nunlike brow—all this he looked at, and his senses grew confused. The sad rise and fall of the Hebrew chant was in his ears again; the bright room and the people were not there, but the chant seemed in some strange way to rise up in folds of darkness and surround Violetta like a frame; and everything else was dark and filled with the music, except Violetta, who stood there white and shining, holding up the ring for him to look at; and at her feet lay that other woman, wet and dead, with the same stone in the steel chain at her throat. 'Isn't it lovely? Isn't mamma very kind?' Violetta was saying.

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'My dear, I think he is ill,' said the vicar.

They took him by the arm, putting him on a chair, and fetched water and a glass of wine. He heard them talking together.

'I daresay it has been too much for him,' said the dean. 'Joy is often as hard to bear as grief.'

'He is such a fellow for work,' said the vicar, 'I never knew any one like him.'

The curate sat up quite straight. 'Did any of you ever see an amethyst like this set in steel?'

'In steel? What an odd idea!' said the maiden aunt.

'He is not quite himself yet,' said the dean in a low voice, tapping her on the shoulder.

'I think it would be very inappropriate, indeed very wrong, to set a valuable stone in any of the baser metals,' said Mrs. Moore. She spoke as if the idea were a personal affront to herself, but then she had an immense notion of her own importance, and always looked upon all wrong-doing as a personal grievance.

'Whatever made you think of it?' asked Violetta.

'I daresay it was rather absurd,' said the curate meekly.

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'By no means,' said the barrister; 'the idea of making jewellery exclusively of gold is modern and crude. In earlier times many beautiful articles of personal ornamentation were made of brass and even of iron.'

'Mamma,' said Violetta, 'I remember one day seeing a curious old thing in the bottom of your dressing-case. It looked as if it might be made of steel. It was a very curious old thing—chain, and a pendant with some inscription round it.'

'Did you?' said Mrs. Moore. 'I have several old trinkets. I do not know to which you refer.'

She bade Violetta ring for tea. 'I am sure you will be the better for a cup of tea,' she said, turning to the curate.

'I am quite well,' he replied. 'I think, if you will excuse me, I will walk home at once; the air will do me good.'

But they would not hear of his walking home. They made him drink tea and sit out the evening with them. Violetta gave them some more music; and they all made themselves exceedingly agreeable. When the evening was over they sent the curate home in the carriage.

The night was frosty, calm, and clear, and quite light, for the March moon was just about to rise from the eastern sea.

When the carriage set him down at his own door the curate had no mind to go in. He waited till the sound of the horse's feet had died away, and then he walked back down the empty street. The town was asleep; his footsteps echoed sharply from roofs and walls.

He was not given to morbid fancies or hallucinations, and he was extremely annoyed at what had taken place. Twice in the last eight days he had been the subject of a waking dream, and now he was confronted with what seemed an odd counterpart of his vision in actual fact. It was no doubt a mere coincidence, but it was a very disagreeable one. Of course if he saw the old trinket described by Violetta, the chances were that it would be quite different from the setting of the stone which the dead woman wore; but even if the two were exactly the same, what difference could it make? A dream is nothing, and that which appears in a dream is nothing. The coincidence had no meaning.

He turned by the side of the church down the lane which led to the little quay. The tide was halfway up the dark weed, and the fishing-boats were drawn near to the quay, ready for the cruise at dawn; their dark furled sails were bowing and curtseying to one another with all ceremony, like ghosts at a stately ball. To the east and south lay the sea, vacant, except that on the eastern verge stood a palace of cloud, the portals of which were luminous with the light from within, and now they were thrown open with a golden flash, and yellow rays shot forth into the upper heavens, spreading a clear green light through the deep midnight of the sky where the other worlds wandered. Then the yellow moon came from her palace, wrapping herself at first with a mantle of golden mist, as if—Godiva-like—she shrank from loosening her garments; but the need of the darkling earth pressed upon her, and she dropped her covering and rode forth in nakedness.

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Everything was more lovely now, for there was light to see the loveliness. The bluff wind that came from the bosom of the sea seemed only to tell of a vast silence and a world asleep. The rocky shore, with its thin line of white breakers, stretched round to the west. About a mile away there was a rugged headland, with some crags at its feet, which had been broken off and rolled down into the sea by the Frost Demon of bygone years. The smallest was farthest out, and wedged behind it and sheltered by it was the black hulk of a wrecked vessel. This outermost rock lay so that it broke the waves as they came against the wreck, and each was thrown high in a white jet and curl of spray, and fell with a low sob back into the darkness of the sea.

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The curate turned and walked toward the headland on the cliff path where he had walked a week before with Violetta. The cliffs were completely desolate, except for some donkeys browsing here and there, their brown hair silvered by the frost. There was a superstition in the town that the place was haunted on moonlight nights by the spirit of a woman who had perished in the wreck. It had been a French vessel, wrecked five years before, and all on board were drowned—six men and one woman, the wife of the skipper. They had all been buried in one grave in the little cemetery that was on the top of the headland; and it was easy to see how the superstition of the haunting came about, for as the curate watched the spray on the rock near the wreck rise up in the moonlight and fall back into the sea, he could almost make himself believe that he saw in it the supple form of a woman with uplifted hands, praying heaven for rescue.

The wind was pretty rough when he got to the head of land, and he walked up among the graves to find a place where he might be sheltered and yet have advantage of the view. He knew that close by the edge of the cliff, over the grave of the shipwrecked people, stood a marble cross, large enough to shelter a man somewhat if he leaned against it. Upon this cross was a long inscription giving a touching account of the wreck, and stating that it was erected by Matilda Moore, wife of the vicar, out of grief for the sad occurrence, and with an earnest prayer for the unknown bereaved ones.

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The curate was rather fond of reading this inscription, as we all are apt to be fond of going over words which, although perfectly familiar to us, still leave some space for curiosity concerning their author and origin, and he was wondering idly as he walked whether there would be light enough from the moon to read them now. The wind came, like the moonlight, from the south-east, and he walked round by the western side of the graveyard in order to come up the knoll on which the cross stood by the sheltered side. Everything around him was intensely bleak and white, for the moon, having left the horizon, had lost her golden light, and the colouring of the night had toned down to white and purple. Patches of wild white cloud were scudding across the pallid purple sky beneath the stars, and there was a silver causeway across the purple sea. The purple was not unlike that of an amethyst. The cliffs sloped back to the town; the boats and peaked roofs and church tower were seen by the sharp outline of their masses of light and shade. The street lamps were not lit in the town because of the moon, and only in two or three places there was the warm glow of a casement fringed with the rays of a midnight candle. To the left of the cliffs, close to the town, were the trees of the squire's park and the roof of the Hall. Perhaps it was because the curate was looking at these things, as he walked among the graves, that he did not look at the monument towards which he was making way, until he came within half a dozen yards of it; then he suddenly saw that there was another man leaning against it, half hid in the shadow. He stopped at once and stood looking.

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The man had thrown his arms backward over the arms of the cross, and was leaning, half hanging, upon it; the young priest was inexpressibly shocked and startled by the attitude. He knew that none of the humbler inhabitants of the town would venture near such a place at such a time, nor could he think of any one else who was likely to be there. Besides, although he could not see the stranger distinctly, he himself was standing in full moonlight, and yet the man in the shadow of the cross made no sign of seeing him. At that moment he would gladly have gone home without asking further question, but that would have looked as if he were afraid.

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He tried a chance remark. 'It is a fine night,' he said, as lightly as might be.

'Yes,' said the other, and moved his arms from the arms of the cross. It was only one word, but the curate recognised the soft voice at once. It was the Jewish rabbi.

'I was at one of your services the other day,' he said, advancing nearer.

'Yes.'

'I felt sorry your people did not turn out better.'

There was no answer.

'It is a very cold wind,' said the curate. 'I hardly know why I came out so far.'

'Shall I tell you?' asked the Jew softly. He spoke good English, but very slowly, and with some foreign accent.

'Certainly, if you can.'

'I desired very much to see you.'

'But you did not tell me, so that could not be the reason. Your will could not influence my mind. I assure you I came of my own free will; it would be terrible if one man should be at the mercy of another's caprice.'

'Be it so; let us call it chance then. I desired that you should come, and you came.'

'But you do not think that you have a power over other men like that?'

'I do not know; I find that with some men such correspondence between my will and their thoughts and actions is not rare; but I could not prove that it is not chance. It makes no difference to me whether it be chance or not. I have been thinking of you very much, desiring your aid, and twice you have come to me—as you say—of your own free will.'

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'If you have such a power, you may be responsible for a very disagreeable dream I had in your synagogue the other day.'

'What was the dream?'

'Nay, if you created it you should be able to tell me what it was.'

'I have no idea what it was; if I influenced your imagination I did so unconsciously.'

There was about this Jew such a complete gentleness and repose, such earnestness without eagerness, such self-confidence without self-assertion, that the curate's heart warmed to him instinctively.

'I believe you are an honest Christian,' said the Jew very simply.

'I hope honest Christians are not rare.'

'I think a wholly honest man is very rare, because to see what is honest it is necessary to look at things without self-interest or desire.'

'I am certainly not such a man. The most I can say is that I try to be more honest every day.'

'That is very well said,' said the Jew. 'If you had believed in your own honesty, I should have doubted it.' Then, in a very simple and quiet way, he told the curate a strange story.

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He said that he lived in Antwerp. They were five in one family—the parents, a sister and brother, and himself. His father and brother did business with the English ships, but he was a teacher and reader in the synagogue. There had been in their family a very sacred heirloom in the form of an amulet or charm. Their forefathers had believed that it came from Jerusalem before their nation lost the holy city; but he himself did not think that this could be true; he only knew that it was ancient, and possessed very valuable properties as a talisman to those who knew how to use it. About five years before, his sister, who was beautiful and wayward, had loved and married a French sea-captain. The father cursed his daughter, but the mother could not let her go from them under the fear of this curse, and she hung the amulet about her neck as a safeguard. Alas for such safeguard! in a few weeks the captain's ship was wrecked, and all on her were drowned. He said that it was that same ship which lay near them, a wreck among the waves, and his sister lay buried beneath their feet.

The family did not hear of the wreck till some time after the burial, and then they knew for the first time what their mother had done with the amulet. His brother came over at once to this town to seek it, but in vain. The people said they had not seen the necklace; that it had certainly

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not been buried with the girl. The people seemed simple and honest; the brother was a shrewd man, and he believed that they spoke the truth. He returned home, in distress; they could not tell what to think, for they knew their sister would not have dared to take off the necklace, and the chain was too strong to be broken by the violence of the waves.

Some months after they heard that there was a young Englishman dying in Antwerp who came from this town. The name of the town was graven on their hearts, and they went to see him. He was a mere boy, a pretty boy, and when they asked him about the wreck he became excited in his weakness and fever, and told them all the story of it as he had seen it with his own eyes.

It was an October afternoon. A storm had been lowering and partially breaking over the town for three days, and that day there was a glare of murky light from the cloud that made the common people think that the end of the world was come. When the ship struck, the fisher-people ran out of the town to the shore nearest her, and this boy would have run out with them and been among the foremost but that a very pious and charitable lady of the place had besought him to take her with him. There was a great rain and wind, and it was with difficulty that he led the lady out and helped her down to the shore. By that time the wreck had been dashed to pieces, and the fishermen were bringing in the dead bodies of the crew. There was a woman among them, and when they brought her body in, they did not lay it with the bodies of the sailors, but carried it respectfully and laid it close to the lady who stood in the shelter of some rocks. The wet clothes had fallen back from her breast—the boy remembered it well, for it had been his first sight of death, and his heart was touched by the girl's youth and beauty. He had not seen her again, for he had gone to help with the boats, and the fishermen's wives had run at the lady's bidding and brought coverings to wrap her in.

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The Jewish father then told the dying man about the amulet. He said that, to the best of his memory, some such thing had been about the neck of the dead girl, but that he was certain that none of the fisher-people would have been bad enough to steal from the dead. They entreated him to think well what he said, and to consider again if there was no doubtful character there who might have had the opportunity and the baseness to commit the crime. At that the dying man fell into profound thought, and when he looked at them again the fever-flush had mounted to his face, and there was a light in his eyes. He told them that if there was any one upon the shore that day who would have done such a thing it was the very rich and pious lady that he himself had taken to the wreck. She had been alone with the body when she sent the other women for wrappings. They thought that perhaps his mind was wandering, and left him, promising to return next day; but when they came again he was dead.

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'I have learned since I came here,' said the Jew, 'that he was the son of the old man who lives in the great house down there among the trees.'

They both looked down at the park. The leafless elms stood up like giant feathers in the white mist of the moonbeams, and the chimney-stacks of the house threw a deep shadow on the shining roof.

'But we felt,' said the Jew, 'that even if the judgment of the dying boy were a true one, and this lady had committed the crime, we still had no evidence against her, and that whoever was wicked enough to steal would certainly deny the act, and conceal that which was stolen. Hopeless as it seemed to wait, doing nothing, our only chance of redress would be lost by making any inquiry which might frighten her. We sent a message to the goldsmith in London who mends her jewels, asking him to watch for this necklace, and so we waited. At last we heard news. An amethyst which we do not doubt is ours came to the goldsmith to be put in a ring; but there was no necklace with it. I came here to see if I could do something, but I have been here for some time and can devise no plan. If she still possess the other part, to speak would be to cause its destruction, and how can I find out without asking if she still has by her the thing that would prove her crime? Do not be angry with me when I tell you this. Remember it was not I who presumed to suspect the wife of your priest, but the English boy, who knew her well.'

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'Yes,' said the curate, 'I shall remember that.' He had grown tired of standing in the wind, and had sat down on the frosty grass below the cross. The blast was very cold, and he crouched down to avoid it, hugging his knees with his hands.

'You are about to be united to the family,' said the Jew; 'perhaps you have seen the stone. Will you, for the sake of that justice which we all hope for, try to find out for me if the other part of the amulet still exists? I will give you a drawing of it, and if you find it as I describe, you will know that my tale is true. Remember this—that we have no wish to make the wrong public or punish the wrong-doer. We only want to obtain our property.'

'Have you got a drawing of it now?'

'Yes, I have it here.'

The curate rose up and took the paper. He lit a match, and held its tiny red flame in the shelter of the stone. The paper was soiled and untidily folded, but the drawing was clear. It took but a glance to satisfy him that what he had seen in his dream was but the reflection in his own thought of the idea in the Jew's mind. He did not stop to ask any explanation of the fact; the fact itself pressed too hard upon him. While the match was still burning he mechanically noticed the Jew's face, as it leaned over the paper near his own—not a handsome face, but gentle and noble in its expression. Then the match went out; it dropped from his hand, a tiny spark, into the grass, and for a moment illuminated the blades among which it fell.

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CHAPTER IV

The two men walked back over the bleak cliffs together, and for the greater part of the way in silence; at last the curate spoke. He told the Jew quite truly that he believed the vicar's wife had his jewel, and that he supposed she must have come by it according to his worst suspicions. 'But,' he added, 'I believe she is a good woman.'

The other looked at him in simple surprise. 'That is very curious,' he said.

'Let us not try to find out her secret by prying; let us go to her to-morrow, and tell her openly what we think. You fear that she will deny her action; I have no such fear; and if she does not stand our test, I give you my word for it, you shall not be the loser.'

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'I have put my case in your hands,' said the Jew. 'I will do as you say.'

They turned into the sleeping town; but when they reached the place of parting the curate put his hand on the Jew's arm and said, 'I should not have your forbearance. If some one unconnected with myself had wronged me so, at the same time making profession of religion, I should think she deserved both disgrace and punishment.'

'And that she shall have, but not from us,' he replied. 'The sin will surely be visited on her and on her children.'

'Surely not on the children,' said the curate. 'You cannot believe that. It would be unjust.'

'You have seen but little of the world if you do not know that such is the law. The vagabond who sins from circumstances may have in him the making of a saint, and his children may be saints; but with those who sin in spite of the good around them it is not so. For them and for their children is the curse.'

'God cannot punish the innocent for the guilty,' said the priest passionately.

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'Surely not; for that is the punishment—that they are not innocent. The children of the proud are proud; the children of the cruel, cruel; and the children of the dishonest are dishonest, unto the third and fourth generation. Fight against it as they may, they cannot see the difference between right and wrong; they can only, by struggling, come *nearer* to the light. Do you call this unjust of God? Is it unjust that the children of the mad are mad, and the children of the virtuous virtuous.'

'You take from us responsibility if we inherit sin.'

'Nay, I increase responsibility. If we inherit obliquity of conscience, we are the more responsible for acting not as seems right in our own eyes, the more bound to restrain and instruct ourselves, for by this doctrine is laid upon us the responsibility of our children and children's children, that they may be better, not worse, than we.'

All night long the curate paced up and down his room. The dawn came and he saw the fishermen hurry away to the boats at the quay. The sunrise came with its dull transient light upon the rain cloud. When the morning advanced he went for the Jew, and they walked down the street in the driving rain. The wet paving-stones and roofs reflected the grey light of the clouds which hurried overhead. The ruddy-twigged beech trees at the vicarage gate were shaken and buffeted by the storm. The two men shook their dripping hats as they entered the house. They were received in a private parlour, which was filled with objects of art and devotion. Very blandly did the good wife of the vicar greet them, yet with business-like condescension.

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The Jew, in a few very simple words, told the story of his sister's death and the loss of the amulet. He told the peculiar value of the amulet, and added, 'I have reason, madam, to believe that it has come into your possession. If so, and if you have it still by you, I entreat that you will give it to me at once, for to you it can only be a pretty trinket, and to us it is like a household god.'

She looked at the Jew with evident emotion. 'I cannot tell you how it grieves me to hear you speak as if you attributed to any inanimate object the saving power which belongs to God alone,' she said. 'Think for a moment, only think, how dishonouring such a superstition is to the Creator.'

'Madam!' said the Jew in utmost surprise.

'Consider how wrong such a superstition is,' she said. 'What virtue can there be in a stone, or a piece of metal, or an inscription? None. They are as dead and powerless as the idols of the heathen; and to put the faith in any such thing that we ought to put in God's providence, is to dishonour Him. It grieves me to think that you, or any other intelligent man, could believe in such a superstition.'

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'Madam,' said the Jew again, 'these things are as we think of them. You think one way and I another.'

'But you think wrongly. I would have you see your error, and turn from it. Can you believe in the Christian faith and yet—'

'I am a Jew,' he said.

'A Jew!' she exclaimed. She began to preach against that error also; entering into a long

argument in a dull dogmatic way, but with an earnestness which held the two men irresolute with wonder and surprise.

'It would seem, madam,' said the Jew, after she had talked much, 'that you desire greatly to set an erring world to rights again.'

'And should we not all desire that?' she asked, unconscious of the irony. 'For what else are we placed in the world but to pass on to others the light that God has entrusted to us?'

'I verily believe, madam,' said he seriously, 'that you think exactly what you say, and that you desire greatly to do me good. But, putting these questions aside, will you tell me if you have this ornament which I venerate?'

'Yes, I have it.'

'You took it from the breast of my sister when she lay dead upon your shore?'

'I unfastened it from her neck, and have kept it with the greatest care. It was an ornament which was quite unsuitable to your sister's station in life. I could not have allowed any of our poor women to see such a valuable stone on the neck of a girl like themselves in station; it would have given them false ideas, and I am careful to teach them simplicity in dress. In England we do not approve of people of your class wearing jewellery.'

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The curate put his arms on the table and bowed his head on his hands.

'Be that as it may,' said the Jew, rising, 'I will thank you if you will give me my property now and let me go.'

'I cannot give it to you.' She was a little flustered in her manner, but not much. 'It would be against my conscience to give you what you would use profanely. Providence has placed it in my care, and I am responsible for its use. If I gave it to you it would be tempting you to sin.'

He sat down again and looked at her with wonder in his soft brown eyes. 'You have had the stone taken out,' he said, 'and set in a ring.'

'Yes, and I have given it to my daughter, so that it is no longer mine to return to you. You must be aware that the marble cross stone I set up over your sister's grave cost me much more than the value of this stone. I am very much surprised that you should ask me to give it back. Surely any real feeling of gratitude for what I did for her would prompt you to be glad that you have something to give me in return.' She paused, then harped again upon the other string. 'But under any circumstances I could not feel justified in giving you anything that you would put to a bad use.'

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'That you have stolen my property does not make it yours to withhold, whatever may be your sentiments concerning it.'

'"Stolen!" I do not understand you when you use such a word. Do you think it possible that I should steal? I took the chain from your sister's neck with the highest motives. Do not use such a word as "stolen" in speaking to me.'

'Truly, madam,' he said, 'you could almost persuade me that you are in the right, and that I insult you.'

She looked at him stolidly, although evidently not without some inward apprehension. It was a piteous sight—the poor distorted reasoning faculty grovelling as a slave to the selfish will.

'I cannot give you back the amethyst,' she said, 'for I have given it away; but if you will promise me never again to regard it as having any value as an amulet or talisman, I will give you the necklace, and I will pay you something to have another stone put in.'

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The curate looked up. 'Get him the necklace and Violetta's ring,' he said, 'and we will go.'

A man had arisen within the curate who was stronger than his self-control. They might have argued with her for ever: he frightened her into compliance. He took her by the arm and turned her to the door.

'There is not a man, woman or child in this town,' he said, 'who shall not hear of this affair if you delay another moment to get him the chain and the ring. It is due to his charity if the matter is concealed then.'

When she was gone the Jew was disposed to make remarks. 'I truly believe,' he said, 'that it is as you say, that this woman is very virtuous in the sight of her own conscience.'

A servant brought them a packet. The Jew opened it, taking out the chain and the ring reverently and putting them in his breast. Then they went out into the wind and the rain.

The Jew went to his native city, and the curate accompanied him as far as London. There he said good-bye to him as to a friend. He did not return at once to his parish, but found a substitute to do his work there, and went inland for a month, seeking by change and relaxation to attain to the true judgment of calm pulses and quiet nerves. It was in April and in Lent that he returned.

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Higgs, the irrepressible, received him with joy. 'It's you that are the good sight for sore eyes,' he said. 'Not but what we've been 'aving an uncommon peaceful time for Lent. The vicar's lady she's

took bad and took to bed.'

The curate reproved the wicked Higgs, but he inquired after the health of the invalid.

'I hope Mrs. Moore is not very ill?'

'Bless you, no, sir; she's 'ale and 'earty. Cook says she's sure she've fell out with some one. That's her way; she takes to bed when she've fell out with any one. It makes them repent of their sins.'

A soft grey mist lay over land and sea. The church and vicarage were grey and wet. The beeches at the vicarage gate had broken forth in a myriad buds of silver green, and all the buds were tipped with water, and the grey stems were stained and streaked. The yew trees in the churchyard were bedewed with tiny drops. At the little gate that led from the vicarage into the churchyard, between the yew trees and the beeches, the curate waited for Violetta, after evensong. She came out of the old grey porch and down the path between the graves and the yew trees with her prayer-book in her hand. She looked like an Easter lily that holds itself in bud till the sadness of Lent is past, so pure, so modest, such a perfect thing from the hand of God.

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She stopped and started when she saw her lover, and then greeted him with a little smile, but blent with some reproachful dignity.

'I am glad you have come at last, for I have been wanting to speak to you. Poor mamma has been very poorly and ill. It has grieved her very much indeed that you should have so misunderstood her motives, and treated her so rudely. Mamma takes things like that most deeply to heart.'

'She told you why I treated her rudely?'

'Yes, she told me, but she did not tell papa anything about it; it would only vex papa and do no good. Mamma told me to tell you that she had made up her mind to forgive you, and to say no more about it, although she was deeply grieved that you should have so misunderstood her.'

'Yes,' said the curate vaguely, for he did not know what else to say.

'Of course, as to the necklace, it may be a matter of opinion as to whether mamma judged rightly or not; but no one who knows her could doubt that her one desire was to do what was right. It is quite true what she says: that the stone was most unsuitable to the station of those people; every one says that the man was a very common and vulgar-looking person; and of course to regard such a thing with superstitious veneration is a very great sin, from which she saved them as long as she kept it. Mamma says of course she knew she ran the risk of being misunderstood in acting as she did, but she thought it her duty to run that risk if by that means she could save anything that God had entrusted to her keeping from being misused. You know what mamma is; there is nothing she would not do if she thought it right.'

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'Yes,' he said again, as though simply admitting that he had heard what she said.

'So I think we had better not say anything more about it. I know you will see that it is wisest to say nothing to papa or any one else. People think so differently about such things that it would only cause needless argument, and give poor mamma more pain when she has already suffered so much.'

'You may trust me. I will never mention the matter to your father, or to any one else. No one shall ever hear of it through me.'

'I was sure that you would see that it is wisest not to; I told mamma so. When she is better, and you have shown her that you regret having misunderstood her, we shall all be very happy again.' She held up her pretty face for a kiss.

No one could see them except the chattering starlings in the church tower, for they stood in the soft mist between the dewy yew trees and the red-budding hedge by the vicarage lawn. The beech trees stretched out their graceful twigs above them, the starlings talked to one another rather sadly, and far off through the stillness of the mist came the sound of the tide on the shore. The curate was very pale and grave. His tall frame trembled like a sick woman's as he stooped to give Violetta that kiss. He took her hands in his for a moment, and then he clasped her in his arms, lifting her from the grass and embracing her in a passion of tenderness and love. Then he put her from him.

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'Violetta, it is amiable of you, and loyal, to excuse and defend your mother, but tell me—tell me, as you speak before God, that you do not think as you have spoken. You are a woman now, with a soul of your own; tell me you know that to take this necklace and to keep it secretly was a terrible sin.'

'Indeed'—with candour—'I do not think anything of the sort. I think it is wicked of you to slander mamma in that way. And if you want to know what I think'—with temper now—'I think it was most unkind of you to give away my ring. After it had been given to me on such an occasion, too, it was priceless to us, but we could easily have paid that vulgar man all it was worth to him.'

'I will not argue with you. I perceive now that that would do no good.' There was a heart-broken tone in his voice that frightened Violetta. 'I will—I will only say—'

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'What?' she asked. The thin sharp sound in her voice was a note of alarm.

'I will not marry you,' moaned the curate.

'Not marry me!' she exclaimed in astonishment.

'I love you. I shall always love you. No other woman shall ever be my wife; but I will never marry you; and I shall go away and leave you free to forget me.'

'But why? What have I done?' she asked, her breath catching her tones.

'You have done nothing, my poor, poor girl; but—oh, my darling, I would gladly die if by dying I could open your eyes to see the simple integrity of unselfishness!'

'It is very absurd for you to speak of unselfishness at the very moment when you are selfishly giving me so much pain,' she cried, defiant.

He bent his head and covered his face with his hands.

She stood and looked at him, her cheeks flushed and her breast heaving with a great anger.

'Good-bye, Violetta,' he said, and turned slowly away.

'I never heard of anything so dishonourable,' she cried.

And that was what the world said; the curate was in disgrace with society for the rest of his life.

V

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'HATH NOT A JEW EYES?'

Mr. Saintou the hairdresser was a Frenchman, therefore his English neighbours regarded him with suspicion. He was also exceedingly stout, and his stoutness had come upon him at an unbecomingly early age, so that he had long been the object of his neighbours' merriment. When to these facts it is added that, although a keen and prosperous business man, he had attained the age of fifty without making any effort to marry, enough will have been said to show why he was disliked.

Why was he not married? Were English women not good enough for him? The pretty milliner across the street had been heard to remark in his presence that she should never refuse a man simply because he was a foreigner. Or if he did not want an English wife, why did he not import one from Paris with his perfumes? No, there was no reason for his behaviour, and Mr. Saintou was the object of his neighbours' aversion.

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Neighbours are often wrong in their estimates. In the heart of this shrewd and stout French hairdresser there lay the rare capacity for one supreme and lasting affection. Mr. Saintou's love story was in the past, and it had come about in this way.

One day when the hairdresser was still a young man, not long after he had first settled in Albert Street, the door of his shop opened, and a young woman came in. Her figure was short and broad, and she was lame, walking with a crutch. Her face and features were large and peculiarly frank in expression; upon her head was a very large hat. When she spoke, it was with a loud staccato voice; her words fell after one another like hailstones in a storm, there was no breathing space between them.

'I want Mr. Saintou.'

'What may I have the pleasure of showing madame?'

'Good gracious, I told you I wanted to be shown Mr. Saintou. Are you Mr. Saintou? None of your assistants for me; I want my hair cut.'

The hairdresser laid his hand upon his heart, as though to point out his own identity. He bowed, and as even at that age he was very stout, the effort of the bow caused his small eyes to shut and open themselves again. There was nothing staccato about the manner of the hairdresser, he had carefully cultivated that address which he supposed would be most soothing to those who submitted themselves to his operations.

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'Very well,' said the little lady, apparently satisfied with the identification, 'I want my hair cut. It is like a sheaf of corn. It is like a court train. It is like seven horses' manes tied together, if they were red. It is like a comet's tail.'

It is probable that the hairdresser only took in that part of this speech upon which he was in the habit of concentrating his attention, and that the force of the similes which followed one another like electric shocks escaped him altogether. He was about to show the new customer into the ladies' room, where his staid and elderly sister was accustomed to officiate, but she drew back with decision.

'No, not at all; I have come to have my hair cut by Mr. Saintou, and I want to have it done in the room with the long row of chairs where the long row of men get shaved every morning. I told my sister I should sit there. You have no men in at this time of day, have you, Mr. Saintou? Now I shall sit here in the middle chair, and you shall wash my hair. My father is the baker round the

corner. He makes good bread; do you wash people's hair as well? Will you squirt water on it with that funny tube? Will you put it in my eyes? Now, I am up on the chair. Don't put the soap in my eyes, Mr. Saintou.' [Pg 132]

Saintou was not a man easily surprised. 'Permit me, mademoiselle, would it not be better to remove the hat? Mon Dieu! Holy Mary, what hair!' For as the Eastern women carry their burdens on the crown of the head to ease the weight, so, when the large hat was off, it appeared that the baker's daughter carried her hair.

'Like the hair of a woman on a hair-restorer bottle, if it were red,' remarked the girl in answer to the exclamation.

'No, mademoiselle, no, it is not red. Mon Dieu! it is not red. Holy Mary! it is the colour of the sun. Mon Dieu, what hair!' As he untwined the masses, it fell over the long bib, over the high chair, down till it swept the floor, in one unbroken flood of light.

'Wash it, and cut it, and let me go home to make my father's dinner,' said the quick voice with decision. 'My father is the baker round the corner, and he takes his dinner at two.'

'Is it that mademoiselle desires the ends cut?' asked the hairdresser, resuming his professional manner.

'Which ends?'

'Which ends?' he exclaimed, baffled. 'Mon Dieu! these ends,' and he lifted a handful of the hair on the floor and held it before the eyes of the girl. [Pg 133]

'Good Heavens, no! Do you think I am going to pay you for cutting those ends? It's the ends at the top I want cut. Lighten it; that's what I want. Do you think I am a woman in a hairdresser's advertisement to sit all day looking at my hair? I have to get my father's dinner. Lighten it, Mr. Saintou; cut it off; that's what I want.'

'Mon Dieu, no!' Saintou again relapsed from the hairdresser into the man. He too could have decision. He leant against the next chair and set his lips very firmly together. 'By all that is holy, no,' he said; 'you may get some villain Englishman to cut that hair, but me, never.'

'You speak English very well, Mr. Saintou. Have you been long in the country? Well, wash the hair then, and be done. Don't put the soap in my eyes.'

Saintou was in ecstasies. He touched the hair reverently as one would touch the garments of a saint. He laid aside his ordinary brushes and sponges, and going into the shop he brought thence what was best and newest. Do not laugh at him. Have we not all at some time in our lives met with what seemed the embodiment of our ideal; have we not set aside for the time our petty economies and reserves, and brought forth whatever we had that was best, of thought, or smiles, or vesture?

'Ah, mademoiselle,' he said, 'to take care of such hair for ever—that would be heaven. I am a Frenchman; I have a soul; I can feel.' [Pg 134]

'Should you be afraid to die a sudden death, Mr. Saintou?' said the quick voice from the depths of a shower of water.

'Ciel! We do not speak of such things, mademoiselle. There will come a time, I know, when my hair will turn grey; then for the sake of my profession I shall be obliged to dye it. There will come a time after that when I shall die; but we do not even think of these things, it is better not.'

'But should you be afraid to die now?' persisted the girl.

'Very much afraid,' said the hairdresser candidly.

'Then don't feel, Mr. Saintou. I never feel. I make it the business of my life not to feel. They tell me there is something wrong at my heart, and that if I ever feel either glad or sorry I shall go off, pop, like a crow from a tree when it is shot, like a spark that falls into water.'

The hairdresser meditated upon this for some time. He did not believe her. He had drawn the bright hair back now from the water, and was fondling it with his whitest and softest towels.

'Who was it that said to mademoiselle that her heart was bad?'

'Good gracious, Mr. Saintou, my heart is not bad. I know my catechism and go to church, and cook my father's dinner every day, and a very good dinner it is too. What put it into your head that I had a bad heart?' [Pg 135]

'Pardon! mademoiselle; I mistake. Who told mademoiselle that she was sick at heart?'

'Good gracious heavens! I am not sick at heart. To be sure my mother is dead, and my sister is ill, and my father is as cross as two sticks, but for all that I am not heart-sick. I like this world very well, and when I feel sad I put more onions into the soup.'

Saintou went on with his work for some time in silence, then he tried again. 'You say I speak good English, and I flatter myself I have the accent very well, but what avails if I cannot make you understand? Was it a good doctor who said mademoiselle's heart was affected; touched, I might say?'

There was a shout of laughter from under the shower of gold.

'My heart touched! One would think I was in love. No, my heart is not touched yet; least of all by you, Mr. Saintou.'

'Least of all by you,
Mr. Saintou.'

She repeated this last rhyming couplet with a quaint musical intonation, as though it was the refrain of a song, and after her voice and laughter had died away she went on nodding her head in time to the brushing as if she were singing it over softly to herself. This distressed the hairdresser not a little, and he remained silent.

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'What shall I pay you, Mr. Saintou?' said the little lady, when the large hat was once more on the head.

'If mademoiselle would but come again,' said the hairdresser, putting both hands resolutely behind his back.

'When I come again I shall pay you both for that time and this,' she said, with perhaps more tact than could have been expected of her. 'And if you want to live long, Mr. Saintou, don't feel. If I should feel I should die off, quick, sharp, like a moth that flies into the candle.' She made a little gesture with her hand, as if to indicate the ease and suddenness with which the supposed catastrophe was to take place, and hobbled down the street. Saintou stood in the doorway looking after her, and his heart went from him.

He sent her flowers—flowers that a duchess might have been proud to receive. He sent them more than once, and they were accepted; he argued much from that. He made friends with the baker in order that he might bow to him morning and evening. Then he waited. He said to himself, 'She is English. If I go to see her, if I put my hand on my heart and weep, she will jeer at me; but if I wait and work for her in silence, then she will believe.' He made a parlour for her in the room above his shop; and every week, as he had time and money, he went out to choose some ornament for it. His maiden sister watched these actions with suspicion, threw scornful looks at when he observed her watchfulness, and lent a kindly helping hand when he was out of sight. The parlour grew into a shrine ready for its divinity, and the hairdresser worked and waited in silence. In this he made a mistake, but he feared her laughter.

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Meanwhile the girl also waited. She could not go back to the hairdresser's shop lest she should seem to invite a renewal of those attentions which had given her the sweet surprise of love. The law of her woman's nature stood like a lion in the path. She waited through the months of the dreary winter till the one gleam of sunshine which had come into her hard young life had faded, till the warmth it had kindled in her heart died—as a lamp's flame dies for lack of oil; died—as a flower dies in the drought; died into anger for the man who had disturbed her peace, and when she thought she cared for him no more she went again to get her hair cut.

'You have come,' said Saintou; but the very strength of his feeling made him grave.

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'Good gracious, yes, I have come to have my hair cut. You would not cut it when I was here, and I have been very poorly these three months. I could not come out, so the other day I had my sister cut it off. My father wanted to send for you, but I said "no," and, oh, my! it looks just as if a donkey had come behind and mistaken it for hay.'

How quickly a train of thought can flash through the brain! Saintou asked himself if he loved the girl or the hair, and his heart answered very sincerely that the hair, divine as it was, had been but the outward sign which led him to love the inward grace of the girl.

'Mademoiselle ought not to have said "no"; I should have come very willingly and would have cut her hair, if I had known it must be so.'

'I made my sister cut it, but it's frightful. It looks as if one had tried to mow a lawn with a pair of scissors, or shear a sheep with a penknife.'

'I will make all that right,' said Saintou soothingly; 'I will make it all right. Just in a moment I will make it very nice.'

Yes, it was too true, the hair was gone; and very barbarously it had been handled. 'I shall make it all right,' he said cheerfully; 'I shall trim it beautifully for mademoiselle. Ah, the beautiful colour is there all the same.'

'As red as a sunset or a geranium,' she said.

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'You do not believe that,' sighed Saintou. He trimmed the hair very tenderly, and curled it softly round the white face, till it looked like a great fair marigold just beginning to curl in its petals for the night. He worked slowly, for he had something he wanted to say, and when his work was done he summoned up courage and said it. He told her his hopes and fears. He told her the story blundering enough, but it had its effect.

'Mon Dieu!' said Saintou, but he said it in a tone that made his sister, who was listening to every word through the door, leave that occupation and dart in to his assistance.

'Qu'elle est morte,' was her brief stern comment. And so it was. The baker's daughter had felt, and she had died.

'This is not wholly unexpected,' said the baker sadly, when he came to carry away the corpse of his daughter. 'We all expected it,' said the neighbours; 'she had heart disease.' And they talked their fill, and never discovered the truth it would have pleased them best to talk about.

The short hair curled softly about the face of the dead girl as she lay in her coffin, and Saintou paid heavily for masses for her sweet soul. When they had laid her in the churchyard he came home, and took the key, and went into the little parlour all alone. She had never seen it. She had never even heard of it. It is sad to bury a baby that is dead; it is sadder, if we but knew it, to bury in darkness and silence a child that has never lived. A joy that has gone from us for ever is a jewel that trembles like a tear on Sorrow's breast, but the brightest stars in her diadem are the memories of hopes that have passed away unrealised and untold. Ah well, perhaps the gay trappings of the little room, by their daily influence on his life, drew him nearer to heaven. He gave the key to his sister afterwards, and they used the room as their own; but that day he locked himself in alone, and, hiding his face in the cushions of her chair, he wept as only a strong man can weep.

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A COMMERCIAL TRAVELLER

Mam'selle Zilda Chaplot keeps the station hotel at St. Armand, in the French country.

The hotel is like a wooden barn with doors and windows, not a very large barn either. The station is merely a platform of planks between the hotel and the rails. The railroad is roughly made; it lies long and straight in a flat land, snow-clad in winter, very dusty in the summer sun, and its line is only softened by a long row of telegraph poles, which seem to waver and tremble as the eye follows their endless repetition into the distance. In some curious way their repetition lends to the stark road a certain grace.

When Zilda Chaplot was young there were fewer wires on these telegraph poles, fewer railway-lines opposite the station, fewer houses in St. Armand, which lies half a mile away. The hotel itself is the same, but in those days it was not painted yellow, as it is now, and was not half so well kept. The world has progressed by twenty years since mam'selle was a girl, and, also, she owns the place herself now, and is a much better inn-keeper than was her father.

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Mam'selle Chaplot is a very active person, tall, and somewhat stout. Her complexion is brown; her eyes are very black; over them there is a fringe of iron-grey hair, which she does up in curl-papers every night, and which, in consequence, stands in very tight little curls all day.

Mam'selle Chaplot minds her affairs well; she has a keen eye to the main chance. She is sometimes sharp, a trifle fiery, but on the whole she is good-natured. There are lines about the contour of her chin, and also where the neck sweeps upward, which suggest a more than common power of satisfaction in certain things, such as dinners and good sound sleep, and good inn-keeping—yes, and in spring flowers, and in autumn leaves and winter sunsets. Zilda Chaplot was formed for pleasure, yet there is no tendency latent in her which could have made her a voluptuary. There are some natures which have so nice a proportion of faculties that they are a law of moderation to themselves. They take such keen delight in small pleasures that to them a little is enough.

The world would account Mam'selle Chaplot to have had a life of toil and stern limitations; a prosperous life, truly, for no one could see her without observing her prosperity, but still a hard dry life. Even her neighbours, whose ideas of enjoyment do not soar above the St. Armand level, think that her lot would be softer if she married. Many of the men have offered marriage, not with any disinterested motive, it is true, but with kindly intent. They have been set aside like children who make requests unreasonable, but so natural for them to make that the request is hardly worth noticing. The women relatives of these rejected suitors have boasted to mam'selle of their own domestic joys, and have drawn the contrast of her state in strong colour. Zilda only says 'Chut!' or she lifts her chin a little, so that the pretty upward sweep of the neck is apparent, and lets them talk. Mam'selle is not the woman to be turned out of her way by talk.

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The way of single blessedness is not chosen by Zilda Chaplot because of any fiction of loyalty to a quondam lover. Her mind is such that she could not have invented obligations for herself, because she has not the inventive faculty. No, it is simply this: Mam'selle Chaplot loved once, and was happy; her mind still hugs the memory of that happiness with exultant reserve; it is enough; she does not desire other happiness of that sort.

When she looks out on the little station platform and sees the loungers upon it, once and again she lets her busy mind stop in its business to think of some one else she was once accustomed to see there. When she looks with well-practised critical eye down the hotel dining-room, which is now quite clean and orderly, when she is scolding a servant, or serving a customer, her mind will revert to the room in its former rough state, and she will remember another customer who used to eat there. When the spring comes, and far and near there is the smell of wet moss, and shrubs on the wide flat land shoot forth their leaves, and the fields are carpeted with violets, then mam'selle looks round and hugs her memories, and thinks to herself, 'Ah! well, I have had my

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day.' And because of the pleasant light of that day she is content with the present twilight, satisfied with her good dinners and her good management.

This is the story of what happened twenty years ago.

St. Armand is in the French country which lies between the town of Quebec and the townships where the English settlements are. At that time the railway had not been very long in existence; two trains ran southward from the large towns in the morning, and two trains ran northward to the large towns in the evening; besides these, there was just one local train which came into St. Armand at noon, and passengers arriving at noon were obliged to wait for the evening train to get on farther.

There were not many passengers by this short local line. Even on the main line there was little traffic that affected St. Armand. Yet most of the men of the place found excuse of business or pleasure to come and watch the advent of the trains. The chief use of the station platform seemed to be for these loungers; the chief use of the bar at the hotel was to slake their thirst, although they were not on the whole an intemperate lot. They stood about in homespun clothes and smoked. A lazy, but honest set of humble-minded French papists were the men at St. Armand.

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It was on the station platform that Zilda Chaplot came out in society, as the phrase might be. She was not a child, for when her father took the place she was twenty-four. There was red in her cheeks then, and the lashes of her eyes were long; her hair was not curled, for it was not the fashion, but brushed smoothly back from broad low brows. She was tall, and not at all thin. She was very strong, but less active in those days, as girls are often less active than women. When Zilda had leisure she used to stand outside the hotel and watch the men on the platform. She was always calm and dignified, a little stupid perhaps. She did not attract a great deal of attention from them.

They were all French at St. Armand, but most of the strangers which chance brought that way spoke English, so that the St. Armand folks could speak English also.

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Anything which is repeated at appreciable intervals has to occur very often before the unscientific mind will perceive the law of its repetition. There was a little red-haired Englishman, John Gilby by name, who travelled frequently that way. It was a good while before the loungers at the station remarked that upon a certain day in the week he always arrived by the local train and waited for the evening train to take him on to Montreal. It was, in fact, Gilby himself who pointed out to them the regularity of his visits, for he was of a social disposition, and could not spend more than a few afternoons at that dull isolated station without making friends with some one. He travelled for a firm in Montreal; it was his business to make a circuit of certain towns and villages in a certain time. He had no business at St. Armand, but fate and the ill-adjusted timetable decreed that he should wait there.

This little red-haired gentleman—for gentleman, in comparison with the St. Armand folk he certainly was—was a thorough worldling in the sense of knowing the world somewhat widely, and corresponding to its ways, although not to its evil deeds. Indeed, he was a very good sort of man, but such a worldling, with his thick gold chain, and jaunty clothes, and quick way of adjusting himself to passing circumstances, that it was some time before his good-natured sociableness won in the least upon the station loungers. They held aloof, as from an explosive, not knowing when it would begin to emit sparks. He was short in stature, much shorter than the hulking fellows who stood and surveyed him through the smoke of their pipes, but he had such a cocky little way with him that he overawed them much more than a big man would have done. Out of sheer dulness he took to talking to Zilda.

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Zilda stood with her back against the wall.

'Fine day,' said Gilby, stopping beside her.

'Oui, monsieur.'

Gilby had taken his cigar from his mouth, and held it between two fingers of his right hand. Her countrymen commonly held their pipes between their thumb and finger. To Zilda, Gilby's method appeared astonishingly elegant, but she hardly seemed to observe it.

'You have a flat country here,' said he, looking round at the dry summer fields; 'rather dull, isn't it?'

'Oui, monsieur.'

'Don't you speak English?'

'Yes, sir,' said Zilda.

This was not very interesting for Gilby. He had about him a good deal of the modern restlessness that cannot endure one hour without work or amusement. He made further efforts to make up to the men; he asked them questions with patronising kindness, he gave them scraps of information upon all subjects of temporary interest, with a funny little air of pompous importance. When by mere force of habit they grew more familiar with him, he would strut up and engage them in long conversations, listen to all they said with consummate good nature, giving his opinion in return. He was wholly unconscious that he looked like a bantam crowing to a group of larger and more sleepy fowls, but the Frenchmen perceived the likeness.

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As the months wore on he did them good. They needed waking up, those men who lounged at the station, and he had some influence in that direction; not much, of course, but every traveller has some influence, and his was of a lively, and, on the whole, of a beneficial sort. The men brought forth a mood to greet him which was more in correspondence with his own.

When winter came the weather was very bleak; deep snow was all around. Gilby disliked the closeness of the hotel, which was sealed to the outer air.

'Whew!' he would say, 'you fellows, let us do something to keep ourselves warm.' And after much exercise of his will, which was strong, he actually had the younger men all jumping with him from a wood pile near the platform to see who could jump farthest. He was not very young himself; he was about thirty, and rather bald; the men who were with him were much younger, but he thought nothing of that. He led them on, and incited them to feats much greater than his own, with boisterous challenges and loud bravos. Before he jumped himself he always made mock hesitation for their amusement, swinging his arms, and apparently bracing himself for the leap. Perhaps the deep frost of the country made him frisky because he was not accustomed to it; perhaps it was always his nature to be noisy and absurd when he tried to be amusing. Certain it was that it never once occurred to him that under the French politeness with which he was treated, under the sincere liking which they really grew to have for him, there was much quiet amusement at his expense. It was just as well that he did not know, for he would have been terribly affronted; as it was, he remained on the best of terms with them to the end.

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The feeling of amusement found vent in his absence in laughter and mimicry. Zilda joined in this mimicry; she watched the Frenchmen strut along the platform in imitation of Gilby, and smiled when their imitation was good. When it was poor she cried, 'Non, ce n'est pas comme ça,' and she came out from the doorway and showed them how to do it. Her imitation was very good indeed, and excited much laughter. This showed that Zilda had been waked into greater vivacity. Six months before she could not have done so good a piece of acting.

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Zilda's exhibition would go further than this. Excited by success, she would climb the wood pile, large and heavy as she was, and, standing upon its edge, would flap her arms and flutter back in a frightened manner and brace herself to the leap, as Gilby had done. She was aided in this representation by her familiarity with the habits of chickens when they try to get down from a high roost. The resemblance struck her; she would cry aloud to the men—

'Voici Monsieur Geelby, le poulet qui a peur de descendre!'

The fact that at the thought of mimicking Gilby Zilda was roused to an unwarranted glow of excitement showed, had any one been wise enough to see it, that she felt some inward cause of pleasurable excitement at the mention of his name. A narrow nature cannot see absurdity in what it loves, but Zilda's nature was not narrow. She had learnt to love little Gilby in a fond, deep, silent way that was her fashion of loving.

He had explained to her the principles of ventilation and why he disliked close waiting-rooms. Zilda could not make her father learn the lesson, but it bore fruit afterwards when she came into power. Gilby had explained other things to her, small practical things, such as some points in English grammar, some principles of taste in woman's dress, how to choose the wools for her knitting, how to make muffins for his tea. It was his kindly, conceited, didactic nature that made him instruct whenever he talked to her. Zilda learned it all, and learned also to admire and love the author of such wisdom.

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It was not his fault; it was not hers. It was the result of his gorgeous watch-chain and his fine clothes and his worldly knowledge, and also of the fact that because of his strict notions and conceited pride it never occurred to him to be gallant or to make love to her. Zilda, the hotel-keeper's daughter, was accustomed to men who offered her light gallantry. It was because she did not like such men that she learned to love—rather the better word might be, to adore—little John Gilby. From higher levels of taste he would have been seen to be, in external notions, a common little man, but from Zilda's standpoint, even in matters of outward taste he was an ideal; and Zilda, placed as she was, quickly perceived, what those who looked down upon him might not have discovered, that the heart of him was very good. 'Mon Dieu, but he is good!' she would say to herself, which was simply the fact.

All winter long Gilby came regularly. Zilda was happy in thinking of him when he was gone, happy in expecting him when he was coming, happy in making fun of him so that no one ever suspected her affection. All that long winter, when the snow was deep in the fields, and the engines carried snow-ploughs, and the loungers about the station wore buffalo coats, Zilda was very happy. Gilby wore a dogskin cap and collar and cuffs; Zilda thought them very becoming. Then spring came, and Gilby wore an Inverness cape, which was the fashion in those days. Zilda thought that little Gilby looked very fascinating therein, although she remarked to her father that one could only know he was there because the cape strutted. Then summer came and Gilby wore light tweed clothes. The Frenchmen always wore their best black suits when they travelled. Zilda liked the light clothes best.

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Then there came a time when Gilby did not come. No one noticed his absence at first but Zilda. Two weeks passed and then they all spoke of it. Then some one in St. Armand ascertained that Gilby had had a rise in the firm in which he was employed, that he sat in an office all day and did not travel any more. Zilda heard the story told, and commented upon, and again talked over, in the way in which such matters of interest are slowly digested by the country intellect.

Alas! then Zilda knew how far she had travelled along a flowery path which, as it now seemed to her, led to nowhere. It was not that she had wanted to marry Gilby; she had not thought of that as possible; it was only that her whole nature summed itself up in an ardent desire that things should be as they had been, that he should come there once a week, and talk politics with her father and other men, and set the boys jumping, and eat the muffins he had taught her to make for his tea. And if this might not be, she desired above all else to see him again, to have one more look at him, one more smile from him of which she could take in the whole value, knowing it to be the last. How carelessly she had allowed him to go, supposing that he would return! It was not her wish to express her affection or sorrow in any way; it was not her nature to put her emotions into words; but ah, holy saints! just to see him again, and at least take leave of him with her eyes!

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It was very sad that he should simply cease to come, yet that she knew was just what was natural; a man does not bid adieux to a railway station, and Zilda knew that she was, as it were, only part of the station furniture. She resented nothing; she had nothing to resent.

So the winter came again, and Christmas, and again the days grew longer over the snowfields. Zilda always looked for the sunsets now, for she had been taught that they were beautiful. She cultivated geraniums and petunias in pots at her windows, just as she had done for many winters, but she would stop oftener to admire the flowers now.

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The men had taken again to congregating in the hot close bar-room, or huddling together in their buffalo coats, smoking in the outer air. Zilda looked at the wood pile, from which no one jumped now, with weary eyes. It had grown intolerable to her that now no one ever mentioned Gilby; she longed intensely to hear his name or to speak it. She dared not mention him gravely, soberly, because she was conscious of her secret which no one suspected. But it was open to her to revive the mimicry. 'Voici Monsieur Geelby,' she would cry, and pass along the station platform with consequential gait. A great laugh would break from the station loungers. 'Encore,' they cried, and Zilda gave the encore.

There was only one other relief she found from the horrible silence which had settled down upon her life concerning the object of her affection. At times when she lay awake in the quiet night, or at such times as she found herself within the big stone church of St. Armand, she prayed that the good St. Anne would intercede for her, that she might see 'Monsieur Geelby' once more.

This big church of St. Armand has a great pointed roof of shining tin. It is a bright and conspicuous object always in that landscape; under summer and winter sun it glistens like some huge lighthouse reflector. Ever since, whenever Zilda goes out on the station platform, for a breath of air, for a moment's rest and refreshing, or, on business intent, to chide the loungers there, the roof of this church, at a half-mile's distance, twinkles brightly before her eyes, set in green fields or in a snow-buried world; and every time it catches her eye it brings to her mind more or less distinctly that she has in her own way tested religion and found it true, because the particular boon which she had demanded at this time was granted.

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It was a happy morn of May; the snow had just receded from the land, leaving it very wet, and Spring was pushing on all the business she had to do with almost visible speed. The early train came in from Montreal as usual, and who should step out of it but Gilby himself! He was a little stouter, a little more bald, but he skipped down upon the platform, radiant as to smile and the breadth of his gold watch-chain, and attired in a check coat which Zilda thought was the most perfect thing in costume which she had ever beheld.

In a flash of thought it came to Zilda that there would be more than a momentary happiness for her. 'Ah, Monsieur Geelby, do you know that the river has cut into the line three miles away, and that this train can go no farther till it is mended.'

Gilby was distinctly annoyed; he had indeed left town by the earlier of the two morning trains in order to stop an hour and take breakfast at St. Armand; he had been glad of the chance of doing that, of seeing Chaplot and his daughter and the others; but to be stopped at St. Armand a whole day—he made exhibition of his anger, which Zilda took very meekly. Why had the affair not been telegraphed? Why were busy men like himself brought out of the city when they could not get on to do their work?

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There were other voices besides Gilby's to rail; there were other voices besides Zilda's to explain the disaster. In the midst of the babel Zilda slipped away to make muffins hastily for Gilby's breakfast. Her heart was singing within her, but it was a tremulous song, half dazed with delight, half frightened, fearing that with his great cleverness he would see some way to proceed on his journey although she saw none.

When she came out of the kitchen with the muffins in her hand her sunshine suddenly clouded. Gilby, unconscious that a special breakfast was preparing for him, had hastily swallowed coffee and walked on to the site of the breakdown to see for himself how long the mending would take.

It was as if one, looking through long hours for the ending of night, had seen the sunrise, only to see the light go out suddenly again in darkness. Zilda felt that her heart was broken. Her disappointment grew upon her for an hour, then she could no longer keep back the tears; because she had no place in which to weep, she began to walk away from the hotel down the line. There was no one to notice her going; she was as free to go and come as the wild canaries that hopped upon the budding bramble vines growing upon the railway embankment, or the blue-breasted swallows that sat on the telegraph wire.

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At first she only walked to hide her tears; then gradually the purpose formed within her to go on to the break in the road. There was no reason why she should not go to see the mishap. Truly there had been many a breakdown on this road before and Zilda had never stirred foot to examine them, but now she walked on steadily. Her fear told her that Gilby might find some means of getting on to the next station, some engine laden with supplies for the workmen from the other station might take him back with it. If so, what good would this her journey do? Ah, but perhaps the good God would allow her to see him first, or—well, she walked on, reason or no reason.

The sun was high, the blue of the sky seemed a hundred miles in depth, and not wisp or feather of cloud in it anywhere! Where the flat fields were untilled they were very green, a green that was almost yellow, it was so bright. Within the strip of railway land a tangle of young bushes grew, and on every twig buds were bursting. About a mile back from the road, on either side, fir woods stood, the trees in close level phalanx. Everywhere over the land birds big and little were fluttering and flying.

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Zilda did not notice any of these things; she had only learned to observe two things in nature, both of which Gilby had pointed out to her—the red or yellow rose of the winter sunset, the depth of colour in the petals of her flowers. Nature was to her like a language of which she had only been told the meaning of two words. In the course of the next month she learned the meaning of a few more; she never made further progress, but what she learned she learned.

The river which, farther on, had done damage to the line, here ran close to it for some distance, consequently Zilda came to the river before she reached the scene of the disaster. The river banks at this season were marshy, green like plush or velvet when it is lifted dripping from green vats of the brightest dye. There were some trees by the river bank, maples and elms, and every twig was tipped with a crimson gem. Zilda did not see the beauty of the river bank either; she regarded nothing until she came to a place where a foot-track was beaten down the side of the embankment, as if apparently to entice walkers to stray across a bit of the meadow and so cut off a large curve of the line. At this point Zilda heard a loud chirpy voice calling, 'Hi! hi! who's there? Is any one there?'

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Zilda did not know from whence the voice came, but she knew from whom it came. It was Gilby's voice, and she stopped, her soul ravished by the music. All the way along, bobolinks, canaries, and song-sparrows had been singing to her, the swallows and red-throats had been talking; everywhere among the soft spongy mosses, the singing frog of the Canadian spring had been filling the air with its one soft whistling note. Zilda had not heard them, but now she stopped suddenly with head bent, listening eager, enraptured.

'Hi! hi!' called the voice again. 'Is any one there?'

Zilda went down the bank halfway among the bushes and looked over. She saw Gilby sitting at the edge of the meadow almost in the river water. She saw at once that something was wrong. His attitude was as natural as he could make it, such an attitude as a proud man might assume when pain is chaining him in an awkward position, but Zilda saw that he was injured. Her heart gave a great bound of pleasure. Ah! her bird was wounded in the wing; she had him now, for a time at least.

'You! Mam'selle Zilda,' he said in surprise; 'how came you here?'

'I wished to see the broken road, monsieur.' There was nothing in her voice or manner then or at any other time to indicate that she took a special interest in him.

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'Do you often take such long walks?' he asked with curiosity.

Zilda shrugged her shoulders. 'Sometimes; why not?'

She could not have told why she dissembled; it was instinct, just as it was the instinct of his proud little spirit to hate to own that he was helpless. 'Look here,' he said, 'I slipped on the bank—and I—I think I have sprained my ankle.'

'Oui, monsieur,' said Zilda.

Her manner evinced no surprise; her stolidity was grateful to him.

Stooping down, she took his foot in her hand, gently, but as firmly as if it had been a horse's hoof. She straightened it, unlaced his muddy boot, and with strong hands tore the slit further open until she could take it off.

'Look here,' he said, with a little nervous shout of laughter, 'do you not know you are hurting me?' It was the only wince he gave, although he was faint with pain.

'Oui, monsieur'—with a smile as firm and gentle as her touch.

She took off her hat, and, heedless of the ribbon upon it, filled it with water again and again and drenched the swollen leg. It was so great a relief to him that he hardly noticed that she stood ankle-deep in the river to do it. She wore a little red tartan shawl upon her shoulders, and she dipped this also in the river, binding it round and round the ankle, and tying it tight with her own boot-lace.

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'Thank you,' said he; 'you are really very good, Mam'selle Zilda.'

She stood beside him; she was radiantly happy, but she did not show it much. She had him there very safe; it mattered less to her how to get him away; yet in a minute she said—

'Monsieur had better move a little higher up; he is very uncomfortable.'

He knew that much better than she, but he had borne all the pain he could just then. He nodded as if in dismissal of the idea. 'Presently. But, in the meantime, Zilda, sit down and see what a beautiful place this is; you have not looked at it.'

So she found a stone to sit on, and immediately her eyes were opened and she saw the loveliness around her.

The river was not a very broad one, but ah! how blue it was, with a glint of gold on every wave. The trees that stood upon either bank cast a lacework of shadow upon the carpet of moss and violets beneath them. The buds of the maples were red. On a tree near them a couple of male canaries, bright gold in the spring season, were hopping and piping; then startled, they flew off in a straight line over the river to the other shore.

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'See them,' said Gilby; 'they look like streaks of yellow light!'

'I see,' said Zilda, and she did see for the first time.

Now Gilby had a certain capacity for rejoicing in the beauties of nature; it was overlaid with huge conceit in his own taste and discernment and a love of forcing his observations on other people, but the flaws in his character Zilda was not in a position to see. The good in him awakened in her a higher virtue than she would otherwise have known; she was unconscious of the rest, just as eyes which can see form and not colour are unconscious of the bad blending of artificial hues.

Presently Zilda rose up. 'I will make monsieur more comfortable,' she said, and she lifted him to a drier place upon the bank.

This was mortifying to little Gilby; his manner was quite huffy for some minutes after.

Zilda had her own ideas of what she would do. She presently left him alone and walked on swiftly to the place of the breakdown. There she borrowed a hand-car; it was a light one that could be worked easily by two men, and Zilda determined to work it alone. While she was coming back along the iron road on the top of the narrow embankment, Gilby could see her from where he sat—a stalwart young woman in homespun gown, stooping and rising with regular toilsome movement as she worked the rattling machine that came swiftly nearer.

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When the carriage thus provided for him was close at hand, the almost breathless Zilda actually proposed to exert her strength to carry Gilby up to it. He insisted upon hopping on one foot supported by her arm; he did not feel the slightest inclination to lean upon her more than was needful, he was too self-conscious and proud. Even after she had placed him on the car, he kept up an air of offence for a long time just because she had proved her strength to be so much greater than his own. His little rudenesses of this sort did not disturb Zilda's tranquillity in the least.

Gilby sat on the low platform of the hand-car. He looked like a bantam cock whose feathers were much ruffled. Zilda worked at the handles of the machine; she was very large and strong, all her attitudes were statuesque. The May day beamed on the flat spring landscape through which they were travelling; the beam found a perfect counterpart in the joy of Zilda's heart.

So she brought Gilby safely to the hotel and installed him in the best room there. The sprain was a very bad one. Gilby was obliged to lie there for a month. Sometimes his friends came out from the town to see him, but not very often, and they did not stay long. Zilda cooked for him, Zilda waited upon him, Zilda conversed with him in the afternoons when he needed amusement. This month was the period of her happiness.

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When he was going home, Gilby felt really very grateful to the girl. He had not the slightest thought of making love to her; he felt too strongly on the subject of his dignity and his principles for that; but although he haggled with Chaplot over the bill, he talked in a bombastic manner about making Zilda a present.

It did not distress Zilda that he should quarrel with her father's bill; she had no higher idea in character than that each should seek his own in all things; but when Gilby talked of giving her a present she shrank instinctively with an air of offence. This air of offence was the one betrayal of her affection which he could observe, and he did not gather very much of the truth from it.

'I will give you a watch, Zilda,' he said, 'a gold watch; you will like that.'

'No, monsieur.' Zilda's face was flushed and her head was high in the air.

'I will give you a ring; you would like that—a golden ring.'

'No, monsieur; I would not like it at all.'

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Gilby retired from the discussion that day feeling some offence and a good deal of consternation. He thought the best thing would be to have nothing more to do with Zilda; but the next day, in the bustle of his departure, remembering all she had done for him, he relented entirely, and he gave her a kiss.

Afterwards, when the train was at the station, and Chaplot and Zilda had put his bags and his wraps beside him on a cushioned seat, Gilby turned and with great politeness accosted two fine ladies who were travelling in the same carriage and with whom he had a slight acquaintance. His disposition was at once genial and vain; he had been so long absent from the familiar faces of the town that his heart warmed to the first townfolk he saw; but he was also ambitious: he wished to appear on good terms with these women, who were his superiors in social position.

They would not have anything to do with him, which offended him very much; they received his greeting coldly and turned away; they said within themselves that he was an intolerably vulgar little person.

But all her life Zilda Chaplot lived a better and happier woman because she had known him.

VII

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THE SYNDICATE BABY

Some miles above the city of La Motte, the blue Merrian river widens into the Lake of St. Jean. In the Canadian summer the shores of this lake are as pleasant a place for an outing as heart could desire. The inhabitants of the city build wooden villas there, and spend the long warm days in boats upon the water. The families that live in these wooden villas do not take boarders; that was the origin of 'The Syndicate.' It consisted of some two dozen bachelors who were obliged to sit upon office stools all day in the hot city. 'If,' said they, 'we could live upon the lake, we could have our morning swim and our evening sail; and the trains would take us in and out of the city.'

The one or two uncomfortable hotels of this region were already overcrowded, so these bachelors said to each other—'Go to; we will put our pence together, and build us a boat-house with an upper story, and live therein.'

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They bought a bit of the beach for a trifle of money. They built a boat-house, of which the upper half was one long dormitory, with a great balcony at the end over the water which served as kitchen and dining-hall. The ground floor was the lake itself, and each man who could buy a boat tethered it there. The property, boats excepted, was in common. By and by they bought a field in which they grew vegetables; later they bought two cows and a pasture. The produce of the herd and the farm helped to furnish forth the table. This accretion of wealth took several years; some of the older men grew richer, and took to themselves wives and villas; the ranks were always filled up by more impecunious bachelors. The bachelors called themselves 'The Syndicate.'

The plan worked well, chiefly because of the fine air and the sunshine, the warm starry nights, and, above all, the witchery of the lake, which is to every man who has spent days and nights upon it like a mystical lady-love, ever changeful and ever charming. Then, too, there was the contrast with the hot city; the sense of need fulfilled makes men good-natured. The one servant of the establishment, an old man who made the beds and the dinners, was not a professional cook; the meals were often indifferent; yet the Syndicate did not quarrel among themselves.

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Some outlet for temper perhaps was needful. At any rate they had one outside quarrel with an old Welshman named Johns, a farmer of great importance in the place, who had sold them the land and tried, in their opinion, to cheat them afterwards about the boundaries. Their united rage waxed hot against Johns, and he, on his side, did nothing to propitiate. The quarrel came to no end; it was a feud. 'Esprit de corps,' like the fumes of wine, gives men a wholly unreasonable sense of complacency in themselves and their belongings, whatever the belongings may happen to be. The Syndicate learned to cherish this feud as a valuable possession.

The Syndicate, as has been seen, had one house, one servant, and one enemy. It also had one Baby. The Baby was the youngest member of the community, a pretty boy who by some chance favour had obtained a bed in the dormitory at the hoyden age of nineteen. He had a tendency to chubbiness, and his moustache, when it did come, was merely a silken whisp, hardly visible. He did some fagging in return for the extraordinary favour of adoption. The Baby from the first was entirely accustomed to being 'sat upon.' He had no unnecessary independence of mind. At twenty-one he still continued to be 'Baby.'

All the affairs of the Syndicate flourished, including the feud with the neighbouring landowner. All went well with the men and their boats and the Baby, until, at length, upon one fateful day for the latter, there came a young person to the locality who made an addition to the household of Farmer Johns.

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'Old Johns has got a niece,' said the bachelors sitting at dinner, as if the niece had come fresh to the world as babies do, and had not held the same relation to old Johns for twenty-five years. Still, it was true she had never been in the old man's possession before, and now she had arrived at his house, a sudden vision of delight as seen from the road or on the verandah.

Now Helen Johns was a beauty; no one unbiassed by the party spirit of a time-honoured feud would have denied that. She was not, it is true, of the ordinary type of beauty, whose chief ornament is an effort at captivation. She did not curl her hair; she did not lift her eyes and smile when she was talking to men; she did not trouble herself to put on her prettiest gown when the

evening train came in, bringing the bachelors from the city. She was tall—five foot eight in her stockings; all her muscles were well developed; there was nothing sylph-like about her waist, but all her motions had a strong, gentle grace of their own that bespoke health and dignity. She had a profession, too, which was much beneath most of the be-crimped and smile-wreathed maidens who basked in the favour of the bachelors. She had been to New York and had learned to teach gymnastics, the very newest sort; 'Delsart' or 'Emerson,' or some such name, attached to the rhythmic motions she performed. The Syndicate had no opportunity to criticise the gymnastic performance, for they had not the honour of her acquaintance; they criticised everything else, the smooth hair, the high brow, the well-proportioned waist, the profession; they decided that she was not beautiful.

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There were, roughly speaking, two classes of girls in this summer settlement, each held in favour by the Syndicate men according as personal taste might dispose. There were the girls who in a cheerful manner were ever to be found walking or boating in such hours and places as would assuredly bring them into contact with the happy bachelors, and there were those who would not 'for the world' have done such a thing, who sedulously shunned such paths, and had to be much sought after before they were found. Now it chanced that Helen Johns was seen to row alone in her uncle's boat right across the very front of the Syndicate boat-house, at the very hour when the assembled members were eating roast beef upon the verandah above and arriving at their decisions concerning her, and she did not look as if she cared in the least whether twenty-four pair of eyes were bent upon her or not. To be sure, it was her nearest way home from the post-office across the bay, and the post came in at this evening hour. No one could find any fault, not even any of the bachelors, but none the less did the affront sink deep into their hearts. It added a new zest to the old feud. 'We do not see that she is beautiful,' they cried over their dinner. 'We should not care for Helen of Troy if she looked like that.'

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The Baby dissented; the Baby actually had the 'cheek' to say, right there aloud at the banquet, that he might not be a man of taste, but, for his part, he thought she looked 'the jolliest girl' he had ever seen. In his heart he meant that he thought she looked like a goddess or an angel (for the Baby was a reverent youth), but he veiled his real feeling under this reticent phrase.

One and all they spoke to him, spoke loudly, spoke severely. 'Baby,' they said, 'if you have any dealings with the niece of Farmer Johns we'll kick you out of this.'

It was a romantic situation; love has proverbially thriven in the atmosphere of a family feud. The Baby felt this, but he felt also that he could not run the risk of being kicked out of the Syndicate. The Baby did sums in a big hot bank all day; he had no dollars to spare, there was no other place upon the lake where he could afford to live, and he had a canoe of his own which his uncle had given him. Hiawatha did not love the darling of his creation more than the Baby loved his cedar-wood canoe. All this made him conceal carefully that mysterious sensation of unrestful delight which he experienced every time he saw Miss Helen Johns. This, at least, in the first stage of his love-sickness.

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Fate was hard; she led the Baby, all cheerful and unsuspecting, to spend an evening at a picnic tea in a wood a mile or more from the shore. Mischievous Fate! She led him to flirt frivolously until long after dark with a girl that he cared nothing at all about, and then whispered in his ear that he would get home the quicker if in the obscurity he ran across the Johns' farm. Fate, laughing in her sleeve, led him to pass with noiseless footsteps quite near the house itself; then she was content to leave him to his own devices, for through the open window he caught sight of Helen Johns doing her gymnastics. Her figure was all aglow with the yellow lamplight; she was happy in the poetry of her motions and in the delight that the family circle took in watching them. The Baby was in the dark and the falling dew; he was uncomfortable, for he had to stand on tiptoe, but nothing would have induced him to ease his strained attitude. The pangs of a fierce discontent took possession of his breast.

Art was consulted in the gymnasium in which Miss Johns had studied; the theory was that only that which is beautiful is healthful. Sometimes she poised herself on tiptoe with one arm waved toward heaven, an angel all ready, save the wings, for aerial flight. Sometimes she seemed to hover above the ground like a running Mercury. Sometimes she stood, a hand behind her ear, listening as a maid might who was flying from danger in some enchanted land. Often she waved her hands slowly as if weaving a spell.

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A spell was cast over the soul of the Baby; he held himself against the extreme edge of a verandah; his mouth remained open as if he were drinking in the beams from the bright interior and all the beautiful pictures that they brought with them. It was only when the show was over that he noiselessly relaxed his strained muscles, and crept away over the dew-drenched grass, hiding under the shadow of maple boughs, guilty trespasser that he was.

After that, one evening, Farmer Johns and his niece had an errand to run; at a house about two miles away on the other side of the bay there was a parcel which it was their duty to fetch. They had started out in the calm white light of summer twilight; a slight wind blew, just enough to take their sail creeping over the rippled water, no more. The lake within a mile of the shore was thickly strewn with small yachts, boats, and canoes. Upon the green shore the colours of the gaily painted villas could still be seen among the trees, and most conspicuous of all the great barn-like boat-house of the Syndicate, which was painted red. By and by the light grew dimmer and stars came out in the sky; then one could no longer distinguish the outline of the shore, but in every window a light twinkled, like a fallen star.

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Helen sat in the side of the tiny ship as near the prow as might be; her uncle sat at the tiller and managed the sails. They were a silent pair, the one in a suit of tweeds with a slouch hat, the other in a muslin gown with a veil of black lace wrapped about her head.

The sailing of the boat was an art which Helen had not exerted herself to understand; she only knew that every now and then there was a minute of bluster and excitement when her uncle shouted to her, and she was obliged to cower while the beam and the sail swung over her head with a sound of fluttering wind. When she was allowed to take her seat after this little hurly-burly the two lighthouses upon the lake and all the lights upon the shore had performed a mysterious dance; they all lay in different places and in different relation to one another. She had not learned to know the different lights. When dusk came she was lost to her own knowledge. She only knew that the sweet air blew upon her face and that she trusted her uncle.

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The moonless night closed in. Now and then, as they passed a friendly craft, evening greetings were spoken across the dark space. By the time they got to the place for which they were bound they were floating almost alone upon the black water.

Johns descended into a small boat and secured the sailing-boat to the buoy which belonged to the house whither he was going, or rather, he thought that he secured it.

Helen heard the splash of his oars until he landed. The shore was but twenty yards away, but she could hardly see it. The sail hung limp, wrinkled, and motionless. She began to sing, and there alone in the darkness she fell in love with her own voice, and sang on and on, thinking only of the music.

Her uncle was long in coming; she became conscious of movement in the water, like the swell of waves outside rolling into the cove. She heard the sound of swaying among all the trees on the shore. She looked up and saw that the stars of one half the sky were obscured, that the darkness was rolling onward toward those that were still shining.

She stopped her own singing, and the song of the waters beneath her prow was curiously like the familiar sound when the boat was in motion. She strained her eyes, but could not see how far she was from the near shore. She looked on the other side and it seemed to her that the lights on the home-ward side of the bay were moving. That meant that she was moving, at what speed and in what direction she had no means of knowing.

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She stood up, lifted her arms in the air and shouted for help; again and again her shouts rang out, and she did not wait to hear an answer. She thought that the masters of other boats had seen the storm coming and gone into shore.

She was out now full in the whistling wind and the boat was leaping. Her throat was hoarse with calling, her eyes dazzled by straining.

When she turned in despair from scanning the shore she saw a sight that was very strange. At the tiller where her uncle ought to have been, and just in the attitude in which he always stood, was a slight white figure. A new sort of fear took possession of Helen; at first she could not speak or move, but kept her eyes wide open lest the ghostly thing should come near her unawares.

This illusion might be a forerunner of the death to which she was hastening, the Angel of Death himself steering her to destruction!

Then in a strange voice came the familiar shout, the warning to hold down her head. The sail swung over in the customary way; every movement of the figure at the helm was so familiar and natural that comfort began to steal into her heart. Plainly, whoever had taken command of the drifting craft knew his business; might it not be an angel of life, and not of death?

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Now in plain sober reality, as her pulses ceased to dance so wildly, Helen could not believe that her companion was angel or spirit. One does not believe in such companionship readily.

She scrambled to her knees and steadied herself by the seat. 'Who are you?' she asked.

The figure made a gesture that seemed like a signal of peace, but no answer was given.

The lights upon her own part of the shore were now not far distant. She looked above and saw breaks in the darkness that had hidden the stars; the clouds were passing over.

The squall that was taking them upon their journey was still whistling and blowing, but she feared its force less as she realised that she was nearing home.

She desired greatly to work herself along the boat and touch the sailor curiously with her hand, but she was afraid to do it, and that for two reasons: if he was a spirit she had reason for shrinking from such contact, and if he was a man—well, in that case she also saw objections.

The man at the helm dropped the sail; for a minute or two he stood not far from Helen as he busied himself with it.

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'Who are you?' she asked again, but she still had not courage to put out her hand and touch him.

There was a little wooden wharf upon the shore, and to this the sailor held the boat while Helen sprung out. Her feet were no sooner safe upon it than the boat was allowed to move away. She saw the black mast and the white figure recede together and disappear in the darkness.

Johns had to walk home by the shore, and in no small anxiety. When he saw that his niece was safe he chuckled over her in burly fashion.

'Then I suppose,' he said, 'that some fellow got aboard her between the puffs of wind. I hope it was none of those Syndicate men; they're a fast lot. What was his name? What had he to say for himself?'

'She was flying far too fast for any one to get aboard,' asserted Helen. 'I don't know what his name was; he didn't say anything; I don't know where he went to.'

Then the uncle suggested toddy in an undertone to his wife. The aunt looked over her spectacles with solicitude, and then arose and put her niece to bed.

When Helen was left alone she lay looking out at the stars that again were shining; she wondered and wondered; perhaps the reason that she came to no definite conclusion was that she liked the state of wonder better. Helen was a modern girl; she had friends who were spiritualists, friends who were theosophists, friends who were 'high church' and believed in visions of angels.

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In the morning Johns' boat was found tethered as usual to the buoy in front of his house.

Long before this the Syndicate had suspected the Baby's attachment. The strength of that attachment they did not suspect in the least; never having seen depths in the Baby, they supposed there were none. They had fallen into the habit of taking the Baby by the throat and asking him in trenchant tones, 'Have you spoken to her?' The Baby found it convenient to be able to give a truthful negative, not that he would have minded fibbing in the least, but in this case the fib would certainly have been detected; he could not expect his goddess to enter into any clandestine parley and keep his secret.

Had the Baby taken the matter less to heart he would have been more rash in asserting his independence, but he meditated some great step and 'lay low.' What or when the irrevocable move was to be he had no definite idea, the thought of it was only as yet an exalted swelling of mind and heart.

There was a period, after the affair of the boat, when he spent a good deal of time haunting the sacred precincts of the house where Helen lived. The precincts consisted of a dusty lane, a flat, ugly fenced field where a cow and a horse grazed, and a place immediately about the house covered with thick grass and shaded by maple trees. There were some shrubs too, behind which one could hide if necessary, but they were prickly, uncomfortable to nestle against, and the unmown grass absorbed an immense quantity of dew. In imagination, however, the Baby wandered on pastoral slopes and in classic shades. At first he paid his visits at night when the family were asleep, and he slipped about so quietly that no one but the horse and the cow need know where he went or what he did. At length, however, he grew more bold, and took his way across the maple grove going and coming from other evening errands. Trespassing is not much of a fault at the lake of St. Jean. The Baby became expert in dodging hastily by, with his eyes upon the windows; the dream of his life was to see the gymnastics performed again; at length it was realised.

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The thing we desire most is often the thing that brings us woe.

The Baby caught sight of Helen practising her beautiful attitudes. He hung on to a rail of the verandah, and gazed and gazed. Then he took his life in his hand, as it were, and swung himself up on the verandah; he moved like a cat, for he supposed that the stalwart Johns was within. From this better point of view, peeping about, he now surveyed the whole interior of the small drawing-room. What was his joy to find that there was no family circle of spectators; Helen was exercising herself alone! He hugged to himself the idea that the gracious little spectacle was all his own.

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Now, as it happened, the Baby in his secret hauntings of this house had not been so entirely unseen as he supposed. Certainly Johns had never caught sight of him or he would have been made aware of it, but Helen, since the night of the boating mystery, had more than once caught sight of a white figure passing among the maple shadows. These glimpses had added point and colour to all the mystical fancies that clustered round the helmsman of the yacht. She hardly believed that some guardian spirit was protecting her in visible semblance, or that some human Prince Charming, more kingly and wise than any man that she had yet seen, had chosen this peculiar mode of courting her; but her wish was the father of thoughts that fluttered between these two explanations, and hope was fed by the conviction that no man who could see her every day if he chose would behave in this romantic manner.

So upon this evening it happened that when Helen, poised upon her toes and beating the time of imaginary music with her waving hand, caught sight of the Baby's white flannels through the dark window pane, she recognised the figure of her dreams and, having long ago made up her mind what to do when she had the chance, she ran to the French window without an instant's delay, and let herself out of it with graceful speed.

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The Baby, panic-stricken, felt but one desire, that she might never know who had played the spy. He threw himself over the verandah rail with an acrobat's skill, and with head in front and nimble feet he darted off under the maple trees: but he had to reckon with an agile maiden. Helen had grown tired of a fruitless dream. A crescent moon gave her enough light to pursue; lights of friendly houses on all sides assured her of safety.

Over the log fence into the pasture vaulted the Baby, convinced now that he had escaped. Vain thought! He had not considered the new education. Over the fence vaulted Helen as lightly: in a minute the Baby heard her on his track.

The cow and the horse had never before seen so pretty a chase. There was excitement in the air and they sniffed it; they were both young and they began to run too. The sound of heavy galloping filled the place.

Of the two sides of the field which lay farthest from the house, one looked straight over to the glaring Syndicate windows, and one to the rugged bank that rose from the shore. The Baby's one mad desire was to conceal his identity. He made for the dark shore. Another fence, he thought, or the rocks of the bank, would surely deter her flying feet.

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They both vaulted the second fence. The Baby still kept his distance ahead, but when he heard that she too sprang over, a fear for her safety darted across his excited brain. Would those cantering animals jump after and crush her beneath their feet, or would she fall on the rocks of the shore which he was going to leap over? The Baby intended to leap the shore and lose his identity by a swim in the black water.

It was this darting thought of anxiety for Helen that made him hesitate in his leap. Too late to stop, the hesitation was fatal to fair performance. The Baby came down on the shore with a groan, his leg under him and his head on the earth.

He saw Helen pause beside him, deliberately staring through the dim light.

'I'm not hurt,' said the Baby, because he knew that he was.

'You are only the Syndicate Baby!' she exclaimed with interrogatory indignation.

'I'm going to cut the Syndicate; I'll never have anything more to do with them, Miss Johns.'

Helen did not understand the significance of this eager assurance.

The Baby's brain became clear; he tried to rise, but could not.

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'Are you not hurt?' she asked.

'Oh! no, not at all, Miss Johns' (he spoke with eager, youthful politeness); 'it's only—it's only that I've doubled my leg and can't quite get up.'

The Baby was pretty tough; a few bumps and breaks were matters of small importance to him; his employers had already bargained with him not to play football as he gained so many holidays in bandages thereby. Just now he was quick enough to take in the situation: Helen despised him, it was neck or nothing, he must do all his pleading once for all, and the compensation for a broken leg was this, that she could not have the inhumanity to leave him till he declared himself fit to be left. He pulled himself round, and straightened the leg before him as he sat.

Helen was not accustomed to falls and injuries; she was shocked and pitiful, but she was stern too; she felt that she had the right.

'I'm very sorry; I will go and get some one to help you, but you know it's entirely your own fault. What have you been behaving in this way for?'

'If you'd only believe me,' pleaded the Baby, 'I—I—you really can have no idea, Miss Johns—'

If she could have seen how white and earnest his young face was she might have listened to him, but the light was too dim.

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'I want to know this' (severely), 'Was it you who got on to our sailing boat that other night?'

'I thought you were alarmed, Miss Johns, and in a rather—rather dangerous situation.' The Baby was using his prettiest tones, such as he used when he went out to a dance.

If she could have known how heroic it was to utter these mincing accents over a broken leg she might have been touched; but she did not even know that the leg was broken. She went on rigidly, 'How could you get aboard when she was sailing so fast? Where did you come from?'

'Oh! it wasn't difficult at all, I assure you, Miss Johns; I only got on between the gusts of the wind. I swam from the Syndicate boat. You know, of course, one of us must have gone when we heard you singing out for help, and I was only too happy, frightfully happy, I am sure—and it was nothing at all to do. If you were much here, and saw us swimming and boating, you'd see fellows do that sort of thing every day.'

It was a delicate instinct that made him underrate the feat he had performed, for he would have been so glad to have her feel under the slightest obligation to him; but as far as her perceptions were concerned, the beauty of his sentiment was lost, for when he said that the thing that he had done was easy, she believed him.

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She still interrogated. 'Why did you not speak and tell me who you were?'

There had been an ostensible and a real reason for this conduct on the Baby's part. The first was the order which his friends in the Syndicate boat had called after him as he jumped into the water, the second he spoke out now for the first time to Helen.

'I didn't speak, Miss Johns, because I—I *couldn't*. Oh! you have no idea—really, you know, if you'd only believe me—I love you so much, Miss Johns, I couldn't say anything or I'd have said more than I ought, the sort of thing I'm saying now, you know.'

'Tut!' said Helen sharply, 'what rubbish!'

'Oh! but Miss Johns—yes, I knew you would think it was all rot and that sort of thing; that was the reason I didn't say it in the boat, and that is the reason I've never dared to ask to be introduced to you, Miss Johns. It wasn't that I cared for the Syndicate. You see, the worst of it is, I'm so confoundedly poor; they give me no sort of a screw at all at the bank, I do assure you. But, Miss Johns, my uncle is one of the directors; he's sure to give me a leg up before very long, and if you only knew—oh! really if you only knew—,' words failed him quite when he tried to describe the strength of his devotion. He only sat before her, supporting himself with both hands on the ground and looking up with a face that had no rounded outline now, but was white, passionate and pathetic; he could only murmur, 'really, really—if you only knew—'

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The darkness barred her vision and the extravagant words in the boyish voice sounded ridiculous to her.

'I will believe you,' she said, 'if you want me to, but it doesn't make any difference; I am sorry you are hurt, and sorry you have taken this fancy for me. I think you will find some other girl very soon whom you will like better; I hope you will. There isn't' (she was becoming vehement), 'there isn't the slightest atom of use in your caring for me.'

'Isn't there?' asked the Baby despairingly. 'I wish you would say that you will think over it, Miss Johns; I wish you would say that I might know you and come and see you sometimes. I'd cut the Syndicate and make it up with your uncle.'

'It wouldn't be the slightest use,' she repeated excitedly.

'Of course if you go on saying that, I sha'n't bore you any more, but do, Miss Johns, do, do just think a minute before you say it again.'

A note in his voice touched her at last; she paused for the required minute and then answered gently; her gentleness carried conviction. 'I could never care for you. You are not at all the sort of man I could ever care for, and I am going back to New York in a few days, so you won't be troubled by seeing me any more.'

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When Helen rushed breathless to the door of the Syndicate boat-house and told of the accident, the bachelors went out in a body and bore the Baby home.

They petted him until he was on his feet again. They gained some vague knowledge of his interview with Helen, and he kept a very distinct remembrance of it. Both he and they believed that his first attempt at love had come to nothing, but that was a mistake.

The Baby had loved with some genuine fervour, and his grief made a man of him.

VIII

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WITCHCRAFT

A young minister was walking through the streets of a small town in the island of Cape Breton. The minister was only a theological student who had been sent to preach in this remote place during his summer holiday. The town was at once very primitive and very modern. Many log-houses still remained in it; almost all the other houses were built of wood. The little churches, which represented as many sects, looked like the churches in a child's Dutch village. The town hall had only a brick facing. On the hillsides that surrounded the town far and wide were many fields, in which the first stumps were still standing, charred by the fires that had been kindled to kill them. There were also patches of forest still to be seen among these fields, where the land had not yet been cleared. In spite of all this, the town was very advanced, every improvement being of the newest kind because so recently achieved. Upon huge ungainly tree-trunks roughly erected along the streets, electric lamps hung, and telephone wires crossed and recrossed one another from roof to roof. There was even an electric tram that ran straight through the town and some distance into the country on either side. The general store had a gaily dressed lay figure in its window,—a female figure,—and its gown was labelled 'The Latest Parisian Novelty.'

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The theological student was going out to take tea. He was a tall, active fellow, and his long strides soon brought him to a house a little way out of the town, which was evidently the abode of some degree of taste and luxury. The house was of wood, painted in dull colours of red and brown; it had large comfortable verandahs under shingled roofs. Its garden was not old-fashioned in the least; but though it aspired to trimness the grass had not grown there long enough to make a good lawn, so the ribbon flower-beds and plaster vases of flowers lacked the green-velvet setting that would have made them appear better. The student was the less likely to criticise the lawn because a very pretty, fresh-looking girl met him at the gate.

She was really a fine girl. Her dress showed rather more effort at fashion than was quite in

keeping with her very rural surroundings, and her speech and accent betrayed a childhood spent among uneducated folk and only overlaid by more recent schooling. Her face had the best parts of beauty: health and good sense were written there, also flashes of humour and an habitual sweet seriousness. She had chanced to be at the gate gathering flowers. Her reception of the student was frank, and yet there was just a touch of blushing dignity about it which suggested that she took a special interest in him. The student also, it would appear, took an interest in her, for, on their way to the house, he made a variety of remarks upon the weather which proved that he was a little excited and unable to observe that he was talking nonsense.

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In a little while the family were gathered round the tea-table. The girl, Miss Torrance by name, sat at the head of the table. Her father was a banker and insurance agent. He sat opposite his eldest daughter and did the honours of the meal with the utmost hospitality, yet with reserve of manner caused by his evident consciousness that his grammar and manners were not equal to those of his children and their guest. There were several daughters and two sons younger than Miss Torrance. They talked with vivacity.

The conversation soon turned upon the fact that the abundant supply of cream to which the family were accustomed was not forthcoming. Strawberries were being served with the tea; some sort of cold pudding was also on the table; and all this to be eaten without cream,—these young people might have been asked to go without their supper, so indignant they were.

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Now, Mr. Torrance had been decorously trying to talk of the young minister's last sermon and of the affairs of the small Scotch church of which he was an elder, and Miss Torrance was ably seconding his effort by comparing the sentiments of the sermon to a recent magazine article, but against her will she was forced to attend to the young people's clamour about the cream.

It seemed that Trilium, the cow, had recently refused to give her milk. Mary Torrance was about eighteen; she suddenly gave it as her opinion that Trilium was bewitched; there was no other explanation, she said, no other possible explanation of Trilium's extraordinary conduct.

A flush mounted Miss Torrance's face; she frowned at her sister when the student was not looking.

'It's wonderful, the amount of witchcraft we have about here, Mr. Howitt,' said the master of the house tentatively to the minister.

Howitt had taken Mary's words in jest. He gave his smooth-shaven face the twist that with him always expressed ideas wonderful or grotesque. It was a strong, thin face, full of intelligence.

'I never could have conceived anything like it,' said he. 'I come across witch tales here, there, everywhere; and the marvellous thing is, some of the people really seem to believe them.'

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The younger members of the Torrance family fixed their eyes upon him with apprehensive stare.

'You can't imagine anything more degrading,' continued the student, who came from afar.

'Degrading, of course.' Mr. Torrance sipped his tea hastily. 'The Cape Breton people are superstitious, I believe.'

An expression that might have betokened a new resolution appeared upon the fine face of the eldest daughter.

'*We* are Cape Breton people, father,' she said, with dignified reproach. 'I hope'—here a timid glance, as if imploring support—'I hope we know better than to place any real faith in these degrading superstitions.'

Howitt observed nothing but the fine face and the words that appeared to him natural.

Torrance looked at them both with the air of an honest man who was still made somewhat cowardly by new-fashioned propriety.

'I never put much o' my faith in these things myself,' he said at last in broad accents, 'still,'—an honest shake of the head—'there's queer things happens.'

'It is like going back to the Middle Ages'—Howitt was still impervious—'to hear some of these poor creatures talk. I never thought it would be my lot to come across anything so delightfully absurd.'

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'Perhaps for the sake of the ministry ye'd better be careful how ye say your mind about it,' suggested Mr. Torrance; 'in the hearing of the poor and uneducated, of course, I mean. But if ye like to make a study o' that sort of thing, I'd advise ye to go and have a talk with Mistress Betty M'Leod. She's got a great repertory of tales, has Mistress Betty.'

Mary spoke again. Mary was a young woman who had the courage of her opinions. 'And if you go to Mistress M'Leod, Mr. Howitt, will you just be kind enough to ask her how to cure poor Trilium? and don't forget anything of what she says.'

Miss Torrance gave her sister a word of reproof. There was still upon her face the fine glow born of a new resolution never again to listen to a word of witchcraft.

As for Howitt, there came across his clever face the whimsical look which denoted that he understood Mary's fun perfectly. 'I will go to-morrow,' he cried. 'When the wise woman has told

me who has bewitched Trilium, we will make a waxen figure and stick pins in it.'

The next day Howitt walked over the hills in search of Mistress Betty M'Leod. The lake of the Bras d'Or held the sheen of the western sun in its breast. The student walked upon green slopes far above the water, and watched the outline of the hills on the other side of the inlet, and thought upon many things. He thought upon religion and philosophy, for he was religious and studious; he thought upon practical details of his present work, for he was anxious for the welfare of the souls under his charge; but on whatever subject his thoughts dwelt, they came back at easy intervals to the fair, dignified face of his new friend, Miss Torrance.

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'There's a fine girl for you,' he said to himself repeatedly, with boyish enthusiasm. He thought, too, how nobly her life would be spent if she chose to be the helpmeet of a Christian minister. He wondered whether Mary could take her sister's place in the home circle. Yet with all this he made no decision as to his own course. He was discreet, and in minds like his decisions upon important matters are fruits of slow growth.

He came at last to a farm, a very goodly farm for so hilly a district. It lay, a fertile flat, in a notch of the green hillside. When he reached the house yard he asked for Mistress Betty M'Leod, and was led to her presence. The old dame sat at her spinning-wheel in a farm kitchen. Her white hair was drawn closely, like a thin veil, down the sides of her head and pinned at the back. Her features were small, her eyes bright; she was not unlike a squirrel in her sharp little movements and quick glances. She wore a small shawl pinned around her spare shoulders. Her skirts fell upon the treadle of the spinning-wheel. The kitchen in which she sat was unused; there was no fire in the stove. The brick floor, the utensils hanging on the walls, had the appearance of undisturbed rest. Doors and windows were open to the view of the green slopes and the golden sea beneath them.

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'You come from Canada,' said the old dame. She left her spinning with a certain interested formality of manner.

'From Montreal,' said he.

'That's the same. Canada is a terrible way off.'

'And now,' he said, 'I hear there are witches in this part of the land.' Whereupon he smiled in an incredulous cultured way.

She nodded her head as if she had gauged his thought. 'Ay, there's many a minister believes in them if they don't let on they do. I mind——'

'Yes,' said he.

'I mind how my sister went out early one morning, and saw a witch milking one of our cows.'

'How did you know she was a witch?'

'Och, she was a neighbour we knew to be a witch real well. My sister didn't anger her. It's terrible unlucky to vex them. But would you believe it? as long as we had that cow her cream gave no butter. We had to sell her and get another. And one time—it was years ago, when Donald and me was young—the first sacrament came round——'

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'Yes,' said he, looking sober.

'And all the milk of our cows would give hardly any butter for a whole year! And at house-cleaning time, there, above the milk shelves, what did they find but a bit of hair rope! Cows' and horses' hair it was. Oh, it was terrible knotted, and knotted just like anything! So then of course we knew.'

'Knew what?'

'Why, that the milk was bewitched. We took the rope away. Well, that very day more butter came at the churning, and from that time on, more, but still not so much as ought by rights to have come. Then, one day, I thought to unknot the rope, and I undid, and undid, and undid. Well, when I had got it undone, that day the butter came as it should!'

'But what about the sacrament?' asked he.

'That was the time of the year it was. Oh, but I could tell you a sad, sad story of the wickedness of witches. When Donald and me was young, and had a farm up over on the other hill, well, there was a poor widow with seven daughters. It was hard times then for us all, but for her, she only had a bit of flat land with some bushes, and four cows and some sheep, and, you see, she sold butter to put meat in the children's mouths. Butter was all she could sell.

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'Well, there came to live near her on the hill an awful wicked old man and woman. I'll tell you who their daughter is: she's married to Mr. M'Curdy, who keeps the store. The old man and his wife were awful wicked to the widow and the fatherless. I'll tell you what they did. Well, the widow's butter failed. Not one bit more could she get. The milk was just the same, but not one bit of butter. "Oh," said she, "it's a hard world, and me a widow!" But she was a brave woman, bound to get along some way. So, now that she had nothing to sell to buy meal, she made curds of the milk, and fed the children on that.

'Well, one day the old man came in to see her in a neighbouring way, and she, being a good

woman,—oh, but she was a good woman!—set a dish of curds before him. "Oh," said he, "these are very fine curds!" So he went away, and next day she put the rennet in the milk as usual, but not a bit would the curd come. "Oh," said she, "but I must put something in the children's mouths!" She was a fine woman, she was. So she kept the lambs from the sheep all night, and next morning she milked the sheep. Sheep's milk is rich, and she put rennet in that, and fed the children on the curd.

'So one day the old man came in again. He was a wicked one; he was dreadful selfish; and as he was there, she, being a hospitable woman, gave him some of the curd. "That's good curd," said he. Next day, when she put the rennet in the sheep's milk, not a bit would the curd come. She felt it bitterly, poor woman; but she had a fine spirit, and she fed the children on a few bits of potato she had growing.

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'Well, one day, the eldest daughter got up very early to spin—in the twilight of the dawn it was—and she looked out, and there was the old woman coming from her house on the hill, with a shawl over her head and a tub in her arms. Oh, but she was a really wicked one! for I'll tell you what she did. Well, the girl watched and wondered, and in the twilight of the dawn she saw the old woman crouch down by one of the alder bushes, and put her tub under it, and go milking with her hands; and after a bit she lifted her tub, that seemed to have something in it, and set it over against another alder bush, and went milking with her hands again. So the girl said, "Mother, mother, wake up, and see what the neighbour woman is doing!" So the mother looked out, and there, in the twilight of the dawn, she saw her four cows in the bit of land, among the alder bushes, and the old neighbour woman milking away at a bush. And then the old woman moved her tub likewise to another bush, and likewise, and likewise, until she had milked four bushes, and she took up her tub, and it seemed awful heavy, and she had her shawl over it, and was going up the hill.

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'So the mother said to the girl, "Run, run, and see what she has got in it." For they weren't up to the ways of witches, and they were astonished like. But the girl, she said, "Oh, mother, I don't like." Well, she was timid, anyway, the eldest girl. But the second girl was a romping thing, not afraid of anything, so they sent her. By this time the wicked old woman was high on the hill; so she ran and ran, but she could not catch her before she was in at her own door; but that second girl, she was not afraid of anything, so she runs in at the door, too. Now, in those days they used to have sailing-chests that lock up; they had iron bars over them, so you could keep anything in that was a secret. They got them from the ships, and this old woman kept her milk in hers. So when the girl bounced in at the door, there she saw that wicked old woman pouring milk out of the tub into her chest, and the chest half full of milk, and the old man looking on! So then, of course they knew where the good of their milk had gone.'

The story was finished. The old dame looked at the student and nodded her head with eyes that awaited some expression of formal disapproval.

'What did they know?' asked he.

'Know! Oh, why, that the old woman was an awful wicked witch, and she'd taken the good of their milk.'

'Oh, indeed!' said the student; and then, 'But what became of the widow and the seven daughters?'

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'Well, of course she had to sell her cows and get others, and then it was all right. But that old man and his wife were that selfish they'd not have cared if she'd starved. And I tell you, it's one of the things witches can do, to take the good out of food, if they've an eye to it; they can take every bit of nouriture out of it that's in it. There were two young men that went from here to the States—that's Boston, ye know. Well, pretty soon one, that was named M'Pherson, came back, looking so white-like and ill that nothing would do him any good. He drooped and he died. Well, years after, the other, whose name was McVey, came back. He was of the same wicked stock as the old folks I've been telling ye of. Well, one day, he was in low spirits like, and he chanced to be talking to my father, and says he, "It's one of the sins I'll have to 'count for at the Judgment that I took the good out of M'Pherson's food till he died. I sat opposite to him at the table when we were at Boston together, and I took the good out of his food, and it's the blackest sin I done," said he.

'Oh, they're awful wicked people, these witches! One of them offered to teach my sister how to take the good out of food, but my sister was too honest; she said, "I'll learn to keep the good of my own, if ye like." However, the witch wouldn't teach her that because she wouldn't learn the other. Oh, but I cheated a witch once. Donald, he brought me a pound of tea. 'Twasn't always we got tea in those days, so I put it in the tin box; and there was just a little over, so I was forced to leave that in the paper bag. Well, that day a neighbour came in from over the hill. I knew fine she was a witch; so we sat and gossiped a bit; she was a real pleasant woman, and she sat and sat, and the time of day went by. So I made her a cup of tea, her and me; but I used the drawing that was in the paper bag. Said she, "I just dropped in to borrow a bit of tea going home, but if that's all ye have"—Oh, but I could see her eyeing round; so I was too sharp for her, and I says, "Well, I've no more in the paper just now, but if ye'll wait till Donald comes, maybe he'll bring some." So she saw I was too sharp for her, and away she went. If I'd as much as opened the tin, she'd have had every grain of good out of it with her eyes.'

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At first the student had had the grave and righteous intention of denouncing the superstition, but gradually he had perceived that to do so would be futile. The artistic soul of him was caught by

the curious recital. He remembered now the bidding of Mary Torrance, and thought with pleasure that he would go back and repeat these strange stories to Miss Torrance, and smile at them in her company.

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'Now, for instance,' he said aloud, 'if a good cow, that is a great pet in the family, should suddenly cease to give her milk, how would you set about curing her?'

The dame's small bright eyes grew keener. She moved to her spinning-wheel and gave it a turn. 'Ay,' she said, 'and whose is the cow?'

He was not without a genuine curiosity. 'What would you do for *any* cow in that case?'

'And is it Torrance's cow?' asked Mistress Betty. 'Och, but I know it's Torrance's cow that ye're speiring for.'

The young minister was recalled to a sense of his duty. He rose up with brisk dignity. 'I only asked you to see what you would say. I do not believe the stories you have been telling me.'

She nodded her head, taking his assertion as a matter of course. 'But I'll tell you exactly what they must do,' she said. 'Ye can tell Miss Torrance she must get a pound of pins.'

'A pound of pins!' said he.

'Ay, it's a large quantity, but they'll have them at the store, for it's more than sometimes they're wanted—a time here, a time there—against the witches. And she's to boil them in whatever milk the cow gives, and she's to pour them boiling hot into a hole in the ground; and when she's put the earth over them, and the sod over that, she's to tether the animal there, and milk it there, and the milk will come right enough.'

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While the student was making his way home along the hillside, through field and forest, the long arm of the sea turned to red and gold in the light of the clouds which the sun had left behind when it sank down over the distant region that the Cape Breton folk call Canada.

The minister meditated upon what he had heard, but not for long. He could not bring his mind into such attitude towards the witch-tales as to conceive of belief in them as an actual part of normal human experience. Insanity, or the love of making a good story out of notions which have never been seriously entertained, must compose the warp and woof of the fabric of such strange imaginings. It is thus we account for most experiences we do not understand.

The next evening the Torrance family were walking to meeting. The student joined himself to Miss Torrance. He greeted her with the whimsical look of grave humour. 'You are to take a pound of pins,' he said.

'I do not believe it would do any good,' she interrupted eagerly.

It struck him as very curious that she should assert her unbelief. He was too nonplussed to go on immediately. Then he supposed it was part of the joke, and proceeded to give the other details.

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'Mr. Howitt,'—a tremulous pause,—'it is very strange about poor Trilium, she has always been such a good, dear cow; the children are very fond of her, and my mother was very fond of her when she was a heifer. The last summer before she died, Trilium fed out of mother's hand, and now—she's in perfect health as far as we can see, but father says that if she keeps on refusing to give her milk he will be obliged to sell her.'

Miss Torrance, who was usually strong and dignified, spoke now in a very appealing voice.

'Couldn't you get an old farmer to look at her, or a vet?'

'But why do you think she has suddenly stopped giving milk?' persisted the girl.

'I am very sorry, but I really don't know anything about animals,' said he.

'Oh, then if you don't know anything about them——' She paused. There had been such an evident tone of relief in her voice that he wondered much what would be coming next. In a moment she said, 'I quite agreed with you the other night when you said the superstition about witchcraft was degrading.'

'No one could think otherwise.' He was much puzzled at the turn of her thought.

'Still, of course, *about animals*, old people like Mistress Betty M'Leod may know something.'

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As they talked they were walking down the street in the calm of the summer evening to the prayer meeting. The student's mind was intent upon his duties, for, as they neared the little white-washed church, many groups were seen coming from all sides across the grassy space in which it stood. He was an earnest man, and his mind became occupied with the thought of the spiritual needs of these others who were flocking to hear him preach and pray.

Inside the meeting-room, unshaded oil lamps flared upon a congregation most serious and devout. The student felt that their earnestness and devotion laid upon him the greater responsibility; he also felt much hindered in his speech because of their ignorance and remote ways of thought. It was a comfort to him to feel that there was at least one family among his hearers whose education would enable them to understand him clearly. He looked with satisfaction at the bench where Mr. Torrance sat with his children. He looked with more

satisfaction to where Miss Torrance sat at the little organ. She presided over it with dignity and sweet seriousness. She drew music even out of its squeaking keys.

A few days after that prayer meeting the student happened to be in the post-office. It was a small, rough place; a wooden partition shut off the public from the postmistress and her helpers. He was waiting for some information for which he had asked; he was forced to stand outside the little window in this partition. He listened to women's voices speaking on the other side, as one listens to that which in no way concerns oneself.

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'It's just like her, stuck up as she is since she came from school, setting herself and her family up to be better than other folks.'

'Perhaps they were out of them at the store,' said a gentler voice.

'Oh, don't tell me. It's on the sly she's doing it, and then pretending to be grander than other folks.'

Then the postmistress came to the window with the required information. When she saw who was there, she said something else also.

'There's a parcel come for Miss Torrance,—if you happen to be going up that way,' the postmistress simpered.

The student became aware for the first time that his friendship with Miss Torrance was a matter of public interest. He was not entirely displeased. 'I will take the parcel,' he said.

As he went along the sunny road, he felt so light-hearted that, hardly thinking what he did, he began throwing up the parcel and catching it again in his hands. It was not large; it was very tightly done up in thick paper, and had an ironmonger's label attached; so that, though he paid small attention, it did not impress him as a thing that could be easily injured. Something, however, did soon make a sharp impression upon him; once as he caught the parcel he felt his hand deeply pricked. Looking closely, he saw that a pin was working its way through the thick paper. After that he walked more soberly, and did not play ball. He remembered what he had heard at the post-office. The parcel was certainly addressed to Miss Torrance. It was very strange. He remembered with displeasure now the assumption of the postmistress that he would be glad to carry this parcel.

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He delivered the pound of pins at the door without making a call. His mind had never come to any decision with regard to his feeling for Miss Torrance, and now he was more undecided than ever. He was full of curiosity about the pins. He found it hard to believe that they were to be used for a base purpose, but suspicion had entered his mind. The knowledge that the eyes of the little public were upon him made him realise that he could not continue to frequent the house merely to satisfy his curiosity.

He was destined to know more.

That night, long after dark, he was called to visit a dying man, and the messenger led him somewhat out of the town.

He performed his duty to the dying with wistful eagerness. The spirit passed from earth while he yet knelt beside the bed. When he was returning home alone in the darkness, he felt his soul open to the power of unseen spirit, and to him the power of the spiritual unseen was the power of God.

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Walking on the soft, quiet road, he came near the house where he had lately loved to visit, and his eye was arrested by seeing a lantern twinkling in the paddock where Trilium grazed. He saw the forms of two women moving in its little circle of light; they were digging in the ground.

He felt that he had a right to make sure of the thing he suspected. The women were not far from a fence by which he could pass, and he did pass that way, looking and looking till a beam of the lantern fell full on the bending faces. When he saw that Miss Torrance was actually there, he went on without speaking.

After that two facts became known in the village, each much discussed in its own way; yet they were not connected with each other in the common mind. One was that the young minister had ceased to call frequently upon Miss Torrance; the other, that Trilium, the cow, was giving her milk.

IX

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THE GIRL WHO BELIEVED IN THE SAINTS

Marie Verine was a good girl, but she was not beautiful or clever. She lived with her mother in one flat of an ordinary-looking house in a small Swiss town. Had they been poorer or richer there might have been something picturesque about their way of life, but, as it was, there was nothing. Their pleasures were few and simple; yet they were happier than most people are—but this they did not know.

'It is a pity we are not richer and have not more friends,' Madame Verine would remark, 'for then we could perhaps get Marie a husband; as it is, there is no chance.'

Madame Verine usually made this remark to the Russian lady who lived upstairs. The Russian lady had a name that could not be pronounced; she spoke many languages, and took an interest in everything. She would reply—

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'No husband! It is small loss. I have seen much of the world.'

Marie had seen little of the world, and she did not believe the Russian lady. She never said anything about it, except at her prayers, and then she used to ask the saints to pray for her that she might have a husband.

Now, in a village about half a day's journey from the town where Marie dwelt, there lived a young girl whose name was Céleste. Her mother had named her thus because her eyes were blue as the sky above, and her face was round as the round moon, and her hair and eyelashes were like sunbeams, or like moonlight when it shines in yellow halo through the curly edges of summer clouds. The good people of this village were a hard-working, hard-headed set of men and women. While Céleste's father lived they had waxed proud about her beauty, for undoubtedly she was a credit to the place; but when her parents died, and left her needy, they said she must go to the town and earn her living.

Céleste laughed in her sleeve when they told her this, because young Fernand, the son of the inn-keeper, had been wooing and winning her heart, in a quiet way, for many a day; and now she believed in him, and felt sure that he would speak his love aloud and take her home to his parents. To be sure, it was unknown in that country for a man who had money to marry a girl who had none; but Fernand was strong to work and to plan; Céleste knew that he could do what he liked.

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It was the time when the April sun smiles upon the meadow grass till it is very green and long enough to wave in the wind, and all amongst it the blue scilla flowers are like dewdrops reflecting the blue that hangs above the gnarled arms of the still leafless walnut trees. The cottage where Céleste lived was out from the village, among the meadows, and to the most hidden side of it young Fernand came on the eve of the day on which she must leave it for ever. Very far off the snow mountains had taken on their second flush of evening red before he came, and Céleste had grown weary waiting.

'Good-bye,' said Fernand. He was always a somewhat stiff and formal young man, and to-night he was ill at ease.

'But,' cried Céleste—and here she wept—'you have made me love you. I love no one in the world but you.'

'You are foolish,' said he. 'It is, of course, a pity that we must part, but it cannot be helped. You have no dowry, not even a small one. It would be unthrifty for the son of an innkeeper to marry a girl without a sou. My parents would not allow me to act so madly!' and his manner added—'nor would I be so foolish myself.'

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Next day Céleste went up to the town, and went into the market-place to be hired as a servant.

This was the day of the spring hiring. Many servants were wanting work, and they stood in the market-place. All around were the old houses of the square; there was the church and the pastor's house, and the house and office of the notary, and many other houses standing very close together, with high-peaked roofs and gable windows. The sun shone down, lighting the roofs, throwing eaves and niches into strong shadow, gleaming upon yellow bowls and dishes, upon gay calicoes, upon cheese and sausages, on all bright things displayed on the open market-stalls, and upon the faces of the maid-servants who stood to be hired. Many ladies of the town went about seeking servants: among them was Madame Verine, and the Russian lady and Marie were with her. When they came in front of Céleste they all stopped.

'Ah, what eyes!' said the Russian lady—'what simple, innocent, trustful eyes! In these days how rare!'

'She is like a flower,' said Marie.

Now, they quickly found out that Céleste knew very little about the work she would have to do; it was because of this she had not yet found a mistress.

'I myself would delight to teach her,' cried the Russian lady.

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'And I,' cried Marie. So Madame Verine took her home.

They taught Céleste many things. Marie taught her to cook and to sew; the Russian lady taught her to write and to cipher, and was surprised at the progress she made, especially in writing. Céleste was the more interesting to them because there was just a shade of sadness in her eye. One day she told Marie why she was sad; it was the story of Fernand, how he had used her ill.

'What a shame!' cried Marie, when the brief facts were repeated.

'It is the way of the country,' said the Russian lady. 'These Swiss peasants, who have so fair a reputation for sobriety, are mercenary above all: they have no heart.'

Céleste lived with Madame Verine for one year. At the end of that time Madame Verine arose one morning to find the breakfast was not cooked, nor the fire lit. In the midst of disorder stood Céleste, with flushed cheeks and startled eyes, and a letter in her hand.

'Ah, madam,' she faltered, 'what a surprise! The letter, it is from monsieur the notary, who lives in the market-place, and to me, madam—to me!'

When Madame Verine took the letter she found told therein that an aunt of Céleste, who had lived far off in the Jura, was dead, and had left to Céleste a little fortune of five thousand francs, which was to be paid to her when she was twenty-one, or on her marriage day.

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'Ah,' cried Céleste, weeping, 'can it be true? Can it be true?'

'Of course, since monsieur the notary says so.'

'Ah, madam; let me run and see monsieur the notary. Let me just ask him, and hear from his lips that it is true!'

So she ran out into the town, with her apron over her head, and Marie made the breakfast.

The Russian lady came down to talk it over. 'The pretty child is distraught, and at *so small* a piece of good fortune!' said she.

But when Céleste came in she was more composed. 'It is true,' she said, with gentle joy, and she stood before them breathless and blushing.

'It will be three years before you are twenty-one,' said Madame Verine; 'you will remain with me.'

'If you please, madam, no,' said Céleste, modestly casting down her eyes; 'I must go to my native village.'

'How!' they cried. 'To whom will you go?'

Céleste blushed the more deeply, and twisted her apron. 'I have good clothes; I have saved my year's wages. I will put up at the inn. The wife of the innkeeper will be a mother to me now I can pay for my lodging.'

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At which Madame Verine looked at the Russian lady, and that lady looked at her, and said behind her hand, 'Such a baby, and so clever! It is the mere instinct of wisdom; it cannot be called forethought.'

It is to be observed that, all the world over, however carefully a mistress may guard her maid-servant, no great responsibility is felt when the engagement is broken. Madame Verine shrugged her shoulders and got another servant. Céleste went down to her village.

After that, when Marie walked in the market-place, she used to like to look at the notary's house, and at him, if she could espy him in the street. The house was a fine one, and the notary, in spite of iron-grey hair and a keen eye, good-looking; but that was not why Marie was interested; it was because he and his office seemed connected with the romance of life—with Céleste's good fortune.

When summer days grew long, Madame Verine, her friend and daughter, took a day's holiday, and out of good nature they went to see Céleste.

'Céleste lives like a grand lady now,' cried the innkeeper's wife, on being questioned. 'She will have me take her coffee to her in bed each morning.'

'The wages she has saved will not hold out long,' said the visitors.

'When that is finished she gives us her note of hand for the money she will get when she is married. She has shown us the notary's letter. It is certainly a tidy sum she will have, and our son has some thoughts of marrying.'

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They saw Céleste, who was radiant; they saw young Fernand, who was paying his court to her. They returned home satisfied.

It was not long after that when one morning Céleste came into Madame Verine's house; she was weeping on account of the loss of some of her money. She had come up to town, she said, to buy her wedding clothes, for which the notary had been so good as to advance her a hundred francs, but her pocket had been picked in the train. The money was gone—quite gone—alas!

So tearful was she that they lent her some money—not much, but a little. Then she dried her eyes, and said she would also get some things on credit, promising to pay in a month, for it was then she was to be married. At the end of the day she came back gaily to show her treasures.

'When the rejoicings of your wedding are over,' said Madame Verine, 'and your husband brings you to town to claim the money, you may stay here in the upper room of this house—it is an invitation.'

In a month came the wedding pair, joyful and blooming. The Russian lady made them a supper. They lodged in an attic room that Madame Verine rented. In the morning they went out, dressed in their best, to see the notary.

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An hour later Madame Verine sat in her little salon. The floor was of polished wood; it shone in

the morning light; so did all the polished curves of the chairs and cabinets. Marie was practising exercises on the piano.

They heard a heavy step on the stair. The bridegroom came into the room, agitated, unable to ask permission to enter. He strode across the floor and sat down weakly before the ladies.

They thought he had been drinking wine, but this was not so, although his eye was bloodshot and his voice unsteady.

'Can you believe it!' he cried, 'the notary never wrote letters to her; there was no aunt; there is no money!'

'It is incredible,' said Madame Verine, and then there was a pause of great astonishment.

'It is impossible!' cried the Russian lady, who had come in.

'It is true,' said the bridegroom hoarsely; and he wept.

And now Céleste herself came into the house. She came within the room, and looked at the ladies, who stood with hands upraised, and at her weeping husband. If you have ever enticed a rosy-faced child to bathe in the sea, and seen it stand half breathless, half terrified, yet trying hard to be brave, you know just the expression that was on the face of the child-like deceiver. With baby-like courage she smiled upon them all. [Pg 230]

Now the next person who entered the room was the notary himself. He was a gentleman of manners; he bowed with great gallantry to the ladies, not excepting Céleste.

'She is a child, and has had no chance to learn the arts of cunning,' cried the Russian lady, who had thought that she knew the world.

The notary bowed to her in particular. 'Madam, the true artist is born, not made.'

Then he looked at Céleste again. There were two kinds of admiration in his glance—one for her face, the other for her cleverness. He looked at the weeping husband with no admiration at all, but the purpose in his mind was steady as his clear grey eye, unmoved by emotion.

'I have taken the trouble to walk so far,' said he, 'to tell this young man what, perhaps, I ought to have mentioned when he was at my office. Happily, the evil can be remedied. It is the law of our land that if the fortune has been misrepresented, a divorce can be obtained.'

Céleste's courage vanished with her triumph. She covered her face. The husband had turned round; he was looking eagerly at the notary and at his cowering bride. [Pg 231]

'Ah, Heaven!' cried the two matrons, 'must it be?'

'I have walked so far to advise,' said the notary.

All this time Marie was sitting upon the piano-stool; she had turned it half-way round so that she could look at the people. She was not pretty, but, as the morning light struck full upon her face, she had the comeliness that youth and health always must have; and more than that, there was the light of a beautiful soul shining through her eyes, for Marie was gentle and submissive, but her mind and spirit were also strong; the individual character that had grown in silence now began to assert itself with all the beauty of a new thing in the world. Marie had never acted for herself before.

She began to speak to the notary simply, eagerly, as one who could no longer keep silence.

'It would be wrong to separate them, monsieur.'

Madame Verine chid Marie; the notary, no doubt just because he was a man and polite, answered her.

'This brave young fellow does not deserve to be thus fooled. I shall be glad to lend him my aid to extricate himself.'

'He does deserve it,' cried Marie. 'Long ago he pretended to have love for her, just for the pleasure of it, when he had not—that is worse than pretending to have money! And in any case, it is a *wicked* law, monsieur, that would grant a divorce when they are married, and—look now—left to himself he will forgive her, but he is catching at what you say. You have come here to tempt him! You dare not go on, monsieur!' [Pg 232]

'Dare not, mademoiselle?' said the notary, with a superior air.

'No, monsieur. Think of what the good God and the holy saints would say! This poor girl has brought much punishment on herself, but—ah, monsieur, think of the verdict of Heaven!'

'Mademoiselle,' said the notary haughtily, 'I was proposing nothing but justice; but it is no affair of mine.' And with that he went out brusquely—very brusquely for a gentleman of such polite manners.

'I am astonished at you, Marie,' said Madame Verine. This was true, but it was meant as a reproach.

'She is beside herself with compassion,' said the Russian lady; 'but that is just what men of the

world despise most.'

Then Marie went to her room weeping, and the two ladies talked to Céleste till her soft face had hard lines about the mouth and her eyes were defiant. Young Fernand slipped out and went again to the market-place.

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'I come to ask your aid, monsieur the notary.'

'I do not advise you.'

'But, monsieur, to whom else can I apply?'

'I am too busy,' said the notary.

Fernand and Céleste walked back to their village, hand in hand, both downcast, both peevish, but still together.

Now the notary was not what might be called a bad man himself, but he believed that the world was very bad. He had seen much to confirm this belief, and had not looked in the right place to find any facts that would contradict it. This belief had made him hard and sometimes even dishonest in his dealings with men; for what is the use of being good in a world that can neither comprehend goodness nor admire it? On the whole, the notary was much better satisfied with himself than with human nature around him, although, if he had only known it, he himself had grown to be the reflex—the image as in a mirror—of what he thought other men were; it is always so. There was just this much truth in him at the bottom of his scorn and grumbling—he flattered himself that if he could see undoubted virtue he could admire it; and there was in him that possibility of grace.

After he left Madame Verine's door he thought with irritation of the girl who had rebuked him. Then he began to remember that she was only a woman and very young, and she had appealed to his heart—ah, yes, he had a heart. After all, he was not sure but that her appeal was charming. Then he thought of her with admiration. This was not the result of Marie's words—words in themselves are nothing; it is the personality of the speaker that makes them live or die, and personality is strongest when nourished long in virtue and silence and prayer. When it came to pass that the notary actually did the thing Marie told him to do, he began to think of her even with tenderness in his heart.

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Now a very strange thing happened. In about a week the notary called on Madame Verine a second time; he greeted her with all ceremony, and then he sat down on a little stiff chair and explained his business in his own brief, dry way.

Marie was not there. The little *salon*, all polished and shining, gave faint lights and shadows in answer to every movement of its inmates. Madame Verine, in a voluminous silk gown, sat all attention, looking at the notary; she thought he was a very fine man, quite a great personage, and undoubtedly handsome.

'Madam,' began he, 'I am, as you know, at middle age, yet a bachelor, and the reason, to be plain with you, is that I have not believed in women. Pardon me, I would not be rude, but I am a business man. I have no delusions left, yet it has occurred to me that a young woman who would make the lives of the saints her rule of life—I do not believe in such things myself, but—in short, madam, I ask for your daughter in marriage.'

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He said it as if he was doing quite a kind thing, as, indeed, he thought he was. Madame Verine thought so too, and with great astonishment, and even some apologies, gave away her daughter with grateful smiles.

Marie was married to the notary, and he made her very happy. At first she was happy because he had good manners and she had such a loving heart that she loved him. After a few years he found out that she was too good for him, and then he became a better man.

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THE PAUPERS' GOLDEN DAY

Betty Lamb was a comely girl; she was big to look at, being tall and strong. She was never plump; she was never well clothed, not even in the best days of her youth. She had been brought up in the work-house; after that she belonged to no one. Her mind was a little astray: she had strong, rude, strange ideas of her own; she would not be humble and work day in, day out, like other folk, and for that reason she never thrived in the world. She lived here and there, and did this and that. All the town knew her; she was just 'Betty Lamb'; no one expected aught of her.

It was a small town in the west of Scotland. On different sides of it long lanes of humble cottages straggled out into the fields; the cottages had grey stone walls and red tiled roofs. There were new grey churches in the town, and big buildings, and streets of shops. The people in those days thought these very fine; they thought less about the real glory of the town—a ruined abbey which stood upon an open heath just beyond the houses.

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Three walls, two high gothic windows with the slender mullions unbroken, a few stately columns broken off at different heights from the ground, and one fragment of the high arch of the nave standing up against the sky in exquisite outline—these formed the ruin. It was built of the red sandstone that in its age takes upon it a delicate bloom of pink and white; it looked like a jewel in the breast of the grey hill country. Furze grew within the ruin and for acres on all sides. Sheep and goats came nibbling against the old altar steps. A fringe of wallflower and grass grew upon the top of the highest arch and down the broken fragments of the wall.

All around the stately hills looked down upon the town and the ruin, and the sky that bent over was more often than not full of cloud, soft and grey.

Betty Lamb was getting on to middle age, about thirty, when she had a baby. They had put her again in the poorhouse, but she rose when her baby was but a day old and went away from the place.

It was summer time then; the sky relented somewhat; there was sunshine between the showers, and sometimes a long fair week of silvery weather, when a white haze of lifting moisture rose ever, like incense, from the hills, and the light shone white upon the yellow bloom of the furze. [Pg 241]

Betty Lamb found the ambry niche in the wall of the ruin at the side of the place where the altar had been. She laid her baby there. That was his cradle, and by sunlight and moonlight she was heard singing loud songs to him. The people were afraid of going too near her at that time. 'It is dangerous,' said they, 'to touch an animal when she has her young with her.'

As years went on Betty Lamb and her little boy spent summer after summer upon the moor. The child was not christened, unless, indeed, the dew falling from the sacred stones and the pity of God for fatherless innocents had christened him. In this world, at least, his name was written in no book of life, for he had no name.

He grew to be a little lithe lad. Then it was that in every pickle of mischief where a little lad could be this elf-child, with his black eyes and curly auburn hair, was to be found. So maddening indeed were his naughty tricks that the townspeople spoke not so often of beating him, as they would have beaten a human child, but of wringing his neck like a young thing that had no right to live. Yet it was more often in word than in deed that punishment of any sort was inflicted, for the preliminary stage was perforce, 'first catch your boy,' and that was far from easy.

Even when the catching was accomplished the beating did not always come. One day the minister of the Kirk looked out upon his glebe. His favourite cow, with a bridle in her mouth, was being galloped at greatest speed around the field, Betty's lad standing tip-toe upon her back. The minister, with the agility which unbounded wrath gave him, caught the boy' and swung his cane. [Pg 242]

'I am going to thrash you,' said he.

'Ay, ye maun do that.' The small face was drawn to the aspect of a grave judge—'ye maun do that; it's yer juty.'

The minister, who had looked upon his intention rather in the light of natural impulse, felt the less inclination for the task. 'Are you not afraid of being beaten?' he asked.

'Aweel!—an air of profound reflection—'I'm thinking I can even it ony day wi' ridin' on a coo's back when she'll rin like yon.'

The sunlight of habitual benevolence began to break through the cloud of wrath upon the good minister's face. 'If I let you off, laddie, what will you do for me in return?'

An answering gleam of generosity broke upon the sage face of the child. 'I'll fair teach ye how to dae't ye'sel'.'

The lad grew apace. The neighbours said that he showed 'a caring' for his mother, but no one held toward him a helping hand. They were so sure that no good could come of him or of her. The mother had taken to drink, and one day it was found that the lad was gone. Just as he had often slipped from the grasp of one or other of the angry townsmen, dodged, darted, and disappeared for the moment, so now it seemed that he had slipped from the grasp of the town, run quickly and disappeared. No one knew why he had gone, or whither, or to what end. [Pg 243]

Betty Lamb remained in the town, a fine figure of a woman, but bowed in the shoulders, dirty, and clad in rags. At last, when her strong defiance of poverty and need would no longer serve her, she was seen to go about from door to door in the early dawn, raking among the ashes for such articles as she chose to put in an old sack and carry upon her back. The townsfolk honestly thought that all had been done that could be done to make a decent woman of her, and now in her old age she must needs go down to the gutter.

One day a man came to the town with circus pictures and a bucket of paste. He pasted his pictures upon all the blank spaces of walls which he could find. Great was the joy of the children who stood and stared, their little hearts made glad by novelty and colour. Great was the surprise of the older folk, who said, 'It is a new thing in the world when so great a show as this comes out of the accustomed track of shows to erect its tent in our small town!' Yet so it was; from some whim of the manager, or of some one who had the ear of the manager, the thing was decreed. [Pg 244]

Upon these circus pictures there figured, in a series of many wonderful harlequin attitudes, a certain Signor Lambetti. Very foreign was the curl of his hair and the waxen ends of his

moustache; very magnificent was his physique; he wore the finest of silken tights and crimson small clothes, and medals were depicted hanging upon his breast.

When at length the circus came for that one night's entertainment and the huge tent was set up upon the common not far from the old red ruin, all the town flocked to see the brilliant spectacle. The minister was there, and what was more, his wife and daughters too; they were far grander than he was, and wore silken furbelows and fringed shawls. The minister paid for the best seats for them to sit in. All the shopkeepers were there; every man, woman and child in all the town who could find as much as sixpence to pay for standing room was there. But the strangest circumstance was that before the show began a man went out from the brightly-lit doorway and called in a loud voice to the beggars and little ragged boys and girls who had come to survey the tent on the outside, and he brought them all in and gave them a good part of the tent to sit in, although they had not sixpence to pay, nor even a penny.

Ah! in those days it was a very grand sight. There were elephants who performed tricks, and camels who walked about with men and bundles on their backs just as they do in eastern deserts, and there were wonderful ladies who dressed and behaved like fairies, and who rode standing tip-toe on the backs of horses and jumped through swinging rings. But the crowd had not read the circus bills and the newspapers from all the neighbouring cities for nothing. They were a canny Scotch crowd; they were not to be taken in by mere glitter, no, not the smallest barefoot boy nor the most wretched beggar, for they knew very well that the real crisis of the evening was to be the appearance of Signor Lambetti, and the word 'wonderful' was not to be spoken until his feats began to be performed.

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At length he came outside the curtain upon which all eyes had long been fixed. The curl of his hair and the waxed ends of his moustache proved him to be beyond doubt from foreign parts. He was indeed a most grand and handsome gentleman. His dress was, if anything, more superb than it had been in the pictures; all his well-formed muscles showed through the silken gauze that he wore. His velvet trappings were trimmed with gold lace and his medals shone like gold.

He walked upon a tight rope away up in the peaked roof of the tent; he held a wand in his hand by which to balance himself and in the other hand a cup of tea which he drank in the very middle of his walk; tossing it off, bowing to the crowd below, and bringing the cup and saucer to the other end in safety.

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The crowd gave deep sighs, partly of satisfaction for being permitted to see so wonderful a sight, partly out of relief for the safety of the performer. 'Ay me,' they said to one another, 'did ye ever see the licht o' that?' It meant more from them than the loudest clamour of applause, yet they applauded also.

Then Signor Lambetti, looking quite as fresh and jaunty as at first, ascended a small platform, standing out upon it in the full light of all the lamps. He made a little speech to the effect that he was now going to perform a feat which was so difficult and dangerous that hitherto he had kept it solely for the benefit of crowned heads, before whom on many occasions he had had the privilege of appearing. He said, in an airy way, that the reason he did the town the honour of beholding this most wonderful of all his feats was merely that he had taken a liking to the place.

'Ay, but he's grond,' said the little barefoot boys to one another as they huddled against the front of the stand allotted to them. 'Ay me, but he's grond'; and all the rest of the townsfolk said the same to themselves or each other, but they expressed it in all the different ways of that dignified caution common to the Scotch.

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There was a series of swings, one trapeze fixed higher than another, like a line of gigantic steps, to the very pinnacle of the tent. 'The Signor' announced that he was going to swing himself up upon these hanging bars until he reached the topmost, and from that he would leap through the air down, down into the lighted abyss below, and catch a rope that was stretched at the foot of the Grand Stand.

Merely to hear him tell what he was going to do made the crowd draw breath with thrills of joyful horror.

Up and up he went, swinging himself with lissome grace, raising each trapeze with the force of his swing until he could reach the one above it.

He looked smaller as he travelled higher in his wonderful flying progress. The little boys had not breath left now even to say, 'Ay me, but he's grond.' There was silence among all the crowd.

To every one in all that crowd—to all except one—the spectacle was that of a strange man performing a strange feat; one poor woman present saw a different sight, one alone in all that crowd knew that the acrobat was not a stranger.

In a corner of the beggars' gallery sat Betty Lamb. Dirty and clothed in rags as she was, she held up her head at this hour with the old queenly defiance of her youthful days. Her eyes, bleared and sunken, had descried her son; her mother's heart, mad though all pronounced her to be, had vibrated to the first sound of her son's voice. She knew him as certainly as if she had seen him standing before her again, the little lad of past years, or the infant cradled in the ambry of the ruined chancel.

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The monarchs of whom Lambetti had been glibly speaking were not more noble in rank or more surrounded with glory in the thought of Betty Lamb than was this hero of the circus, and he her

son! What constitutes glory? Is it not made up of the glare of lamps and the wearing of shining clothes, the shout of a thousand voices in applause, the glance of a thousand eyes in admiration, and the renown that spreads into the newspapers? In the mind of Betty Lamb there was no room for gradations; she knew glory, she knew shame; she herself had sunk to shame; but now that was past, her son had attained to glory, and her soul went out, as it were, from the circumstances of her own degradation and accepted his glory as her own.

They said (the townsfolk said) that Betty Lamb had not lacked opportunity. Ah well, God knows better than we what to each soul may be its opportunity.

Betty Lamb watched her son in his perilous upward flight, and, for the first time in her life, prayed that Heaven would forgive her misdeeds. By some inborn instinct she assumed that it was this prayer she must pray in order to obtain that desire of her eyes, his safety. When he reached the highest swing, when he made his leap from that awful height and caught the lower rope, there had come a change in Betty Lamb's soul. It had seemed hours, nay, years to her, the space of time in which he was swinging himself up and leaping down. Perhaps, half-witted as she had been, this was in reality her life, not the other that for sixty years she had been visibly living. She saw that his eye was fixed upon her; she knew that the kisses were thrown to her. She rose and walked erect, in her heart a new sense of responsibility and of the value of life.

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Next day in Betty Lamb's cellar-room a shadow darkened the doorway, and her son stood before her. He did not kiss her—that had not been their way, even when he was an infant and she had sung her songs to him in the lonely ruin—but he bowed to her with all the foreign graces that he had learned, just as if she were one of the queens before whom he had performed. She feasted her eyes upon him.

He looked round upon the cellar. 'You must not live here any longer,' said he.

For the first time in her life humility reigned in her heart and she resigned her gypsy freedom. 'I'm thinking,' she replied modestly, 'that it's nae fit for the mither of sich as ye are noo.'

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With the minister Lambetti left money that would defray the expenses of a decent habitation for his mother, and, to the wonder of all, from that day forth the mother lived in it decently. She was even charitable with her little store; she was even known to raise the fallen.

When she was dead Lambetti was dead too. He had lived his life fast, and, if gold be of worth, it seemed as if he had lived it to some purpose. Lambetti left money to the town, money for two purposes which in due time the long-headed townsmen carried into effect. An asylum was built upon the moor; it is called 'Betty Lamb's Home for the Young and the Aged.' The old Abbey also was walled in; lawns and flower beds were spread about the broken stones, and where the walls might totter they were supported. The honour of this change too is ascribed to the famous son of Betty Lamb, who had no name but his mother's.

XI

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THE SOUL OF A MAN

CHAPTER I

A man was standing on one of the highroads in the south of Gloucestershire. He was a man of science; his tools and specimens were in his hand, and he was leaning against the wayside paling, enjoying a well-earned rest. A long flock of birds fluttered over the autumn fields; beneath them a slow ploughman trudged with his horses, breaking the yellow stubble. The sky hung low, full of sunshine yet full of haze—an atmosphere of blue flame, and the earth was bright with the warm autumn colours of woods and hedgerow.

Just as the birds were flying past, a young woman came by upon the road, treading with quick powerful step upon the fallen leaves. She was a poor woman; her beauty, which would have been almost perfect in a simpler gown, was marred by garments cut in cheap conformity to fashionable dress. It could not be hidden, however, and her large symmetrical figure, swinging as she walked, attracted the attention of the man; as he stood there, leaning against the paling, he felt by no means disinclined to while away his hour of rest by a few soft words with the comely stranger. If he had put his thoughts into words, he would have held it as good luck that she had come to amuse his leisure, thinking very little about luck as it concerned her. His dog lying at his feet stirred to look at the woman, and the man, following the same instinct of nature, accosted her.

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'Can you tell me, my girl, what time it is?'

She stopped short and looked at him. 'That I can't, sir,' she said in clear hearty tones, and turned to continue her walk.

'But tell me what time you think it is, my good girl; I am not good at reading the sun.'

She turned again, and looked at him with a longer pause, but, if there was suspicion or disapproval in her thoughts, she expressed nothing in her face.

'Yer a gent; I'd 'a thought ye'd 'a had a watch.'

'But mine is at the watchmaker's getting mended,' he said with a smile. He was neither young nor handsome, but he was clever, and that goes further than either in dealing with a woman.

She still stood staring at him in rude independence.

'The shadows is longer 'an they was a while by; mebbe it's three.'

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He sighed and shifted his position wearily against the paling, as though faint with fatigue.

'You can't tell me of any place near where I can get something to eat? I have been working hard since daybreak, and now I am out of my reckoning, and tired and hungry.' He glanced down at his tools and earth-stained clothes.

He won his wish; the woman, who would not have tarried a moment for selfish pleasure, remained out of generous pity.

'I've the piece mother put up, mebbe it's big enou' for we two.'

'But I could not think of taking your luncheon,' he exclaimed, with a gallantry that was meant to be impressive, but was quite lost on his practical companion. She proceeded to open her parcel and examine the contents to see whether or not there was enough for two. He also examined it critically with his eyes, in some alarm at her prompt response to his appeal, but the thick slices of bread and meat, if not dainty, were clean, and of excellent quality.

She took the largest and thickest bit and thrust it into his hand, very much as a mother would feed her child with the portion she considered its fair share.

'Ere, ye may 'ev that, fur I shan't want it.'

'You are very kind,' he said, with a touch of sarcasm too fine for her.

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It appeared that, having taken out the food, she thought well to make her own meal, for she went a few steps farther on, and, sitting down on the grass with her back to the paling, began to eat. A large tuft of weeds grew midway between him and her. Truly we can foresee consequences but a very little way in our dealings with a fellow-creature, and this man, as he stood munching his bread, uncertain how to proceed in winning favour from the bold beauty, was hardly pleased with the result of his encounter. His dog went and laid its head upon her knee, and she fed it with crumbs; its master, after watching them a minute, stepped out on the road with the intention of sitting down between them and the weeds. As he did so he caught sight, as he thought, of a man seated in the very place he intended to occupy. So strong was the impression that he started and stared; but again, as before, there was no one to be seen. The sunshine was bright upon all things; the palings were so far apart that he could see everything in the fields behind; there was no one far or near but the ploughman at half a field's distance, and they two, and the dog.

The woman turned coolly round and looked through the paling, as if she supposed he had seen something behind her. 'Was't a haër?' she asked, eyeing him with interest; 'ye ain't feared o' the like o' that?'

'No, it was not a hare; I did not see a hare.'

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'What was't ye seed then?' she asked, looking at him with bold determination.

'What did I see?' he repeated vaguely, 'I saw nothing.'

'Thought ye looked as if ye'd seed something,' she remarked incredulously, and then went on eating and feeding the dog, as indifferent to his presence as she was to the presence of the weeds.

'Are you going far to-night?' he asked at length, thinking he would make more progress toward friendship before he sat down.

'To th' town.'

'Indeed, as far as that! Which town, may I ask?' he said, with mechanical politeness, for his mind was running on what he had seen.

'Yer a fool and noä mistake,' she replied with emphasis. 'There's but one town wi'in a walk.'

'On the contrary, I am considered a man of great learning,' he replied, with more eager self-assertion than he could hitherto have believed possible under the circumstances.

'Is't larning ye've got?' she asked, with much greater interest than she had before evinced.

'Yes; I am a man who spends his life seeking for knowledge.'

'Are ye wiser ner parson?'

'Very much wiser,' replied the man of science, with honest conviction.

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She looked much more impressed than he had hoped; and thinking that he had made himself sufficiently interesting, he began to speak about her own affairs, supposing they would please her better.

'You are not a married woman?' he said, looking at her ringless hand.

'Married or no,' she replied, 'it's nowt to you.'

'I beg your pardon; everything which concerns such a beautiful woman must be of interest to me.'

At that she laughed outright in hard derision, and went on eating her bread and meat.

'But won't you tell me if you are married or not?' he pleaded, pursuing a subject which he thought must interest her. He was surprised to see the sudden expression of womanly sorrow that came over her face, giving her eyes new depth and light. She answered him sadly, looking past him into the sunny distance—

'No, nor like to be.'

'I must disagree with you there. If you are not married yet, I am sure you will be very soon. I never saw a more likely lassie than yourself.'

Manlike, he was quite unconscious of the consummate impertinence of the form this compliment had taken; but afterwards he realised it when his idle words recurred to his mind.

She turned her eyes full upon him, and said with energy: 'Ye know nowt at all about it;' and then added more meditatively, 'neither do parson.'

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She had been so absorbed in her thoughts for a few minutes that she had ceased to stroke the dog, and, resenting this, it raised its silky head from her lap and laid it upon her breast. Thus reminded, she smiled down into the eyes of the dog and caressed it, pressing its head closer against her bosom. The man stood a few paces away, watching these two beautiful creatures as they sat in the hazy autumn sunlight, with their background of weeds and moss-grown paling. He felt baffled and perplexed, for he knew that he stood apart, excluded from their companionship by something he could not define. So intolerable did this feeling become that he resolved to break through it, and made a hasty movement to sit down beside them; but, as he stepped forward, he was suddenly aware that there was another man in the place he would have taken, embracing and protecting the girl. He swore a loud oath, and flung himself backwards to stand by the hedge on the opposite side of the road, that he might the better review the situation. It was all as it had been before—that quiet autumn landscape—only the woman appeared much interested in his sudden movements.

'What was't ye seed; was't a snaïke?' she inquired loudly, at the same time moving her skirts to look for that dangerous reptile.

'No,' he shouted, putting his whole energy into the word.

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'What was't ye seed, cutting them capers as if ye was shot, an' saying o' words neyther fit fur heaven above nor earth beneath?'

So loudly did she ask, and so resolutely did she wait for an answer, that he was forced into speech. 'I don't know,' he said, with another oath, milder than the first.

'Well, sure enow,' she said, still speaking loudly, 'ere's somethin' awful queer, ye says yer a man that's got larning more ner parson, an' ye sees somethin', an' can't tell what ye's seed. That's twice this short while; are ye often took bad the like o' that?'

The bold derision of this speech fell without effect upon its object, because he perceived a gleam of mischievous intelligence in her eyes which she had intended to conceal, but she was no adept in the art of concealment. The conviction that the woman knew perfectly what he had seen and did not in reality despise him for his conduct, took the sting from her jeers but did not make his position pleasanter. The repeated shock to his nerves had produced a chilly feeling of depression and almost fear, which he could not immediately shake off, and he stood back against the opposite hedge, with his half-eaten bread in his hand, conscious that he looked and felt more like a whipped schoolboy than, as he had fondly imagined when he first stopped the woman, the hero of a rural love scene. That was nothing; he was, as he had described himself, a man who devoted his life to the search for knowledge, and personal consciousness was almost lost in the intense curiosity which the circumstances had aroused in him. With the trained mind of one accustomed to investigation, he instantly perceived that his only clue to the explanation of the phenomenon lay in the personality of the woman. His one eager desire was to probe her thought through and through, but how was he to approach the interior portals of a mind guarded by a will as free and strong as his own? He would fain have bound down her will with strong cords and analysed the secrets of her mind with ruthless vivisection. But how? His tact, trained by all the subtleties of a life cast in cultured social relations, was unequal to the occasion, and, fearing to lose ground by a false step, he remained silent.

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The woman finished eating and shook herself free of the crumbs. He supposed, almost with a sense of desperation, that she was about to leave him before he could begin his inquiry, but instead of moving she motioned him to come near, and he went, and stood on the road in front of her.

'Ye says yer a man o' larning, an' I b'lieves ye, she began.

He was about to reply that he was only a seeker after truth, but he was checked by the knowledge that she would accept no answer she could not understand. He fell back on the truth

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as it was to her, and said simply, 'Yes.'

'I wants to ask ye two questions; will ye answer like an honest man?'

She had laid aside all her loud rudeness, and was speaking with intense earnestness—an earnestness that won his entire respect.

'I will indeed answer you honestly, if I can answer.'

'Then tell me this—What's the soäl o' a man?'

He stood with lips sealed, partly by surprise at the question, and partly by self-acknowledged ignorance of the answer.

'The soäl o' a man,' she repeated more distinctly, 'ye knows what I mean surely?'

Yes, he knew what she meant, but he knew also that his own most honest convictions hovered between a materialist philosophy and faith in the spiritual unseen. If at that moment he could have decided between the two he would gladly have done so, for the sake of the eager woman sitting at his feet, but he knew that he did not know which was the truth.

She, still labouring under the impression that she had not made her meaning plain, endeavoured to explain. 'Ye knows when a man dies, there's two parts to him; one they buries, and one goes—' she pointed upward with her thumb, not irreverently, but as merely wishing to indicate a fact without the expense of words. [Pg 263]

'Yes, I understand what you mean,' he said slowly, 'and under that theory, the soul——'

'Under what?' she said sharply.

'I mean that if you say the soul is divided from the body at death——'

'But it is—ain't it?' she interrupted.

'Yes, it is,' he said, feeling that it was better to perjure himself than to shake her faith.

'Go on,' she said, 'for parson says the soäl is the thing inside that thinks; but when a man's lunny, ye knows—off his head like—has he no soäl then? I've looked i' the Catechis', an' i' Bible, an' i' Prayer-book, an' fur the life o' me, I doän't know.'

'I don't wonder at that,' he said, with mechanical compassion, casting about in his mind for some possible motive for her extraordinary vehemence.

He felt as certain, standing there, that this was a true woman, true to all the highest attributes of her nature, as if he had been able to weigh all the acts of her life and find none of them wanting. In the midst of his perplexity he found time to ask himself whence he had this knowledge. Did he read it in the lines of her face, or was it some unseen influence of her mind upon his own? He had only time to question, not to answer, for she looked up in his face with the trust and expectation of a child, awaiting his words. [Pg 264]

He spoke. 'You say when a man dies he is divided into two parts—the body that rots and the part "that lives elsewhere."' He was speaking very slowly and distinctly. 'If that part of a man which lives goes to Heaven, where everything is quite different from this, he could have no use for most of his thoughts—what we call opinions, for they are formed on what he sees, and hears, and feels here. Look here!'—he held out his arm and moved it up and down from the elbow—'there are nerves and muscles; behind them is something we call life—we don't know what it is. And behind your thoughts and feeling there is the same life—we don't know what it is. The part of you that you say goes to Heaven must be that life. If you ask me what I think, I think the greater part of what you call mind is part of your body. If your body can live a spirit life, so can it; but it would need as much changing first.'

It was most extraordinary to him to see the avidity with which she drank in his words, and also the intelligence with which she seemed to master them, for she cried—

'What's i' the soäl then? When ye *will* to do a thing agen all costs, is that i' the soäl?'

'Certainly the spirit must be the self, and the will, as far as we know, is that self—more that self than anything else is.' He spoke in the pleased tone of a schoolmaster who finds that the mind beneath his touch is being moulded into the right shape; and besides he supposed he could question her next. [Pg 265]

'I *knowed* that,' she said, with an intensity of conviction that confounded her listener, 'I *knowed* the soäl was will.'

'It must be intelligence, and will, and probably memory,' he said, beguiled into the idea that she was interested in the nicety of his theory, 'but not in any sense that activity of mind which shows itself in the opinions most men conceive so important.'

But of this she took no heed. 'When a man's off his head or par'lused, wi' no more life in him than babe unborn—yet when he's living and not dead—where's his soäl then? Parson he says the soäl's sleeping inside him afore going to glory, like a grub afore it turns into a fly; but I asked him how he knowed, and he just said he knowed, an' I mun b'lieve, and that's no way to answer an honest woman.'

'He did not really know.'

'Well, tell what you knows,' she said.

'Indeed, I do not know anything about it.'

'Ye doän't know!'

'I do not know.'

The animation of hope slowly faded from her face, giving place to a look of bitter disappointment. It was as if a little child, suddenly denied some darling wish, should have strength to restrain its tears and mutely acquiesce in the inevitable. [Pg 266]

'Then there's nowt to say,' she said, rising, sullen in the first moment of pain.

'But you'll tell me why you have asked?' he begged; 'I am very sorry indeed that I cannot answer.'

'Noä, I'll not tell ye, fur it's no concern o' yours; but thank ye kindly, sir, all the same. Yer an honest man. Good-day.'

With that she walked resolutely away, nor would she accept his offer of payment for the food she had given. He stood and watched her, feeling checkmated, until he saw her exchange greetings with the ploughman, who reached the end of his furrow as she passed the side of the field. Seeing this, he took up his specimens and walked slowly in the same direction, waiting for the ploughman's next return. As he stood at the hedge he noticed that the labourer, who appeared to be a middle-aged man of average intelligence, surveyed him with more than ordinary interest.

'Good-day,' he said.

'Good-day, sir.' There was a clank of the chains, a shout and groan to the horses, and they stopped beside the hedge.

'Can you tell me the name of the young woman who passed down the road just now?' [Pg 267]

'Jen Wilkes, sir; "Jen o' the glen" they calls 'er, for she lives in the holler down there, a bit by on the town road, out of West Chilton.'

'She has not lived here long, surely; she seems a north country woman by her speech.'

'Very like, sir; it's a while by sin' she came with 'er mother to live i' Chilton.'

It was evident that the ploughman had much more to say, and that he wished to say it, but his words did not come easily.

'Can you tell me anything more about her?' The man rubbed his coarse beard down upon his collar, and clanked his chains, and made guttural sounds to his horses, which possibly explained to them the meaning he did not verbally express. Then he looked up and made a facial contortion, which clearly meant that there was more to be said concerning Jen if any one could be found brave enough to say it.

'I feel assured she is everything that is good and respectable.'

At this the ploughman could contain himself no longer, but heaving up one shoulder and looking round to see that there was no one to hear, he blurted out—"Ave you seen 'er shadder, sir?"

'Her what?'

"'Er shadder. I seen you so long with 'er on the road I thought maybe you'd tried to 'ave a kiss. Gentlemen mostly thinks a sight of Jen's looks; an' it ain't no harm as I knows on to kiss a tidy girl, if y'ain't married, or th' missus don't object.' [Pg 268]

'And if I did, what has that to do with it? What do you mean by her shadow?'

'Oh, I dunno; I h'ain't seen nothing myself; but they says, whenever any has tried to be friendly with 'er, they's seed something not just o' the right sort. They calls it 'er shadder—but I dunno, I h'ain't seen nothing myself.'

When we are suddenly annoyed, by whatever cause, we are apt to vent our annoyance upon the person nearest to us; and at this unlooked-for corroboration of his unpleasant vision, the gentleman said rudely, 'You're not such a fool as to believe such confounded trash as that, are you?'

'No sir, I'm no fool,' said the ploughman sulkily, starting his horses to go up the furrow. In vain the other called out an attempted apology, and tried to delay him; the accustomed shout and clank of the chains was all he got in answer. The birds that had settled upon the field rose again at the return of the horses, and curveted in a long fluttering line above their heads. The man on the road turned reluctantly away, and, too perplexed almost for thought, walked off to catch his home-bound train.

The man of science, Skelton by name, passed some seven days in business and pleasure at home among men of his own class, and then, impelled by an intolerable curiosity, he went to seek the home of the woman with whom he had so strange a meeting. Concerning the mad delusion from which he had suffered in her presence, his mind would give him no rest. Some further effort he must make to understand the cause of an experience which he could not reason from his memory. The effort might be futile; he could form no plan of action; yet he found himself again upon the highroad which led from the nearest station to the village of West Chilton.

The autumn leaf that had bedecked the trees was lying upon the ground, its brightness soiled and tarnished. The cloud rack hung above, a vault of gloom in which the upper winds coursed sadly.

'This is the field,' said Skelton within himself. 'The ploughman has finished his work, but the crows are still flapping about it. I wonder if they are the same crows! That is the clump of weeds by which she sat; it was as red as flame then, but now it is colourless as the cinders of a fire that is gone out.'

His words were like straws, showing the current of his thoughts.

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Just then in the west the cloud masses in the horizon, being moved by the winds, rent asunder, exposing the land to the yellow blaze of the setting sun. The distant hills stood out against the glow in richer blue, and far and near the fields took brighter hues—warm brown of earth ready to yield the next harvest, yellow of stubble lands at rest, bright green of slopes that fed the moving cows. There were luminous shadows, too, that gathered instantly in the copses, as if they were the forms of dryads who could sport unseen in the murk daylight, but must fly under each shrub for refuge in the sudden sunshine. Close at his feet lay the patch of cabbages—purple cabbages they were, throwing back from each glossy leaf and stalk infinite gradations of crimson light. Parts of the leaves were not glossy but were covered with opaque bloom of tender blue, and here and there a leaf had been broken, disclosing scarlet veins. They were very beautiful—Skelton stood looking down into their depth of colour.

It had been difficult for him to conjecture a possible cause for the phantom he had thought he saw a week before, but one theory which had floated in his mind had been that from these cabbages, which had lain a trifle too long in sun and moisture; gases might have arisen which had disturbed his senses. It was true that his theory did not account for other instances of the same optical delusion to which the talk of the ploughman had seemed to point, but Skelton could not bring himself to attach much importance to his words. He meditated on them now as he stood.

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'I dare not go to the young woman and ask her to show me her "shadder." If she knew I was here she would only try to defeat my purpose. I *can* only interview her neighbours; and this first rustic whom I questioned shut himself up like an oyster; if all the rest act in this way, what can I do? And if I can hear all the vulgar superstition there is to be heard, will there be in the whole of it the indication of a single fact?'

So he mused by the road-side while the sun hung in the dream temple of fire made by the chasm of cloud. Then the earth moved onward into the night, and he walked on upon his curious errand.

The darkness of evening had already fallen, and he was still about a mile from the village when he discerned a woman coming towards him on the road. It was the very woman about whom his mind was occupied. There was a house at one side; the gate leading to it was close to him, and, not wishing to be recognised at the moment, he turned in through it to wait in the darkness of some garden shrubs till she had passed.

But she did not pass. She came up, walking more and more slowly, till she stood on the road outside the gate. She looked up and down the road with a hesitating air, and then, clasping her hands behind her, leaned back against a heavy gate-post and composed herself to wait. There was light enough to see her, for there was a moon behind the clouds, and also what was left of the daylight in the west was glimmering full upon her. The house was close to the road—apparently an old farmstead—turning blank dark walls and roofs to them, so that it was evidently uninhabited or else inhabited only at the other side. The young woman looked up at it, apparently not without distrust, but even to her keen scrutiny there was no sign of life. For the rest, the road lay through a glen, the village was out of sight, and the hills around them were like the hills in Hades—silent, shadowy and cold.

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It seemed an unearthly thing that she should have come there to stand and lean against the gate, as if to shut him into his self-sought trap; and there was no impatience about this woman—she stood quite still in that dark, desolate place, as though she was perfectly contented to wait and wait—for what? how long?—these were the questions he asked himself. Was this dark house the abode of evil spirits with which she was in league? and if so, what result would accrue to him? There are circumstances which suggest fantastic speculations to the most learned man.

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At length he heard a footfall. He could not tell where at first, but, as it approached, he saw a countryman in a carter's blouse coming across the opposite field. He got through the hedge and came toward the gate. Then the girl spoke in her strong voice and north-country accent, but Skelton would hardly have known the voice again, it was so soft and sad.

'I've been waiting on ye, Johnnie; some women thinks shame to be first at the trysting, but that's not me when I loves ye true.'

At this Skelton by an impulse of honour thought to pass out of ear-shot, and then another motive held him listening. He thought of the ghostly thing he had seen by this girl, of the wild tale the ploughman had told. The passion of investigation, which had grown lusty by long exercise, rose within him triumphing over his personal inclinations. Too much was at stake to miss a chance like this. Honour in this situation seemed like a flimsy sentiment. He waited for the answer of the girl's lover with breathless interest.

The man was evidently a fine young fellow, tall and strong, and when he spoke it was not without a touch of manly indignation in his tone.

'If you love me true, Jen, I can't think what the meaning of your doings is. It's two years since you came to live in the glen, and you can't say as you've not understood my meaning plain since the first I saw you; it's to take you to church and take care of you as a woman ought to be took care of by a man. And you know I could do it, Jen, for my wages is good; but you've shied an' shied whenever you've seen me, and baulked an' baulked when you couldn't shy, so as no skittish mare is half so bad.'

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'Because, Johnnie, I wouldn't ha' yer heart broke the way mine is. I loved ye too true for that.'

'But what's to hinder that we may be like other folks is? There's troubles comes to all, but we can bear them like the rest. What's to hinder? I thought there was some one else, an' that you didn't like. God knows, Jen, if that 'ad been the way, I'd never 'ev troubled you again; but last night when we heard your mother was took bad, an' mother an' me stepped round to see what we could do, an' you let on as you did 'ave a caring for me, I says,—"Let's be cried in the church," so as your mother could die happy, if die she must. But when you says, "no," and as you'd meet me here an' tell me why, I was content to wait an' come here; an' now what I want to know is—why? what's to hinder, Jen?'

'Ye knows as well as me the tales about me, Johnnie.'

'Tales!' said the young man passionately; 'what tales? All along I've knocked down any man as 'ud say a word against you.'

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'Ay, but the women, Johnnie; ye couldn't knock them down; that's why a woman's tale's allus the worst.'

'An' what can they say? the worst is that if any man comes nigh you for a kiss or the like o' that—and no offence, Jen, but you're an uncommon tidy girl to kiss—he sees another man betwixt himself an' you. Fools they be to believe such trash! If you'd give me the leave—which I'm not the fellow to take without you say the word—I'd soon show as no shadder 'ud come betwixt.'

He came a step nearer, reproachful in his frank respect, as if he would claim the liberty he asked; but she drew back, holding up her hand to ward him off.

'I believe you half believe the nonsense yourself, Jen.'

'Heaven knows, Johnnie, I've reason to b'lieve it weel, none knows better ner me. It's that I've comed to tell ye to-night; an' there's nowt fur it but we mun part. An' if I trouble yer peace staying here i' the glen, I'll go away out o' yer sight. It wasn't a wish o' mine to bring ye trouble. None knows better ner me how hard trouble's to bear.'

Her voice trembled as if with some physical pain; he only answered by a sound of incredulous surprise.

'I'll tell ye the whole on't, Johnnie. Ye sees, we lived i' Yarm—mother and me. Mother, she sewed books fur a book-binding man; an' we'd a little coming in as father'd saved. Well, mother, she was feared lest I'd fall into rough ways like, an' she kep' me in a good bit, an' there was a man as helped i' the book-binding—' she stopped, and then said half under her breath—

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'His name was Dan'el, Dan'el McGair, it was.'

'Go on, Jen.'

'He was a leän man and white to look at. He was very pious, and knowed lots o' things. Least, I don't know if he was pious, fur he didn't go to church, but he'd his own thoughts o' things, an' he was steady, an' kep' himself to himself. He niver telled me his thoughts o' things—he said it 'ud unsettle me like—but he taught me reading; an' mother, she liked his coming constant to see us. As fur as I knows, he was a good man; but I tell ye, Johnnie, that man had a will—whatsoever thing Dan'el McGair wanted, that thing he mun have, if he died i' the getting. He was about forty, an' I was nigh on twenty; it was after he'd taught me reading, an' whenever I'd go out here or there, or do this or that he didn't like, he'd turn as white as snow, an' tremble like a tree-stem i' the wind, an' dare me to do anything as he didn't like. Ye sees he allus had that power over mother to make her think like him, but I wouldn't give in to him. If I'd gived in—well, I doänt know what 'ud 'a comed. God knows what did come were bad enow.' She stopped speaking and toed the damp ground—crushing her boot into the frosty mud and drawing it backwards and forwards as she stood against the gate.

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'Go on, Jen.'

'Ye sees, what he willed to get, that he mun have, an' at the end he willed to have me—mind, body, an' soäl. He'd 'a had me, only I made a stand fur my life. Mother, she was all on his side,

only she didn't want fur me to do what I wouldn't; but she cried like, an' talked o' his goodness— an' Dan'el, he wouldn't ask out an' out, or I could 'a told him my mind an' 'a done wi' it; but he went on giving us, an' paying things, an' mother she took it all, till I was fairly mad wi' the shame an' anger on't. I doänt say as I acted as I ought; I knowed I'd a power over him to drive him wild like wi' a smile or a soft word, an' power's awful dangerous fur a young thing—it's like as if God gave the wind a will o' its own, an' didn't howd it in His own hand. Then I was feared o' Dan'el's power over mother, an' give in times when I ought to 'a held my own. An' I liked to have him fur a sarvint to me, an' I led him on like. So it went on—he niver doubted I'd marry wi' him, an' I held out fur my life. Then at th' end, some words we had made things worse. 'Twas i' spring—i' March I think—he walked out miles an' miles on the bad roads to bring me the first flowers. I was book-binding then, out late at night, an' I comed home to find he'd left them fur me—snowdrops they was, an' moss wi' a glint o' green light on't, like sun shining through th' trees; an' there was a grey pigeon's feather he'd picked up somewheres, all clean and unroughed, like a bit o' the sky at th' dawn; an' there was a twig wi' a wee pink toädstood on't, all pink an' red. The sight o' them fairly made me mad. 'Twas bad enow to buy me wi' munny an' the things munny can buy, but it seemed he'd take the very thoughts o' God A'mighty and use them to get his will. I were mad; but if he'd comed to our house I couldn't 'a spoke fur mother's being there; so I just took them bits o' Spring i' my hand, an' went out i' the dark to his house, an' went into his room, an' threw 'em on the floor, an' stamped 'em wi' my foot, an' I told him how he'd sneaked round to bind me to him, an' as how I'd die first. I was mad, an' talked till I couldn't speak fur my voice give out, an' that wasn't soon. He just sat still hearing me, but he was white, an' shook like a man wi' the palsy. They said he'd had fits once an' that made him nervous, but I didn't think o' him like that. He was strong, fur he could make most all men do as he wanted. He was spoiling my life wi' his strength, an' I didn't think o' him as weakly. When I'd raged at him an' couldn't say more, I went out an' was going home i' the dark, howding by the wall, as weak as a baby; an' just afore I got home, I seed him stand just in front' o' me. I thought he'd runned after me—mebbe he did—but I've thought since, mebbe not, that his body mayn't 'a been there at all; but anyway I seed him stand just afore me, wi' his eyes large and like fire, an' him all white and trembling. He said, "I tell ye, Jen, I will have ye mine, an' as long as I live no other man shall," an' wi' that I went past him into the house.'

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'Go on, Jen,' said the carter.

'All I knows is that the word he spoke was a true word. Next day they comed and telled us he was found all par'lysed in his chair, an' he couldn't move nor speak. From that time the doctors 'ud sometimes come from a long way off; they said as there was somethin' strange about his sickness. I doänt know what they said, I niver seed him again. There's part o' him lies i' the bed, an' the parish feeds him, an' the doctors they talk about him. I niver seed him again sin' that night, but I knows what he said was true, an' there's many a man as 'as seed him anear me sin' that day. I tell ye, Johnnie, there's trouble to face i' this world worse ner death,—not worse ner our own death, fur that's most times a good thing, but worse ner the death o' them we love most true—an' worse ner parting i' this world, Johnnie, an' worse *a'most* than sin itself; but, thank God, not *quite* worse ner sin. But I never knowed, lad, how bad my own trouble was—though it's a'most drove me hard at times, not recking much what I said or did—I niver knowed, my lad, how bad it was till I knowed it was yer trouble too.'

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The young carter stood quite silent. His blue blouse glimmered white in the darkness and flapped a little in the wind, but he stood still as a rock, with his strong arms crossed upon his breast, and the silence seemed filled with the expression of thoughts for which words would have been useless. It was evident that her strong emotion had brought to his mind a conviction of the truth of her words which could not have been conveyed by the words alone. So they stood there, he and she, in all the rugged power of physical strength, confronted with their life's problem. At last, after they had been silent a long time, and it seemed that he had said many things, and that she had answered him, he appeared suddenly to sum up his thoughts to their conclusion, and stretched out both his strong arms to take her and all her griefs into his heart. It seemed in the darkness as though he did clasp her and did not, for she gave a low terrible cry and fled from him—a cry such as a spirit might give who, having ascended to Heaven's gate with toil and prayer, falls backward into Hell; and she ran from him—it seemed that with only her human strength she could not have fled so fast. He followed her, dashing with all his strength into the darkness. They went towards the village, and in the mud their footfalls were almost silent.

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The listener came out of his hiding and went back on the road by which he had come.

CHAPTER III

Next morning Skelton travelled northward to Yarm. After some difficulty he succeeded in discovering the paralytic whom he sought. The medical interest which had at first been aroused by the case appeared to have died away; and it was only after some time spent in interviewing officials that he at last found the man, Daniel McGair. A parish apothecary had him in charge. The apothecary was a coarse good-natured fellow, one of that class of ignorant men upon whose brains the dregs of a refined agnosticism have settled down in the form of arrogant assumption. He had enough knowledge of the external matters of science to know, upon receiving Skelton's card, that he was receiving a visitor of distinction. 'Yes, sir,' he said, leading the way out of the

dispensary, 'I'll exhibit the case. I don't know that there's much that's remarkable about it. Of course, to us who take an interest in science, all these things are interesting in their way.'

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It was quite clear he did not know in what way the most special interest accrued to this case.

'No sir, he ain't in the Union; he saved, and bought his cottage before his stroke, so that's where he is. He ain't got no kith or kin, as far as we know.'

It was bright noonday when they walked through the narrow streets of mean houses, passing among the numerous children which swarm in such localities. The sun was shining, the children were shouting, the women were gossiping at their doors, when the apothecary stopped at a low one-roomed cottage, the home of Daniel McGair. He opened the door with a key and went in, as though the house were empty.

It was a plain bare room; there was no curtain on the window and the sun shone in. There was a smouldering fire in the grate, a bookshelf on one side, still holding its dusty and unused volumes; there was an arm-chair—was that the chair in which he had sat to see his love-gifts trampled down, in which he had received that mysterious stroke from the unseen enemy? There was also a table in the room, and a chest, and, in the corner, a pallet-bed, upon which lay the withered body of a man. That was all, except some prints that hung upon the wall, dusty and lifeless-looking. Such changes do years of disuse make in dwellings which, when inhabited, have been replete with human interest. Even yet there was abundant indication that the room had once been the abode of one who put much of his own personality into his surroundings. The chair and the chest were carved with a rude device—the Devil grappling with the Son of God. The prints were crude allegorical representations of Life and Death. The books were full of the violent polemic of the Reformation. A flowerpot stood on the window-sill; perhaps ten years ago it had had a flower in it, but now it held the apothecary's empty phials. Everything proclaimed the room tenantless.

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Skelton walked to the bed and looked down upon it with profound curiosity. Only the head lay above the coverlet; withered and shrunken it was, yet the brow was high, and it was plain that the features had been fine and strong, betokening the once keen and sensitive nerve—there was nothing sensitive now; all thought and feeling had for ever fled. The half-shut lids disclosed the vacant eyes; the hair lay clammy and matted on the wrinkled brow; there was nothing of life left but the breath.

'It's my opinion, sir, that he'll live out his natural time. It's a theory of mine that we are all born with a certain length of life in us, and, barring accident, that time we'll live. Well, of course this man had the accident of his stroke, which by rights ought to have done for him, but by some fluke he weathered it, and now he'll live out his time. If one could find out his ancestors and see how long they each lived, with a little calculation I could tell you how long he'd lie there.' With that the apothecary poked his patient in the cheek, and jerked him by the arm, to show Skelton how completely consciousness was gone. He would have treated a corpse with more respect: the lowest of us has some reverence for death.

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Just then the door, which had been left ajar, was pushed open, and a slight, sweet-faced woman came in from the street. She was evidently a district Bible-reader, but, although perceiving that she had entered a house where she was not needed, she advanced as far as the bed and looked down upon it with a passion of tenderness and pity depicted on her face.

'Bless you, mum, he ain't suff'ring,' said the apothecary.

'I was thinking of his soul, not of his body,' she said. 'I was wondering if he had been prepared to meet his Creator.'

'Where do you suppose his soul is?' asked Skelton curiously. He asked the question in all reverence; she was not a lady apparently, only a working woman, but there was about her the strong majesty of a noble life.

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'He is not dead yet,' she replied with evident astonishment.

'Lor, mum,' said the apothecary, 'his brain ain't in working order just at present, and as for his spirit apart from his body, that's an unknown quantity we scientific men don't deal in.'

She looked at them both with a look of indescribable compassion, and went away. Skelton would fain have followed the woman out into the sunny street, but he remained to pay that courtesy which was due to the brusque good nature of his companion.

After examining the room and finding nothing more of interest, he went and talked over the physical circumstances of the case with the parish doctor. He did not gain much information about the patient's diseased body, and naturally none whatever concerning the whereabouts of his soul. The peculiar interest of the case he did not mention to any one. Afterwards he went back to the neighbourhood by himself, and endeavoured, as quietly as possible, to find out what traces the man's past life had left upon the minds of his neighbours. Ten years bring more change to any community than we are apt to suppose; and among the poor, where rude necessity rules rather than choice, there is more change than among the rich. There were a few who had seen McGair moving up and down the streets, and knew him to have been a book-binder by trade. One or two remembered the widow Wilkes and her daughter, and could affirm that they had been friends of McGair and had moved away after his illness. Whither they had gone no one knew.

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When there was nothing more to be seen or heard at Yarm, Skelton went home. Again he threw

himself into all the daily interests of his life in order that he might think the more dispassionately of the circumstances of this strange case. In truth it was not now entirely out of curiosity that he was tempted to think of it; his sympathy had been stirred by the courage and sorrow of the woman whom he had so idly accosted on that bright autumn day only a few weeks before. She had appealed to him because he had knowledge. Was all his knowledge, then, powerless to help her? He believed that the shadowy appearance which dogged her footsteps could only be some projection of mind, whether or not its cause was the strong will of the paralytic transcending the ordinary limits of time and space, he could not tell. Certainly no discussion as to its nature and origin could in any way aid its victim, and he could only fall back upon the comfort material kindness and sympathy could give. At last he went down once more to West Chilton, this time for the express purpose of seeing Jen.

He found the cottage in the glen road near the village, and his knock was answered by Jen herself. She recognised him instantly, but was too pre-occupied to take much interest in the fact of his coming. He learned that her mother had just died, and that the neighbours were in the house, keeping vigil during the few sad days preceding the burial. It was evident that there was little real sympathy between them and the bereaved daughter, so he easily persuaded her to come out and walk a bit up the road with him. She did so, evidently supposing that he had some business with her, but too deeply buried in her sorrow to inquire what it was.

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They came to the house by the roadside where he had last seen her and she had been unconscious of his presence. The place seemed to rouse her from the dulness of grief, and she suddenly raised her head, like a beautiful animal scenting some cause of excitement, and stood still, looking round with brightened eyes, taking long deep breaths in the pure frosty air. No doubt she had passed the same road many times since the tryst, but the mind which has lately stood face to face with death perceives more clearly the true relations of all things to itself; and, in this spot, among all life's shiftings of the things that seem and are not, she had stood and wrestled with the reality of her ghostly bondage.

All about them the hills were covered with the year's first snow. How bright the light was upon their heights! how soft the shadows that gathered in their slopes! The fields were white also, and the hedgerows. Above them the sky was veiled with snow clouds, soft and grey, except that at the verge of east and west there were faint metallic lines, such as one sees upon clouds across snowfields, like the pale reflections of a distant fire. Jen had come to a full stop now. She raised her hands to her face and sobbed out like a little child.

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Skelton stood by her, feeling his own feebleness. 'I know you are in great trouble,' he said.

Her sobs did not last long; she soon mastered them, not by any art of concealment but by rude force. Then standing shame-faced, with half-averted head, she wiped her eyes with her apron.

'Yes, sir, I'm in great trouble, greater ner ye can know, fur death's neither here nor there—it's living that's hard. Parson, he speaks out about preparing to die, but to my mind it takes a sight more preparing to know how to go on living.'

'I know that you have greater trouble than your mother's death. I know that you love a young man who loves you, and also what it is that you think keeps you apart from him.'

'And how do you know that, sir?' she asked, still with averted face.

Then he confessed, humbly enough, just how he did know it, and all that he knew, and told her about his visit to Yarm. When he spoke of Yarm and his visit to Daniel McGair she turned and looked full at him, drinking in every word with hungry curiosity.

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'Yes, sir, we left the place, an' I haven't heard o' him this nine year, but I knowed he wasn't dead.'

'How did you know that, Jen?'

'Because, sir, when God A'mighty sees fit that he should die, I'll be free o' him, that's all.'

'And aren't you going to marry?'

'Noä, sir. Johnnie an' me has talked it over, an' he says as how he'll wait till such time as I'm free. An' I didn't say "no" to him, fur when one knows what it is to love true, sir, one knows well it's noä use to say as this thing's best or t'other, but just it's like being taken up like a leaf by the wind an' moved whether one will or no. There's just this diff'rence betwixt true love an' the common kind—the common kind o' love moves ye i' the wrong way, an' true love i' the right; fur it's a true word the blessed St. John said when he said that love is God.'

'Did St. John say that?' said Skelton.

'Yes, sir, I read it to mother just afore she died. An' Johnnie's gone across the sea, sir, wi' his mother; he got a right good chance to better hissself, an' I made him go. His ship sailed the day after Christmas; an' I said, "Johnnie, I'll bide here, an' God 'ull take care o' me as well as ye could yerself;" an' I said, "Johnnie, I'll pray every day, night an' morning, that if ye can forget me, ye will; for if ye can forget, then yer love's not o' the right sort, as I could take, or God 'ud want ye to give; and if ye can't forget, then there's nowt to say but as I'll bide here." An' I said, sir, as he munna think as loving him made me sad, fur I was a big sight happier to love him, if he forgets or if he comes again.'

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'Will you live here; Jen, where the neighbours distrust you?'

'It 'ud just be the same any other place, sir, an' here I can work i' the fields, spring and harvest, an' earn my own bread. I know the fields, sir, an' the hills—they's like friends to me now, an' I knows the dumb things about, an' they all knows me. It's a sight o' help one can get, sir, when one's down wi' the sorrow o' all the world lying on the heart, to have a kind look an' a word wi' the dogs an' cows when they comes down the hills fur the milking. An' the children they mostly lets come to me now, though they kep 'em from me at first.

Then he told her that he had come a long way on purpose to see if he could help her; that he felt ashamed of having listened to her story, and that it would give him happiness in some way or other to make her life more easy. He explained that he had a great deal of money and many friends, and could easily give her anything that these could procure. In saying this he did not disguise from himself for a moment that his motive was mixed, and that he desired to gain some hold over her, such as benevolence could give, that he might further examine the problem of her extraordinary misfortune. Even as he spoke he marvelled at the strength of his respect for her, which could so outweigh his own interest as to make it impossible that he should interfere in her affairs otherwise than with all deference, as if she were a lady.

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When he had made it quite clear to her that he was able and willing to give her anything she should ask, she thought of his words a while, and then answered—

'I thank ye, sir, but there's nowt ye can do o' that sort, fur if there was I'd take it from Johnnie an' none other. But there's one thing I'll ask, sir, an' wi' all yer kind offers ye can't but agree to it, fur it's not much. Ye've found out this tale o' my life; there's none else as knows it, save mother lying dead, an' Johnnie I telled fur love's sake, an' him as lies palsied i' Yarm—God A'mighty only knows, sir, what Dan'el McGair could tell on't—but this I ask, sir,—that ye'll keep all ye knows an' say nowt. I did Dan'el a great wrong, for I smiled on him whiles for the sake o' power; not but what he did me a worse wrong, so far worse that whiles I think no woman has so sore a life as me; but I did do him wrong, sir, and fur that reason I'll not ha' his name blazed abroad, hanging on to a tale as 'ud buzz i' the ears o' all. To tell it 'ud not make *my* life worse but better, fur now them as sees this thing says dark things, an' speaks o' the devil an' worse. The times ha' been when I cursed God an' prayed to die, but, thank Heaven, when I learned what love was, I learned as God A'mighty can love us in spite o' our wrong-doing, an' the pain it brings. Th' use o' such sore pain as mine, sir, isna fur us to say, or to think great things to bear it patient; but the use o' life, sir, to my thinking, is to keep all His creatures from pain if we can, an' to take God's love like the sunshine, an' be thankful. So I'll ask ye to keep what ye knows o' this tale an' not speak on't, an' go no more to Yarm; an' if ye'll give me yer hand on that, sir, I'll thank ye kindly.'

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So he gave her his hand on it, and went away.

XII

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A FREAK OF CUPID

CHAPTER I

The earth was white, the firmament was white, the plumage of the wind was white. The wind flew between curling drift and falling cloud, brushing all comers with its feathers of light dry snow. At the sides of the road the posts and bars of log-fences stood above the drifts; on the side of the hill the naked maple trees formed a soft brush of grey; just in sight, and no more, the white tin roof and grey walls of a huge church and a small village were visible; all else was unbroken snow. The surface of an ice-covered lake, the sloping fields, the long straight road between the fences, were as pure, in their far-reaching whiteness, as the upper levels of some cloud in shadeless air.

A young Englishman was travelling alone through this region. He had set out from the village and was about to cross the lake. A shaggy pony, a small sleigh, a couple of buffalo-ropes and a portmanteau formed his whole equipment. The snow was light and dry; the pony trotted, although the road was soft; the young man, wrapped in his fur-lined coat, had little to do in driving.

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In England no one would set out in such a storm; but this traveller had learned that in Canada the snowy vast is regarded as a plaything, or a good medium of transit, or at the worst, an encumbrance to be plodded through as one plods through storms of rain. He had found that he was not expected to remain at an inn merely because it snowed, and, being a man of spirit, he had on this day, as on others, done what was expected of him.

To-day, in the snow and wind, there was a slight difference from the storms of other days. The innkeeper, who had given him his horse an hour before by the walls of the great tin-roofed church, had looked at the sky and the snow, and asked if he knew the road well; but this had been accepted as an ignorant distrust of the foreign gentleman. Having learned his lesson, that through falling snow he must travel, into the heart of this greater snowstorm he travelled, valiant, if somewhat doubtful.

When he descended upon the ice of the lake he was no longer accompanied by the grey length of the log-fences. This road across the lake had been well tracked after former snowfalls, and so the

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untrodden snow rose high on either side; branches of fir and cedar, stuck at short intervals in these snow walls, marked out the way. The pony ceased to trot. The driver was only astonished that this cessation of speed had not come sooner.

Standing up in his sleigh and looking round he could see two or three other sleighs travelling across nearer the village. The village he could no longer see, scarcely even the hill, nor was there any communication over the deep untrodden snow between his road and that other on which there were travellers.

Another hour passed, and now, as he went on slowly up the length of the lake, all sound and sight of other sleighs were lost. The cloud was not dark; the snow fell in such small flakes that it did not seem that even an infinite number of them could bury the world; the wind drifting them together, though strong, was not boisterous; the March evening did not soon darken: and yet there was something in the determined action of cloud and wind and snow, making the certainty that night would come with no abatement, which caused even the inexperienced Englishman to perceive that he was passing into the midst of a heavy storm.

As is frequently the case with travellers, he had certain directions concerning the road which appeared to be adequate until he was actually confronted with that small portion of the earth's surface to which it was necessary to apply them. He was to take the first road which crossed his, running from side to side of the lake; but the first cross track appeared to him so narrow and so deeply drifted that he did not believe it to be the public road he sought. 'Some farm, hidden in the level maple bush just seen through the falling snow, sends an occasional cart to the village by this by-path,' so he reassured himself; and the pony, who had spied the track first and paused to have time to consider it, at the word of command obediently plodded its continuous route. A quarter of a mile farther on the traveller saw something on the road in front; as the sound of his pony's jangling bells approached, a horse lifted its head and shook its own bells. The horse, the sleigh which it ought to have been drawing, were standing still, full in the centre of the road. The first thought, that it was cheering to come upon the trace of another wayfarer, was checked by the gloomy idea that some impassable drift must bar the way.

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The other sleigh was a rough wooden platform on runners. Upon it a man, wrapped in a ragged buffalo-skin, lay prostrate. The Englishman jumped to the ground and waded till he could lay his hand upon the recumbent figure.

At the touch the man jumped fiercely, and shook himself from sleep. Warm, luxurious sleep, only that, seemed to have enthralled him. His cheeks were red, his aquiline nose, red also, suggested some amount of strong drink; but his black eyes were bright, showing that the senses were wholly alive. He looked defiant, inquiring. He was a French-Canadian, apparently a *habitant*, but he understood the English questions addressed to him. The curious thing was that he seemed to have no reason for stopping. When he had with difficulty made way for the gentleman to pass him on the road, he followed slowly, as it seemed reluctantly. A mile farther on the Englishman, now far in front, suspected that the other had again stopped, and wondered much. The man's face had impressed him; the high cheek bones, the aquiline nose, the clearness of the eye and complexion—these had not expressed dull folly.

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Now the Englishman came to another cross road, wider but more deeply drifted than the track he was on. He turned into it and ploughed the drifts. When he reached the shore, where the land undulated, the drifts were still deeper. There were no trees here; he could see no house; there was hardly any evidence, except the evergreen branches stuck in the sides, that the road had ever been trodden. The March dusk had now fallen, yet not darkly. The full moon was beyond the clouds, and whatever wave of light came from declining day or rising night was held in by, and reflected softly from, the storm of pearl. After some debate he turned back to the lake and his former road. It must lead somewhere; he pressed steadily on toward the western end of the lake.

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The western shore was level; he hardly knew when he was upon the land. The glimmering night blinded the traveller; no ray of candle light was in sight. He began to think that he was destined to see his horse slowly buried, and himself to fight, as long as might be, a losing battle with the fiends of the air.

At last the plodding pony stopped again resolutely. Long lines of Lombardy poplars here met the road. They were but as the ghosts of trees; their stately shape, their regular succession, inspired him with some sentiment of romance which he did not stay to define. He dimly discerned shrubs as if planted in a pleasure-ground. Wading and fumbling he found a paling and a gate. The pony turned off the high road with renewed courage in its motion; the Englishman, letting loose the rein, found himself drawn slowly up a long avenue of the ghostly poplar trees. The road was straight, the land was flat, the poplars were upright. The simplicity affected him with the notion that he was coming to an enchanted palace. The pony approached the door of a large house, dim to the sight; its huge pointed tin roof, its stone sides, mantled as they were with snowflakes and fringed with icicles at eaves and lintels, hardly gave a dark outline in the glimmering storm. The rays of light which twinkled through chinks of shutters might be analogous to the stars produced by a stunned brain; it seemed to the Englishman that if he went up and tried to knock on the door the ghostly house, the ghostly poplar avenue, would vanish. The thought was born of the long monotony of a danger which had called for no activity of brain or muscle on his part. The pony knew better; it stopped before the door.

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The traveller stood in a small porch raised a step or two from the ground. The door was opened by a middle-aged Frenchwoman clad in a peasant's gown of bluish-grey. Behind her, holding a

lamp a little above her head, stood a young girl, large, womanly in form, with dimpled softness of face, and dressed in a rich but quaint garment of amber colour. With raised and statuesque wrist she held the lamp aloft to keep the light from dazzling her eyes. She was looking through the doorway with the quiet interest of responsibility, nothing of which was expressed in the servant's furrowed countenance.

'Is the master of the house at home?'

'There is no master.'

The girl spoke with a mellow voice and with a manner of soft dignity; yet, having regarded the stranger, there leaped into her face, as it seemed to him, behind the outward calm of the dark eyes and dimpling curves, a certain excited interest and delight. The current of thought thus revealed contrasted with the calm which she instinctively turned to him, as the words which an actor speaks aside contrast with those which are not soliloquy. [Pg 302]

With more hesitation, more obvious modesty, he said—

'May I speak to the mistress of the house?'

'I am the mistress.'

He could but look upon her more intently. She could not have been more than eighteen years of age. Her hair had the soft and loose manner of lying upon her head that is often seen in hair which has, till lately, been allowed to hang loose to the winds. Her dress, folded over the full bosom and sweeping to the ground in ample curves, was, little as he could have described a modern fashion, even to his eyes evidently fantastic—such as a child might don at play. Above all, as evidence of her youth, there was that inward quiver of delight at his appearance and presence, veiled perfectly, but seen behind the veil, as one may detect glee rising in the heart of a child even though it be upon its formal behaviour.

'Can you tell me if there is any house within reach where I can stop for the night?' He gave a succinct account of his journey, the lost road, the increasing storm. 'My horse is dead tired, but it might go a mile or so farther.' [Pg 303]

The serving-woman, evincing some little curiosity, received from the girl an interpretation in low and rapid French. The woman expressed by her gestures some pity for man and beast. The girl replied with gentle brevity—

'We know that the roads are snowed up. The next house is three miles farther on.'

He hesitated, but his necessity was obvious.

'I am afraid I must beg for a night's shelter.'

He had been wondering a good deal what she would say, how she would accede, and then he perceived that her dignity knew no circumlocution. 'I will send the man for your horse.' She said it with hardly a moment's pause.

The woman gave him a small broom, an implement to the use of which he had grown accustomed, and disappeared upon the errand. The girl stood still in her statuesque pose of light-bearer. The young man busied himself in brushing the snow from cap and coat and boots. As he brushed himself he felt elation in the knowledge, not ordinarily uppermost, that he was a good-looking fellow and a gentleman.

CHAPTER II

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'My name is Courthope.' The visitor, denuded of coat and cap, presented his card, upon which was written, 'Mr. George Courthope.'

He began telling his hostess whence he came and what was his business. A quarry which a dead relative had bequeathed to him had had sufficient attraction to bring him across the sea and across this railless region. His few words of self-introduction were mingled with and followed by regrets for his intrusion, expressions of excessive gratitude. All the time his mind was questioning amazedly.

By the time the speeches which he deemed necessary were finished, he had followed the girl into a spacious room, furnished in the large gay style of the fifties, brilliantly lit, as if for a festival, and warmed by a log fire of generous dimensions. Having led him in, listening silently the while, and put her additional lamp upon the table, she now spoke, with no *empressement*, almost with a manner of *insouciance*.

'You are perfectly welcome; my father would never have wished his house to be inhospitable.'

With her words his own apologies seemed to lose their significance; he felt a little foolish, and she, with some slight evidence of childish awkwardness, seemed to seek a pretext for short escape. [Pg 305]

'I will tell my sister.' These words came with more abruptness, as if the interior excitement was

working itself to the surface.

The room was a long one. She went out by a door at the farther end, and, as with intense curiosity he watched her quickly receding form, he noticed that when she thought herself out of his sight she entered the other room with a skip. At that same end of the room hung a full-length portrait of a gentleman. It was natural that Courthope should walk towards it, trying to become acquainted with some link in the train of circumstances which had raised this enchanted palace in the wilderness; he had not followed to hear, but he overheard.

'Eliz, it's a *real* young man!'

'No! you are only making up, and' (here a touch of querulousness) 'I've often told you that I don't like make-ups that one wants too much to be true. I'll only have the Austens and Sir Charles and Evelina and——'

'Eliz! He's *not* a make-up; the fairies have sent him to our party. Isn't it just fairilly entrancing? He has a curly moustache and a nice nose. He's English, like father. He says "cawn't," and "shawn't," and "heah," and "theyah,"—genuine, no affectation. Oh' (here came a little gurgle of joy), 'and to-night, too! It's the first *perfectly* joyful thing that has *ever* come to us.'

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Courthope moved quietly back and stood before the blazing logs, looking down into them with a smile of pure pleasure upon his lips.

It was not long before the door, which she had left ajar, was re-opened, and a light-wheeled chair was pushed into the room. It contained a slight, elfin-like girl, white-faced, flaxen-haired, sharp-featured, and arrayed in gorgeous crimson. The elder sister pushed from behind. The little procession wore an air of triumphant satisfaction, still tempered by the proprieties.

'This is my sister,' said the mistress of the house.

'I am very glad to see you, Mr. Courthope.' The tones of Eliz were sharp and thin. She was evidently acting a part, as with the air of a very grand lady she held out her hand.

He was somewhat dazzled. He felt it not inappropriate to ask if he had entered fairyland. Eliz would have answered him with fantastic affirmative, but the elder sister, like a sensible child who knew better how to arrange the game, interposed.

'I'll explain it to you. Eliz and I are giving a party to-night. There hasn't been any company in the house since father died four years ago, and we know he wouldn't like us to be dull, so when our stepmother went out, and sent word that she couldn't come back to-night, we decided to have a grand party. There are only to be play-people, you know; all the people in Miss Austen's books are coming, and the nice ones out of *Sir Charles Grandison*.'

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She paused to see if he understood.

'Are the *Mysteries of Udolpho* invited?' he asked.

'No, the others we just chose here and there, because we liked them—Evelina, although she was rather silly and we told her that we couldn't have Lord Ormond, and Miss Matty and Brother Peter out of *Cranford*, and Moses Wakefield, because we liked him best of the family, and the Portuguese nun who wrote the letters. We thought we would have liked to invite the young man in *Maud* to meet her, but we decided we should have to draw the line somewhere and leave out the poetry-people.'

The girl, leaning her forearms slightly on the back of her sister's chair, gave the explanation in soft, business-like tones, and there was only the faintest lurking of a smile about the corners of her lips to indicate that she kept in view both reality and fantasy.

'I think that I shall have to ask for an introduction to the Portuguese nun,' said Courthope; 'the others, I am happy to say, I have met before.'

A smile of approval leapt straight out of her dark eyes into his, as if she would have said: 'Good boy! you have read quite the right sort of books!'

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Eliz was not endowed with the same well-balanced sense of proportion; for the time the imaginary was the real.

'The only question that remains to be decided,' she cried, 'is what *you* would prefer to be. We will let you choose—Bingley, or Darcy, or——'

'It would be fair to tell him,' said the other, her smile broadening now, 'that it's only the elderly people and notables who have been invited to dinner, the young folks are coming in after; so if you are hungry——' Her soft voice paused, as if suspended in mid-air, allowing him to draw the inference.

'It depends entirely on who you are, who I would like to be.' He did not realise that there was undue gallantry in his speech; he felt exactly like another child playing, loyally determined to be her mate, whatever the character that might entail. 'I will even be the idiotic Edward if you are Eleanor Dashwood.'

Her chin was raised just half-an-inch higher; the smile that had been peeping from eyes and dimples seemed to retire for the moment.

'Oh, we,' she said, 'are the hostesses. My sister is Eliz King and I am Madge King, and I think you had better be a real person too; just a Mr. Courthope, come in by accident.'

'Well, then, he can help us in the receiving and chatting to them.' Eliz was quite reconciled.

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He felt glad to realise that his mistake had been merely playful. 'In that case, may I have dinner without growing grey?' He asked it of Madge, and her smile came back, so readily did she forget what she had hardly consciously perceived.

When the sharp-voiced little Eliz had been wheeled into the dining-room to superintend some preparations there before the meal was ready, Courthope could again break through the spell that the imaginary reception imposed. He came from his dressing-room to find Madge at the housewifely act of replenishing the fire. Filled with curiosity, unwilling to ask questions, he remarked that he feared she must often feel lonely, that he supposed Mrs. King did not often make visits unaccompanied by her daughters.

'She does not, worse luck!' Madge on her knees replied with childish audacity.

'I hope when she returns she may not be offended by my intrusion.'

'Don't hope it,'—she smiled—'such hope would be vain.'

He could not help laughing.

'Is it dutiful then of you'—he paused—'or of me?'

'Which do you prefer—to sleep in the barn, or that I should be undutiful and disobey my stepmother?'

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In a minute she gave her chin that lift in the air that he had seen before.

'You need not feel uncomfortable about Mrs. King; the house is really mine, not hers, and father always had his house full of company. I am doing my duty to him in taking you in, and in making a feast to please Eliz when the stepmother happens to be away and I can do it peaceably. And when she happens to be here I do my duty to him by keeping the peace with her.'

'Is she unkind to you?' he asked, with the ready, overflowing pity that young men are apt to give to pretty women who complain.

But she would have him know that she had not complained.

There was no bitterness in her tone—her philosophy of life was all sweetness. 'No! Bless her! God made her, I suppose, just as He made us; so, according to the way she is made, she packs away all the linen and silver, she keeps this room shut up for fear it will get worn out, and we never see any visitors. But to-day she went away to St. Philippe to see a dying man—I think she was going to convert him or something; but he took a long time to die; and now we may be snowed up for days, and we are going to have a perfectly glorious time.' She added hospitably, 'You need not feel under the slightest obligation, for it gives us pleasure to have you, and I know that father would have taken you in.'

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Courthope rose up and followed her glance, almost an adoring glance, to the portrait he had before observed. He went and stood again face to face with it.

A goodly man was painted there, dressed in a judge's robe. Courthope read the lineaments by the help of the living interpretation of the daughter's likeness. Benevolence in the mouth, a love of good cheer and good friends in the rounded cheeks, a lurking sense of the poetry of life in the quiet eyes, and in the brow reason and a keen sense of right proportion dominant. He would have given something to have exchanged a quiet word with the man in the portrait, whose hospitality, living after him, he was now receiving.

Madge had been arranging the logs to her satisfaction, she would not accept Courthope's aid, and now she told him who were going to dine with them. She had great zest for the play.

'Mr. and Mrs. Bennett, of course, and we thought we might have Mr. Knightley, because he is a squire and not so very young, even though he is not yet married. Miss Bates, of course, and the Westons. Mrs. Dashwood has declined, of which we are rather glad, but we are having Mrs. Jennings.' So she went on with her list. 'We could not help asking Sir Charles with Lord and Lady G—, because he is so important; but Grandmamma Shirley is "mortifying" at present. She wrote that she could not stand "so rich a regale." Sir Hargrave Pollexfen will come afterwards with Harriet, and I am thankful to say that Lady Clementina is not in England at present, so could not be invited.' She stopped, looking up at him freshly to make a comment. 'Don't you detest Lady Clementina?'

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When they went into the dining-room, the choice spirits deemed worthy to be at the board were each introduced by name to the Lady Eliz, who explained that because of her infirmities she had been unable to have the honour of receiving them in the drawing-room. She made appropriate remarks, inquiring after the relatives of each, offering congratulations or condolences as the case demanded. It was cleverly done. Courthope stood aside, immensely entertained, and when at last he too began to offer spirited remarks to the imaginary guests, he went up in favour so immensely that Eliz cried, 'Let Mr. Courthope take the end of the table. Let Mr. Courthope be father. It's much nicer to have a master of the house.' She began at once introducing him to the invisible guests as her father, and Madge, if she did not like the fancy, did not cross her will.

The table was long, and amply spread with fine glass and silver; nothing was antique, everything was in the old-fashioned tasteless style of a former generation, but the value of solid silver was not small. The homely serving-woman in her peasant-like dress stood aside, submissive, as it seemed, but ignorant of how to behave at so large a dinner. Courthope, who in a visit to the stables had discovered that this Frenchwoman with her husband and one young daughter were at present the whole retinue of servants, wondered the more that such precious articles as the young girls and the plate should be safe in so lonely a place.

Madge was seated at the head of the table, Courthope at the foot; Eliz in her high chair had been wheeled to the centre of one side. Madge, playing the hostess with gentle dignity, was enjoying herself to the full, a rosy, cooing sort of joy in the play, in the feast that she had succeeded in preparing, in her amusement at the literary sallies of Eliz, and, above all perhaps, in the company of the new and unexpected playmate to whom, because of his youth, she attributed the same perfect sympathy with their sentiments which seemed to exist between themselves. Courthope felt this—he felt that he was idealised through no virtue of his own; but it was a delightful sensation, and brought out the best that was in him of wit and pure joyfulness. To Eliz the creatures of her imagination were too real for perfect pleasure; her face was tense, her eyes shot sparkles of light, her voice was high, for her the entertainment of the invisible guests involved real responsibility and effort.

'Asides are allowed, of course?' said Eliz, as if pronouncing a debatable rule at cards.

'Of course,' said Madge, 'or we could not play.'

'It's the greatest fun,' cried Eliz, 'to hear Sir Charles telling Mr. John Knightley about the good example that a virtuous man ought to set. With "hands and eyes uplifted" he is explaining the duty he owes to his Maker. It's rare to see John Knightley's face. I seated them on purpose with only Miss Matty between them, because I knew she wouldn't interrupt.'

Courthope saw the smile in Madge's eyes was bent upon him as she said softly, 'You won't forget that you have Lady Catherine de Bourg at your right hand to look after. I can see that brother Peter has got his eye upon her, and I don't know how she would take the "seraphim" story.'

'If she begins any of her dignified impertinence here,' he answered, 'I intend to steer her into a conversation with Charlotte, Lady G——.'

Courthope had a turkey to carve. He was fain to turn from the guests to ask advice as to its anatomy of Madge, who was carving a ham and assuring Mr. Woodhouse that it was 'thrice baked, exactly as Serle would have done it.'

'Stupid!—it was apples that were baked,' whispered Eliz.

'You see,' said Madge, when she had told him how to begin upon the turkey, 'we wondered very much what a dinner of "two full courses" might be, and where the "corner dishes" were to be set. We did not quite know—do you?'

'You must not have asides that are not about the people,' cried Eliz intensely. 'Catherine Moreland's mother is talking common sense to General Tilney and Sir Walter Eliot, and there'll be no end of a row in a minute if you don't divert their attention.'

Eliz had more than once to call the other two to account for talking privately adown the long table.

'What a magnificent ham!' he exclaimed. 'Do you keep pigs?'

Madge had a frank way of giving family details. 'It was once a *dear* little pig, and we wanted to teach it to take exercise by running after us when we went out, but the stepmother, like Bunyan, "penned it"—

""Until at last it came to be,
For length and breadth, the bigness which you see.""

More than once he saw Madge's quick wit twinkle through her booklore. When he was looking ruefully at a turkey by no means neatly carved, she gave the comforting suggestion, "'Tis impious in a good man to be sad.'"

'I thought it one of the evidences of piety.'

'It is true that he was "Young" who said it, but so are we; let us believe it fervently.'

When Madge swept across the drawing-room, with her amber skirts trailing, and Eliz had been wheeled in, they received the after-dinner visitors. Courthope could almost see the room filled with the quaint creations to whom they were both bowing and talking incessantly.

'Mr. Courthope—Miss Jane Fairfax—I believe you have met before.' Madge's voice dropped in a well-feigned absorption in her next guest; but she soon found time again to whisper to him a long speech which Miss Bates had made to Eliz. Soon afterwards she came flying to him in the utmost delight to repeat what she called a "lovely sneap" which Lady G—— had given to Mrs. Elton; nor did she forget to tell him that Emma Woodhouse was explaining to the Portuguese nun her reasons for deciding never to marry. 'Out of sheer astonishment she appears to become quite

tranquillised,' said Madge, as if relating an important fact.

His curiosity concerning this nun grew apace, for she seemed a favourite with both the girls.

When it was near midnight the imaginary pageant suddenly came to an end, as in all cases of enchantment. Eliz grew tired; one of the lamps smoked and had to be extinguished; the fire had burned low. Madge declared that the company had departed. [Pg 317]

She went out of the room to call the servant, but in a few minutes she came back discomfited, a little pout on her lips. 'Isn't it tiresome! Mathilde and Jacques Morin have gone to bed.'

'It is just like them,' fretted Eliz.

At the fretful voice Madge's face cleared. 'What does it matter?' she cried. 'We are perfectly happy.'

She lifted the lamp with which he had first seen her, and commenced an inspection of doors and shutters. It was a satisfaction to Courthope to see the house. It was a French building, as were all the older houses in that part of the country, heavily built, simple in the arrangements of its rooms. Every door on the lower floor stood open, inviting the heat of a large central stove. Insisting upon carrying the lamp while Madge made her survey, he was introduced to a library at the end of the drawing-room, to a large house-place or kitchen behind the dining-room; these with his own room made the square of the lower story. A wing adjoining the further side was devoted to the Morins. Having performed her duty as householder, Madge said good-night.

'We have enjoyed it ever so much more because you were here.' She held out her hand; her face was radiant; he knew that she spoke the simple truth. [Pg 318]

She lifted the puny Eliz in her arms and proceeded to walk slowly up the straight staircase which occupied one half of the long central hall. The crimson scarfs hanging from Eliz, the length of her own silk gown, embarrassed her; she stopped a moment on the second step, resting her burden upon one lifted knee to clutch and gather the gorgeous raiment in her hand.

'You see we put on mother's dresses, that have always been packed away in the garret.'

Very simply she said this to Courthope, who stood holding a lamp to light them in their ascent. He waited until the glinting colours of their satins, the slow motion of the burden-bearer's form, reached the top and were lost in the shadows of an open door.

CHAPTER III

Courthope opened the shutters of his window to look out upon the night; they were heavy wooden shutters clasped with an iron clasp. A French window he could also open; outside that a temporary double window was fixed in the casement with light hooks at the four corners. The wind was still blustering about the lonely house, and, after examining the twilight of the snow-clad night attentively, he perceived that snow was still falling. He thought he could almost see the drifts rising higher against the out-buildings. [Pg 319]

Two large barns stood behind the house; from these he judged that the fields around were farmed.

It was considerations concerning the project of his journey the next day which had made him look out, and also a restless curiosity regarding every detail of the *ménage* whose young mistress was at once so child-like and so queenlike. While looking out he had what seemed a curious hallucination of a dark figure standing for a moment on the top of the deep snow. As he looked more steadily the figure disappeared. All the outlines at which he looked were chaotic to the sight, because of the darkness and the drifting snow, and the light which was behind him shimmering upon the pane. If half-a-dozen apparitions had passed in the dim and whirling atmosphere of the yards, he would have supposed that they were shadows formed by the beams of his lamp, being interrupted here and there by the eddying snow where the wind whirled it most densely. He did not close his shutters, he even left his inner window partially open, because, unaccustomed to a stove, he felt oppressed by its heat. When he threw himself down, he slept deeply, as men sleep after days among snowfields, when a sense of entire security is the lethargic brain's lullaby. [Pg 320]

He was conscious first of a dream in which the sisters experienced some imminent danger; he heard their shrieks piercing the night. He woke to feel snow and wind driving upon his face, to realise a half-waking impression that a man had passed through his room, to know that the screams of a woman's voice were a reality. As he sprang for his clothes he saw that the window was wide open, the whole frame of the outer double glass having been removed, but the screams of terror he heard were within the house. Opening the door to the dark hall he ran, guided by the sound, to the foot of the staircase which the girls had ascended, then up its long straight ascent. He took its first steps in a bound, but, as his brain became more perfectly awake, confusion of thought, wonder, a certain timidity because now the screaming had ceased, caused him to slacken his pace. He was thus hesitating in the darkness when he found himself confronted by Madge King. She stood majestic in grey woollen gown, candle in hand, and her dark eyes blazed upon him in terror, wrath and indignation.

It seemed for a moment that she could not speak; some movement passed over the white sweep of her throat and the full dimpling lips, and then—

'Go down!' She would have spoken to a dog with the same authority, but never with such contemptuous wrath. 'Go down at once! How dare you!' [Pg 321]

Abashed, knowing not what he might have done to offend, Courthope fell back a step against the wall of the staircase. From within the room Eliz cried, 'Is he there? Come in and lock the door, Madge, or he'll kill you!' The voice, sharp, high with terror, rose at the end, and burst into one of those piercing shrieks which seemed to fill the night, as the voices of some small insects have the power to make the welkin ring in response.

Before Courthope could find a word to utter, another light was thrown upon him from a lamp at the foot of the stair. It was held by Jacques Morin, grey-haired, stooping, dogged. The Morin family—man, wife and daughter—were huddling close together. They, too, were all looking at him, not with the wrath and contempt to which Madge had risen, but with cunning desire for revenge, mingled with the cringing of fear. There was a minute's hush, too strong for expression, in which each experienced more intensely the shock of the mysterious alarm.

It was Madge who broke the silence. Her voice rang clear, although vibrating.

'Jacques Morin, he came into our room to rob!' She pointed at Courthope. [Pg 322]

The thin voice of Eliz came in piercing parenthesis: 'I saw him in the closet, and when I screamed he ran.'

Madge began again. 'Jacques Morin, what part of the house is open? I feel the wind.' All the time Madge kept her eyes upon Courthope, as upon some wild animal whose spring she hoped to keep at bay.

That she should appeal to this dull, dogged French servant for protection against him, who only desired to risk his life to serve her, was knowledge of such intense vexation that Courthope could still find no word, and her fixed look of wrath did actually keep him at bay. It took from him, by some sheer physical power which he did not understand, the courage with which he would have faced a hundred Morins.

When Jacques Morin began to speak, his wife and daughter took courage and spoke also; a babel of French words, angry, terrified, arose from the group, whose grey night-clothes, shaken by their gesticulations, gave them a half-frenzied appearance.

In the midst of their talking Courthope spoke to Madge at last. 'I ran up to protect you when I heard screams; I did not wake till you screamed. Some one has entered the house. He has entered by the window in my room; I found it open.' [Pg 323]

With his own words the situation became clear to him. He saw that he must hunt for the house-breaker. He began to descend the stairs.

The Morin girl screamed and ran. Morin, producing a gun from behind his back, pointed it at Courthope, and madam, holding the lamp, squared up behind her husband with the courage of desperation.

It was not this fantastic couple that checked Courthope's downward rush, but Madge's voice.

'Keep still!' she cried, in short strong accents of command.

Eliz, becoming aware of his movement, shrieked again.

Courthope, now defiant and angry, turned towards Madge, but, even as he waited to hear what she had to say, reflected that her interest could not suffer much by delay, for the thief, if he escaped, could make but small speed in the drifting storm over roads which led to no near place of escape or hiding.

It was the judge's daughter which Courthope now saw in Madge—the desire to estimate evidence, the fearless judgment.

'We took you in last night, a stranger; and now we have been robbed, which never happened before in all our lives. My sister says it was you she saw in our room. As soon as I could get the candle lit I found you here, and Jacques Morin says that you have opened your window so that you would be able to escape at once. What is the use of saying that you are not a robber?' [Pg 324]

He made another defiant statement of his own version of the story.

The girl had given some command in French to Morin; to Courthope she spoke again in hasty sentences, reiterating the evidence against him. Her manner was a little different now—it had not the same straightforward air of command. He began to hope that he might persuade her, and then discovered suddenly that she had been deliberately riveting his attention while the command which he had not understood was being obeyed. A noose of rope was thrown round his arms and instantly tightened; with a nimbleness which he had not expected Morin knotted it fast. Courthope turned fiercely; for a moment he struggled with all his force, bearing down upon Morin from his greater height, so that they both staggered and reeled to the foot of the stair. At his violence the voices of the Morin women, joined by that of Eliz, were lifted in such wild terror that a few moments were sufficient to bring Courthope to reason. He spoke to Madge with

haughty composure.

'Tell him to untie this rope at once. There is some villain about the house who may do you the greatest injury; you are mad to take from me the power of arresting him.'

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Madam Morin, seeing the prisoner secured, hastened with her lamp to his bedroom.

Madge, feeling herself safer now, came a little way down the stair with her candle. 'How can we tell what you would do next?' she asked. 'And I have the household to protect; it is not for myself that I am afraid.'

The anger that he had felt toward her died out suddenly.

It was not for herself that she was afraid! She stood a few steps above him; her little candle, flashing its rays into the darkness of the upper and lower halls, made walls and balustrades seem vast by its flickering impotence to oust the darkness. Surely this girl, towering in her sweeping robe and queenly pose, was made to be loved of men and gods! Hero, carrying her vestal taper in the temple recesses, before ever Leander had crossed the wave, could not have had a larger or more noble form, a more noble and lovely face.

Well, if she chose to tie his arms he would have preferred to have them tied, were it not for the maddening thought that more miscreants than one might be within reach of her, and that they would, if skilled, find the whole household an easy prey.

Madam Morin came back from the room with the open window, making proclamation in the most excited French.

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'What do they say?' asked Courthope of Madge.

The Morin girl was following close to her mother, and Jacques Morin was eagerly discussing their information.

Madge passed Courthope in silence. They all went to the window to see; Courthope, following in the most absurd helplessness, trailing the end of his binding-cord behind him, brought up the rear of the little procession. Madge walked straight on into his room, where Madam Morin was again opening the window-shutters.

'They say,' said Madge to Courthope, 'that you have had an accomplice, and that he is gone again; they saw his snow-shoe tracks.'

He begged her to make sure that the man was gone, to let him look at the tracks himself and then to search the house thoroughly. Outside the window the same chaotic sweep and whirl of the atmosphere prevailed. It was difficult, even holding a lantern outside, to see, but they did see that a track had come up to the window and again turned from it. After that they all searched the house, Courthope allowed to be of the company, apparently because he could thus be watched. The thief of the night had come and gone; some silver and jewellery which had been stored in a closet adjoining the bedroom of the sisters had been taken.

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Courthope understood very little of the talk that went on. At length, to his great relief, Madge gave her full attention to him in parley.

'Won't you believe that I know nothing whatever of the doings of this sneak-thief?'

Some of her intense excitement had passed away, succeeded by distress, discouragement, and perhaps perplexity, but that last she did not express to him. She leaned against the wall as she listened to him with white face.

'We never took in any one we didn't know anything about before, and we never were robbed before.' She added, 'We treated you kindly; how could you have done it? If you did it—his heart leaped at the 'if' as at a beam of sunshine on a rainy day—you must have known all about us, although I can't think how; you must have known where we kept things, and that mamma had taken our other man-servant away. You must have brought your accomplice to hide in the barn and do the work while you played the gentleman! That is what Jacques Morin says; he says no one but a child would have taken you in as I did, and that you might have murdered us all. They are very angry with me.'

There was conflict in her manner; a few words would be said haughtily, as to some one not worthy of her notice, and then again a few words as to a friend. He saw that this conflict of her mind was increasing as she stood face to face with him, and with that consolation he submitted, at her request, to be more securely bound—the rope twisted round and round, binding his arms to his sides. It was a girl's device; he made no complaint.

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It seemed that Morin had no thought of following the thief; his faithfulness was limited to such service as he considered necessary, and was of a cowardly rather than a valiant sort. Courthope, when his first eagerness to seek passed off, was comforted by reflecting that, had he himself been free, it would have been futile for him to attempt such a quest while darkness lay over the land in which he was a stranger.

He was allowed to rest on the settle in the large inner kitchen, securely locked in, and so near Morin's room that his movements could be overheard. There, still in bonds, he spent the rest of the night.

CHAPTER IV

When the March morning shone clear and white through the still-falling snow, and the Morins began to bustle about their work for the day, the mental atmosphere in the kitchen seemed to have lost something of the excited alarm that had prevailed in the night. Courthope arose; the garments which he had donned in the night with frantic speed clothed but did not adorn him; he knew that he must present a wild appearance, and the domestic clothes-line, bound round and round his arms, prevented him from so much as pushing back the locks of hair which straggled upon his brow. He was rendered on the whole helpless; however murderous might be his heart, a tolerably safe companion. He interested himself by considering how Samson-like he could be in breaking the cords, or, even tied, how vigorously he could kick Morin, if he were not a girl's prisoner. He reflected with no small admiration upon the quick resource and decision that she had displayed; how, in spite of her almost child-like frankness, she had beguiled him into turning his back to the noose when a supposed necessity pressed her. He meditated for a few minutes upon other girls for whom he had experienced a more or less particular admiration, and it seemed to him that the characters of these damsels became wan and insipid by comparison. He began to have a presentiment that Love was now about to strike in earnest upon the harp of his life, but he could not think that the circumstances of this present attraction were propitious. What could he say to this girl, so adorably strong-minded, to convince her of his claim to be again treated as a man and a brother? Letters? He had offered them to her last night, and she had replied that any one could write letters. Should he show that he was not penniless? She might tell him in the same tone that it was wealth ill-gotten. It was no doubt her very ignorance of the world that, when suspicion had once occurred, made her reject as unimportant these evidences of his respectability, but he had no power to give her the eyes of experience.

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These thoughts tormented him as he stood looking out of the window at the ever-increasing volume of the snow. How long would he be detained a prisoner in this house, and, when the roads were free, how could he find for Madge any absolute proof of his innocence? The track of the midnight thief was lost for ever in the snow; if he had succeeded in escaping as mysteriously as he had come—but here Courthope's mind refused again to enter upon the problem of the fiend-like enemy and the impassable snowfields, which in the hours of darkness he had already given up, perceiving the futility of his speculation until further facts were known.

Courthope strolled through the rooms, the doors of which were now open. Morin permitted this scant liberty chiefly, the prisoner thought, because of a wholesome fear of being kicked. In the library at the back of the drawing-room he found amusement in reading the titles of the books down one long shelf and up another. Every book to which Madge had had access had an interest for him. Three cases were filled with books of law and history; there was but one from which the books had of late been frequently taken. It was filled with romance and poetry, nothing so late as the middle of the present century, nothing that had not some claim upon educated readers, and yet it was a motley collection. Upon the front rim of the upper shelf some one, perhaps the dead father in his invalid days, had carved a motto with a knife, the motto that is also that of the British arms. It might have been done out of mere patriotism; it might have had reference to this legacy of books left to the child-maidens, for whom, it seemed, other companionship had not been provided.

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At length Courthope realised that there was one book which he greatly desired to take from the shelf. The Morin daughter was dusting in the room, and, with some blandishments, he succeeded in persuading her to lay it open upon the table where he could peruse it. To his great amusement he observed that she was very careful not to come within a yard or two of him, darting back when he approached, evidently thinking that the opening of the book might be a ruse to attack her by a sudden spring. At first the curious consciousness produced by this damsel's awkward gambols of fear so absorbed him that he could not fix his attention upon the book; flashes of amusement and of grave annoyance chased themselves through his mind like sunshine and shadow over mountains on a showery day; he knew not which was the more rational mood. Then, attempting the book again, and turning each leaf with a good deal of contortion and effort, he became absorbed. It was the *Letters of a Portuguese Nun*, and in the astonishment of its perusal he forgot the misfortune that had befallen the household, and his own discomfort and ignominy. The Morin girl had left him in the room, shutting the door.

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An hour passed—it might have been about nine of the clock—when Courthope began to be roused from his absorption in the book by a sound in the next room. It was a low uncertain sound, but evidently that of sobbing and tears. He stopped, listened; his heart was wrung with pity. It was not the sharp little Eliz who cried like that! He knew such sobs did not come from the stormy and uncontrolled bosoms of the French servants. He was convinced that it was Madge who was weeping, that she was in the long drawing-room, where the portrait of the judge hung near the door.

He went nearer the door. His excited desire to offer her some sympathy, to comfort, or if possible to help, became intolerable. So conscious was he of a common interest between them that not for a moment did the sense of prying enter his mind.

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He heard then a few words whispered as if to the portrait: 'Father, oh, father, we were so happy with him! It is almost the only time that we have been quite happy since you went away.'

The sense of the broken whispers came tardily to Courthope's understanding through the smothering door. The handle of the door was on a level with the hands that were bound to his sides; he turned himself in order to bring his fingers near it.

Before he touched it he heard Madge sob and whisper again: 'I was so happy, father; I thought it was such fun he had come. I like gentlemen, and we never, never see any except the ones that come out of books.'

To Courthope it suddenly seemed that the whole universe must have been occupied with purpose to bring him here in order to put an end to her gloom and flood her life with sunshine; the universe could not be foiled in its attempt. Young love argues from effect to cause, and so limitless seemed the strength of his sentiment that the simplicity of her mind and the susceptibility of her girlhood were to him like some epic poem which arouses men to passion and strong deeds. Ignominiously bound as he was, his heart lightened; all doubt of his mission to love her and its ultimate success passed from him. He turned the handle and pushed the door half open.

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The long drawing-room was almost dark; the shutters had not been opened; the furniture remained as it had stood when the brilliant assembly of the previous evening had broken up; the large fireplace was full of ashes; the atmosphere was deadly cold. Courthope stood in the streak of light which entered with him. Upon the floor, crouching, her cheek leaning against the lower part of her father's picture, was Madge King. She was dressed in a blanket coat; moccasins were upon her feet; a fur cap lay upon the ground beside her. At the instant of his entrance she lifted her bare head, and across the face flushed with tears and prayers there flashed the look of haughty intolerance of his presence. She had thought that he was locked up in one of the kitchens; she told him so, intensely offended that he should see her tears. It was for that reason that she did not rise or come to the light, only commanding and imploring him to be gone.

'I am quite helpless, even if I wanted to harm you.' He spoke reproachfully, knowing instinctively that if she pitied him she would accept his pity.

'You have harmed us enough already,' she sighed; 'all the rest of our silver, all my dear father's silver is gone. We found that out this morning, for what we had used for the feast had been put in a basket until we could store it away; it is all taken.'

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He was shocked and enraged to hear of this further loss. He did not attempt to reason with her; he had ceased to reason with himself.

'You trusted me when you let me in last night,' he said. 'Don't you think that you would have had some perception of it last night if I had been entirely unworthy? Think what an utter and abominable villain I must be to have accepted your hospitality—to have been so very happy with you—' So he went on appealing to her heart from the sentiments that arose in his own.

Madge listened only for a reasonable period; she rose to her feet. 'I must go,' she said.

He found that she proposed to walk on snow-shoes three miles to the nearest house, which belonged to a couple of parish priests, where she would be certain of obtaining a messenger to carry the news of the robbery to the telegraph station. She could not be brought even to discuss the advisability of her journey; Morin could not be sent, for the servants and Eliz would go mad with terror if left alone.

To Courthope's imagination her journey seemed to be an abandonment of herself to the utmost danger. If between the two houses she failed to make progress over high drifts and against a heavy gale, what was to hinder her from perishing? Then, too, there was that villain, who had seemed to stalk forth from the isolated house afar into the howling night as easily as the Frankenstein demon, and might even now be skulking near—a dangerous devil—able to run where others must trudge toilsomely.

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Madge, it seemed, had only come to that room to make her confession and invoke protection at the shrine of the lost father; she was ready to set forth without further delay. She would not, in spite of his most eloquent pleading, set Courthope at liberty to make of him either messenger or companion.

'The evidence,' she said sadly, 'is all against you. I am very sorry.'

A wilder unrest and vexation at his position returned upon his heart because of the lightening that had come with the impulse of love. That impulse still remained, an under-current of calm, a knowledge that his will and the power of the world were at one, such as men only feel when they yield themselves to some sudden conversion; but above this new-found faith the cross-currents of strife now broke forth again. Thus he raged—

'What was the use of my coming here? Why should the Fates have sent me here if I cannot go this errand for you, or if I cannot go with you to protect you? If this beast is walking about on snow-shoes, how do you know that he will not attack you as soon as you are out of sight of the house?'

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She seemed to realise that it was strange to be discussing her own safety with her prisoner. Very curious was the conflict in her face; her strong natural companionableness, her suspicion of him, and her sense of the dignity which her situation demanded, contending together. It seemed easier for her to disregard his words than to give all the answers which her varying feelings would prompt. She was tying on a mink cap by winding a woollen scarf about her head.

'Miss Madge! Miss King! It is perfectly intolerable! It—it is intolerable!' He stepped nearer as he spoke. A thought came over him that even the conventional title of 'Miss' which he had given her was wholly inappropriate in a situation so strong—that he and she, merely as man and woman, as rational beings, were met together in a wilderness where conventions were folly. 'I cannot allow you to risk your life in this way.' There was a tense emphasis in his words; he felt the natural authority of the protector over the tender thing to be protected, the intimate authority which stress of circumstance may give.

She dropped her hands from tying the scarf under her chin, returning for his words a look of mingled curiosity, indecision, and distrust.

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Quick as she looked upon him, his mind's eye looked upon himself; there he stood in grotesque undress, bound around with the cords of an extraordinary disgrace. He blamed himself at the moment for not having had his hair cut more recently, for he knew that it stood in a wild shock above his head, and he felt that it dangled in his eyes. Then a gust of emotion, the momentary desire for laughter or groans of vexation, rose and choked his utterance, and in the minute that he was mute the girl, sitting down upon a low stool, began tightening the strings of her moccasins, which, after the first putting on, had relaxed with the warmth of the feet. Her business-like preparations for the road maddened him.

'Don't you see,' he said, 'what disgrace you are heaping upon me? What right have you to deny to me, a gentleman and your guest, the right to serve and protect you? Consider to what wretchedness you consign me if I am left here to think of you fighting alone with this dangerous storm, or attacked by blackguards who we know may not be far away!'

She said in a quiet, practical, girlish way, 'It was I who was responsible for letting you in last night, and then this happened—this most unheard-of thing. We never heard of any but a petty theft ever committed in this whole region before. Now I am bound to keep you here until we can hear where father's silver is.'

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'You don't believe that I have done it! I am sure you do not' (he believed what he said). 'Why haven't you the courage to act upon your conviction? You will never regret it.'

'Eliz says that she saw you quite distinctly.'

'Eliz is a little fool,' were the words that arose within him, but what he said was, 'Your sister is excitable and nervous; she saw the thief undoubtedly, and by some miserable freak of fortune he may have resembled me.'

'Does that seem at all likely?'

'Well, then, there was no resemblance, and she fancied it.'

She stood up, looking harassed, but without relenting. 'I must go—there is nothing else to be done. Do you think I would stay here when a day might make all the difference in recovering the things which belonged to my father? Do you think that I am going to lose the things that belonged to him just because I am too much of a coward to go out and give the alarm?'

She walked away from him resolutely, but the thought of the lost treasures and all the dear memories that in her mind were identified with them seemed to overcome her. She drew her hand hastily across her eyes, and then, to his dismay, the sorrow for her loss emphasised her wavering belief in his guilt; for the first time he realised how strong that sorrow was. Impelled by emotion she turned again and came shrinkingly back into his presence.

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'I have not reproached you,' she said, 'because I thought it would be mean in case you had not done it; but it seems that you must have done it. Won't you tell me where the other man has taken our things? They cannot be of any value to you compared with their value to us; and, oh, indeed I would much rather give you as much money as you could possibly make out of them, and more too, if you would only tell me which way this man has gone, and send word to him that he must give them back! I will pledge you my word of honour that—'

For the first time he was offended with her. He stepped back with a gesture of pride, which in a moment he saw she had construed into unwillingness to give the booty up.

'I could promise to give you the money; I could promise that you should not be tracked and arrested. I have enough in the savings-bank of my own that I could get out without our lawyer or mamma knowing, and you don't know how dear, how very dear, everything that belonged to father is to Eliz and me. If you wait here tied until my stepmother comes she will not give any money to get the things back; she would not care if you kept them, so long as she could punish you.'

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Every word of her gentle pleading made the insult deeper and more gross, and the fact that she was who she was only made the hurt to his pride the sorer. He would not answer; he would not explain; he would let her think what she liked; it is the way of the injured heart.

Angry, and confirmed in her suspicion, she too turned proudly away. He saw her, as she crossed the hall, take up a pair of snow-shoes that she had left leaning against the wall, and without further farewell to any one turn toward the front door.

He knew then what he must do. Without inward debate, without even weighing what his act's ultimate consequences might be, he followed her.

'I will do what you ask. I give you my word of honour—and there is honour, you know, even among thieves—that I will do all in my power to bring back everything that has been stolen. Give me snow-shoes. Keep my horse and my watch and my luggage as surety that I mean what I say. I cannot promise that I can get back the silver from the other man, but I will do far more than you can do. I will do more than any one else could do. If it is within my power I will bring it back to you.'

She considered for a little time whether she would trust him or not. It seemed, curiously enough, that from first to last she had never distrusted her first instinct with regard to his character, but that her child-like belief that in the unknown world all things were possible, allowed her to believe also in his criminality. Now that he had, as she thought, made his confession and promised restitution, it was perhaps the natural product of her conflicting thoughts and feelings that she should trust to his oft-repeated vows, and make the paction with him.

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She did not consult the Morins; perhaps she knew that she would only provoke their opposition, or perhaps she knew that they would only be too glad to get rid of the man they feared, caring for nothing but the actual safety of the lives in the household. She brought him his coat and cap and also a man's moccasins and snow-shoes. With a courage that, because somewhat shy and trembling, evoked all the more his admiration, she untied the first knot of his rope, unwound the coil, and then untied the last knot. The process was slow because of the trembling of her fingers, which he felt but could not see. She stood resolute, making him dress for the storm upon the threshold of the door. He did not know how to strap on the snow-shoes. She watched his first attempt with great curiosity; looking up, he was made the more determined to succeed with them by seeing the pain of incredulity returning to her eyes.

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'How do you expect me to know how to manage things that I have never handled in my life before?'

'But if you don't know how to put them on how can you walk in them?'

'I have seen men walk in them, and there are a great many things we can do when something depends upon it.'

She directed him how to cross and tie the straps; she continued to watch him, increasing anxiety betraying itself in her face.

The snow was so light that even the snow-shoes sank some four or five inches. It was just below the porch that he had tied his straps, and when he first moved forward he trod with one shoe on the top of the other. He had not expected this; he felt that no further progress was within the bounds of possibility. For some half minute he stood, his back to the door, his face turned to the illimitable region of drifts and feathery air, unable to conceive how to go forward and without a thought of turning back. When his pulses were surging and tingling with the discomfort of her gaze, he heard the door shut sharply. Perhaps she thought that he was shamming and was determined not to yield again; perhaps—and this seemed even worse—she had been overcome in the midst of her stern responsibility by the powers of laughter; perhaps, horrid thought, she had gone for Morin to bid him again throw the noose over his treacherous shoulders. The last thought pricked him into motion. By means of his reason he discovered that if he was to make progress at all the rackets must not overlap one another as he trod; his next effort was naturally to walk with his feet so wide apart that the rackets at their broadest could not interfere. The result was that in a few moments he became like a miniature Colossus of Rhodes, fixed again so that he could not move, his feet upon platforms at either side of a harbour of snow.

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He heard the door open now again sharply, and he felt certain, yes, certain, that the lasso was on its way through the air; this time he was not going to submit. As men do unthinkingly what they could in no way do by thought, he found himself facing the door, his snow-shoes truly inextricably mixed with one another, but still he had turned round. There was no rope, no Morin; Madge was standing alone upon the outer step of the porch, her face aflame with indignation.

'This is either perfect folly or you have deceived me,' she cried.

'I shall learn how to use them in a minute,' he said humbly. He was conscious as he spoke that his twisted legs made but an unsteady pedestal, that the least push would have sent him headlong into the drift.

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'How could you say that you would go?' she asked fiercely.

He looked down at his feet as schoolboys do when chidden, but for another reason. The question as to whether or not he could get his snow-shoes headed again in the right direction weighed like lead upon his heart.

'I thought that I could walk upon these things,' he said, and he added, with such determination as honour flying from shame only knows, 'and I will walk on them and do your errand.'

With that, by carefully untwisting his legs, he faced again in the right direction, but, having lifted his right foot too high in the untwisting process, he found that the slender tail of its snow-shoe stuck down in the snow, setting the shoe pointing skyward and his toe, tied by the thongs, held prisoner about a foot above the snow. He tried to kick, but the shoe became more firmly embedded. He lost his balance, and only by a wild fling of his body, in which his arms went up into the air, did he regain his upright position. The moment of calm which succeeded produced from him another remark.

'It seems to me that you have got me now in closer bonds than before.' As he spoke he turned his glance backward and saw that comment of his was needless.

The girl had at last yielded to laughter. Worn out, no doubt, by a long-controlled excitement, laughter had now entirely overcome her. Leaning her head on her hand and her shoulders against a pillar of the porch, she was shaking visibly from head to foot, and the effort she made to keep the sound of her amusement within check only seemed to make its hold upon her more absolute.

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'I don't wonder you laugh,' he said, feebly beginning to laugh himself a little.

But she did not make the slightest reply. Her face was crimson; the ripples of her laughter went over her form as ripples of wind over a young tree.

He was forced to leave her thus. By a miracle of determination, as it seemed, he freed his right shoe and made slow and wary strides forward. He saw that he had exaggerated the width of his snow-shoes, but his progress now was still made upon the plan of keeping his feet wide apart, although not too wide for motion. He knew that this was not the right method; he knew that she peered at him between her fingers and was more convulsed with laughter at his every step. He was thankful to think that the falling flakes must soon begin to obscure his figure, but he did not dare to try another plan of walking while she watched, lest she should see him stop again.

CHAPTER V

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Courthope had struck across to the main road at right angles to the poplar avenue. The poplars stood slim, upright, more like a stiff and regular formation of feathery seaweed growing out of a frozen ocean than like trees upon a plain. He was nearing a grove of elm and birch which he had not seen the evening before; by the almost hidden rails of the fence there were half-buried shrubs. So dry, so hard, so absolutely without bud or sere leaf was the interlacing outline of the trees and shrubs, that they too seemed to be some strange product of this new sort of ocean; they did not remind him of verdant glades. Not that beauty was absent, nor charm, but the scene was strange, very strange; the domain of the laughing princess, on whom he had turned his back, was, in the daylight, more than ever an enchanted land which he could fancy to be unknown in story and until now unexplored by man. Such ideas only came to him by snatches; the rest of him, mind and body, was summed up in a fierce determination to catch the thief and bring back his spoils. Whether by this he would prove himself honest or guilty, he neither knew nor felt that he cared.

Gradually, as he thought less about his snow-shoes, he found that the wide lateral swing which he had been giving to his leg was unneeded. Strange as it seemed, the large rackets did not interfere when he took an ordinary step. Having made this pleasant discovery he quickened speed. He did not know whether the girl had stopped laughing and had gone into the house again, but he knew that the falling snow and the branches of the trees must now hinder her from seeing him distinctly.

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In a moment he was glad of this, for, becoming incautious, he fell.

Both arms, put out to save himself, were embedded to the very shoulder straight down in snow that offered no bottom to his touch; when his next impulse was to move knees and feet he found that the points of his snow-shoes were dug deep, and his toes, tied to them, held the soles of his feet in the same position.

What cursed temerity had made him confess to a criminal act in order to be allowed to come on this fool's errand? Fool, indeed, had he been to suppose that he could walk upon a frozen cloud without falling through! Such were Courthope's reflections.

By degrees he got himself up, but only by curling himself round and taking off his snow-shoes. By degrees he got the snow-shoes put on again, and mounted out of the hole which he had made, with snow adhering to all his garments and snow melting adown his neck and wrists. He now realised that he had spent nearly half an hour in walking not a quarter of a mile. With this cheerless reflection as a companion he went doggedly on, choosing now the drifted main road for a path.

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Having left behind him the skeleton forms of the trees, he was trudging across an open plain, flat almost as the surface of the lake which he had traversed yesterday. Sometimes the fences at the side of the road were wholly hidden, more often they showed the top of their posts or upper bar; sometimes he could see cross-fences, as if outlining fields, so that he supposed he still walked through lands farmed from the lonely stone house, that he was still upon his lady's domain. He meditated upon her, judging that she was sweet beyond compare, although why he thought so, after her mistrust and derision, was one of those secrets which the dimpled Cupid only could explain. He was forced to acknowledge the fact that thus he did think, because here he was walking, whither he hardly knew, how he hardly knew, battling with the gale, hustled roughly by its white wings, in danger at every turn of falling off the two small moving rafts of his shoes into a sea in which no man could swim very long. He wondered, should his snow-shoes break, if he would be able to flounder to the rim of the fence? How long could he sit there? Certainly it would seem, looking north and south and east and west, that he would need to sit as long as the life in

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him might endure the frost.

At length a shed or small barn met his eye. His own approach seemed to have been heard and answered from within; the neigh of a horse greeted him. At first he supposed that some horses belonging to the house were stabled here, and neglected because the roads were impassable; then he judged that so slight a shed could not be intended for a stable.

He answered the animal's cry by seeking the door. Against it the drift was not deep, for, as it opened on the sheltered side, he had only the snowfall to scrape away. The door, which had very recently been freed from its crust of frost, yielded easily. He found a brown shaggy horse tied within, and beside it a sleigh, such as he had frequently seen, a mere platform of wood upon runners. Otherwise the shed was empty. Courthope was quickly struck by the recognition of something which set his memory working. The old buffalo-skin on the sleigh was such as was common, but the way it was stretched upon a heap of sacks made him remember the sleigh that he had yesterday passed upon the river, and the keen sinister face of the driver, which had ill contrasted with his apparent sleep and stupidity.

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Courthope tossed aside the skin with a jerk. A rum bottle, a small hoard of frozen bread and bacon, a heavy blanket folded beneath, all seemed to prove that the driver had made provision for a longer journey. The horse had no food before it; no blanket was upon its back. Probably its driver had not intended to leave it here so long. Where was the driver? This quickly became in Courthope's mind the all-important question. Why had he been skulking on the most lonely part of the lake? And now, recalling again the man's face, he believed that he had had an evil design.

Courthope pursued his way; for, whether the thief had gone farther or remained in this vicinity, it was evidently desirable to have help from the nearest neighbours to seek and capture him. Courthope soon reached what seemed to be a dip or hollow in the plain; in this the wind had been very busy levelling the surface with the higher ground. At first he supposed that, for some reason, road and fences had come to an abrupt ending; then he discovered that he merely walked higher above the natural level. The thought came to him that if here he should break his snow-shoes there would not even be the neighbouring fence-top on which to perch and freeze.

Suddenly all his attention was concentrated upon a dark something, like a bit of cloth fallen in the snow. As he came close and touched the cloth he found it to be the covering of a basket almost buried; pushing away the snow-crust covering and feeling with eager fingers among the icy contents, he quickly knew that this was no other than the stolen silver of which he was in quest. A thrill of gratitude to Fortune for so kindly a freak had hardly passed through his mind before his eye sought a depression in the snow just beyond. He saw now that a man was lying there. The head resting upon an arm was but slightly covered with snow; the whole form had sunk by its own heat into a cavity like a grave.

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Courthope lifted the head; the face was that of the man whom he had seen yesterday upon the river. The arms, when he raised them, fell again to the snow like lead, yet he perceived that life was not extinct. Even in the frost the odour of rum was to be perceived, and breath, although so feeble as to be unseen, still passed in and out of the tightly-drawn nostrils. The touch, that would have been reverent to a corpse, was now rough. He shook the fallen man and shouted. He raised him to a sitting posture, but finding that, standing as he did upon soft snow, to lift him was impossible, he laid him again in the self-made grave. That posture at least would be most conducive to the continued motion of the heart.

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Standing upon the other side of the body, Courthope's shoe struck upon another hard object which he found to be a case, stolen locked as it was, which contained, no doubt, the other valuables whose loss Madge had first discovered. The wretch, weighted by a burden in each hand, had apparently missed his way when endeavouring to return to the shed in which he had left his horse, and wandering in circles, perhaps for hours, had evidently succumbed to drink and to cold, caught as in a trap by the unusual violence of the storm.

There was nothing to be done but return to the house for Morin's aid, and, lifting the handles of basket and case in either hand, Courthope doubled back upon his own track, thankful that he had already attained to some skill in snow-shoeing. As he neared the house his heart beat high at the excitement of seeing Madge's delight. He closely scanned the windows, even the tiny windows in the pointed tin roof, but no eager eyes were on the look-out.

Loudly he thumped upon the heavy front door. There was somewhat of a bustle inside at the knock. The snow-bound household collected quickly at the welcome thought of a message from the outside world. When the door was opened Madge and the Morins were there to behold Courthope carrying the plunder. He perceived at once that his guilt, if doubted before, was now proved beyond all doubt. There was a distinct measure of reserve in the satisfaction they expressed. Madge especially was very grave, with a strong flavour of moral severity in her words and demeanour.

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Courthope explained to her that the other man was dying in the snow, that if his life was to be saved no time must be lost. She repeated the story in French to Morin, and thereupon arose high words from the Frenchman. Madge looked doubtfully at Courthope, and then she interpreted.

It seemed that the Frenchman's desire was to put him out again and lock up the house, leaving the two accomplices to shift for themselves as best they might. Courthope urged motives of humanity. He described the man and his condition.

At length he prevailed. Madge insisted that if Morin did not go she would. In a few moments both she and Morin were preparing to set out.

It seemed useless for Courthope to precede them; he went into the dining-room, demanding food of Madam Morin.

He found that Eliz had been carried down and placed in her chair in the midst of domestic activities.

As soon as she spied him, being in a nervous, hysterical state, she opened her mouth and shrieked sharply; the shriek at this time had more the tone of a child's anger than of a woman's fear. With a strong sense of humour he sat down at the table, and she, realising that he was not immediately dangerous, railed upon him. [Pg 355]

'Viper in the bosom!' said Eliz.

Courthope, almost famished, ate fast.

'Daughter of the horse-leech crying "give," and sucking blood from the hand it gives!' she continued.

'Sir Charles Grandison would never have kicked a man when he was down,' he said. 'He would have tried to do good even to the viper he had nourished.'

The memory of Sir Charles's well-known method even with the most villainous, appeared to distract her attention for a moment.

'And then they all sent for him and confessed and made amends, just as I have done,' Courthope went on; but the fact that a laugh was gleaming in his eyes enraged the little cripple.

'How dare you talk to me, sitting there pretending to be a gentleman!'

'I would rather be allowed to make a better toilet if my reputation were to rest upon a pretence. I never heard of a gentlemanly villain who went about without collar and cuffs, and had not been allowed access to his hair-brush.'

'A striped jacket and shaved head is generally what he goes about in after he's unmasked. If I had been Madge I would not have let you off.' [Pg 356]

'Come, remember how sorry Elizabeth Bennett was when she found she had given way to prejudice. If I remember right she lay awake many nights.'

'Are you adding insult to injury by insinuating that either of us might bestow upon you——?'

'Oh! certainly not, I merely wish to suggest that a young lady possessing lively talents and "remarkably fine eyes" might yet make great mistakes in her estimate of the masculine character.'

The cripple, who perhaps had never before heard her one beautiful feature praised by masculine lips, was obliged to harden herself.

'Accomplished wretch!' she cried, in accents worthy of an irate Pamela.

'Do you suppose it was the last time I was serving my term in gaol that I read our favourite novels?' he asked.

By this time Morin had passed out of the door to put on his snow-shoes, and Courthope, who had swallowed only as much food as was necessary to keep him from starvation, turned out to repeat the process of putting on his, this time more deftly.

Morin had a toboggan upon which were piled such necessaries as Madge had collected. They began their march three abreast into the storm.

They went a long way without conversation, and yet Courthope found in this march keen enjoyment. His heart was absurdly light. To have performed so considerable a service for Madge, now to be walking beside her on an errand of mercy, was as much joy as the present hour could hold. [Pg 357]

It was difficult for him to keep up with the others, yet in doing so there was the pleasure of the athlete in having acquired a new mastery over his muscles; and the fascination of being at home in the snow as a sea-bird is at home in the surf, which is the chief element of delight in all winter sports, was his for the first time. With the drunken wretch who was almost frozen he felt small sympathy, but he had the sense that all modern men have on such occasions, that he ought to be concerned, which kept him grave.

The other two were not light-hearted. Morin, dragging the toboggan behind him and walking with his grey head bent forward to the gale, was sullen at being driven in the service of thieves; afraid lest some sinister design was still intended, he cast constant glances of cunning suspicion at Courthope. As for Madge, she appeared grave and pre-occupied beyond all that was natural to her, suffering, he feared, from the pain of her first disillusionment. This was a suffering that he was hardly in a position to take seriously, and yet his heart yearned over her. He thought also that she was pondering over the problem of her next responsibility, and the evidence of this came sooner than he had expected. [Pg 358]

When they got to the place where his first track diverged straight to the shed, she and Morin stopped to exchange remarks; they evidently perceived in this the clearest evidence of all against him. Had he not gone straight to the place where the accomplice had agreed to wait? Then Madge fell back a little to where he was now plodding in the rear. She accosted him in the soft tones that had from the first so charmed him, contrasting with her sister's voice as the tones of a reed-pipe contrast with those from metal, or as the full voice of the cuckoo with the shrill chirp of the sparrow. The soft voice was very serious, the manner more than sedate, the words studied.

'I am afraid that nothing that I can say will persuade you to alter a way of life which you seem to have chosen, but it seems to me very sad that one of your ability should so degrade himself.'

She stopped with a little gasp for breath, as if frightened at her own audacity. Her manner and phrases were an evident imitation of the way in which she had heard advice bestowed upon vagrant or criminal by the benevolent judge whose memory she so tenderly cherished. It was second nature to her to act as she fancied he would have acted. Courthope composed himself to receive the judicial admonition with becoming humility; his whole sympathy was with her, his mind was aglow with the quaint humour of it.

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'You must know,' rebuked Madge, 'how very wrong it is; and it is not possible that you could have difficulty in getting some honest employment.'

'It is very kind of you to interest yourself in me.' He kept his eyes upon the ground.

'I do not know, of course, what led you to begin a life of crime, or in what way you found out what houses in this country were worth robbing, but I fear you must have led a wicked life for a long time' (she was very severe now). 'You are young yet; why should you carry on your nefarious schemes in a new country, where, if you would, you could easily reform?' (Again a little gasp for breath.) 'I have promised to let you go without giving you into the hands of the law. I am afraid I did a selfish and weak thing, because others may suffer from your crimes, and I wish you could take this opportunity, which my leniency gives you, and try to reform before you have lost your reputation as well as your character.'

'It is very kind of you,' he murmured again; and still as he walked he looked upon his feet. He had no thought now of again denying his guilt; having denied and, as she thought, confessed, he felt that to change once more would only evoke her greater scorn. 'Let be,' his heart said. 'Let come what will, I will not confuse her further to-day.'

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CHAPTER VI

They passed the shed, making a straight march, as swift as might be, for the fallen man; but before they reached him they saw some one coming, a black, increasing form in the snowy distance. Morin hesitated. If the thief had arisen, strong and able-bodied, it was clear that they had again been tricked for an evil purpose. Even Madge looked alarmed, and they both raised a halloo in the *patois* of the region. The answer that came across the reach of the storm cheered them.

The new-comer, a messenger from the nearest village, became voluble as soon as he was within speaking distance. He addressed Madge in broken English, but so quickly and with so strong a French accent that Courthope only gathered part of his errand. He had come, it seemed, from the stepmother to tell something concerning a certain Xavier, who had been sent to them the evening before. Before he had finished calling, Madge and Morin had come to the place where the thief lay, and, looking down upon him, Madge gave a little cry.

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The new-comer came up. He looked as if he might be of the grade of a notary's clerk or a country chemist. He did not seem surprised to see who the man was. He began at once with great activity to chafe his hands and face with handfuls of the snow. Madge and Morin were also active with the restoratives. The thief was lifted and laid upon the toboggan. They trod the snow all about to know that nothing remained, and found only a corkless flask containing a few drops of rum. They were all so busy that Courthope had little to do; he stood aside, wondering above all at the way they rubbed the man with the snow, and at the astonishment that Madge expressed. The stranger was very nimble and very talkative; pouring out words now in French to Madge, he walked with her in all haste to the shed from which the horse again whinnied. Morin, awakening to a sense of urgency, started at a trot, dragging the toboggan behind him; it sank heavily in snow so light. Courthope lent a hand to the loop of rope by which it was drawn. He too essayed the trot of the Canadian. He was growing proficient, and if he did not succeed in keeping up the running pace, he managed to go more quickly than before. They made fair progress. Looking back, Courthope saw Madge and the stranger emerge upon the road with the little horse. He had not time to look back often to see how they helped it to make its way. They were still some distance behind when he and Morin reached the house.

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The man called Xavier was carried into the kitchen amid wild exclamations from the Morin women. As they all continued the work of restoring him with a hearty goodwill and an experience of which Courthope could not boast, he was glad to betake himself to his own room, wondering whether he was now a thief or a gentleman in the eyes of this small snow-bound world. There was, in any case, no one at leisure to prohibit him from making free with his own possessions.

When he was dressed a certain shyness prohibited him from entering the dining-room in which he heard Madge, Eliz, and the stranger talking French together. He betook himself to the library, to the *Letters of the Portuguese Nun* and an easy-chair. They might oust him with severity, but it was as well to enjoy a short interval of luxury. The room was warmed with a stove; the book was in the old-fashioned type; an almost sleepless night was behind him; soon he slept.

It was almost midday when he slept; the afternoon was advancing when he awakened. Madam Morin was standing beside him arranging a tray of food upon the table.

'Eh!' she said, and smiled upon him.

Then she pointed to the food, and demanded in pantomime if it suited him. Courthope concluded that he had ceased to be in disgrace. He would rather, much rather, have been summoned to a family meal, but that was not his lot. He had taken many things philosophically in the course of recent hours, and he took this also. What right had he to intrude himself? He ate his meal alone. His roving glance soon brought him pleasure, for he found that some one had tip-toed into the room while he slept and laid the choicest volumes of romance near his chair.

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The wind had dropped, the snow had ceased falling. Before Courthope had finished his luncheon the young man who looked like a notary's clerk came in, using his broken English. He remarked that the storm was over and that they were now going to get out a double team to plough through the road. He suggested that Courthope should help him to drive it, and to transport the prisoner to the gaol in the village. One man must be left to protect the young ladies and the house; one man must help him with the team and its burden. The speaker shrugged his shoulders, suggesting that it would be more suitable for Morin to remain, and said that for his part he would be much obliged and honoured if Courthope would accompany him. Here some plain and easy compliments were thrown in about Courthope's strength and the generous activity he had displayed, but not a word concerning his temporary disgrace; if this man knew of it he did not regard it as of any importance.

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He was a matter-of-fact young man, not much interested in Courthope as a stranger, immensely interested in the fact of the theft and all that concerned it. At the slightest question he poured out excited information. Xavier had been a servant in the house. Mrs. King, who was religious and zealous, had found in him a convert. He had become a Protestant to please her. (At this point the narrator shrugged his shoulders again.) Then Xavier had asked higher wages; upon that there was a quarrel, and he had left.

The speaker's scanty English was of the simplest. He said, 'Xavier is a very bad man, much worse than our people usually are. This winter he went to the city and got his wits sharpened, and when he came back he made a scheme. He sent word to Mrs. King that his old father was dying and would like to be converted too. Mrs. King travels at once with a horse and the strongest servant-man. The old father takes a long time to die, so Xavier comes here yesterday to say she will stay all night; but when he did not come back, his wife she got frightened, and she told that the old man was not going to die, that she was afraid there was a scheme. Now we have Xavier very safe. He may get five years.'

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Upon Courthope's inquiring after the health of the thief, he was told that beyond being severely frost-bitten he was little the worse. He was again drunk with the stimulants that the Morins had poured down his throat. The visitor ended the interview by saying that if Courthope would be good enough to drive the team through the drifts his own horse and sleigh would be sent after him the next day. Courthope inquired what was the wish of the young mistress of the house. The other replied that mademoiselle approved of his plan. It was evident that poor Madge was no longer the mistress; the clerk was an emissary of Mrs. King's, and as such he had taken the control. Still, as he was an amiable and capable person, Courthope fell in with his suggestion, inwardly vowing that soon of some domain, if not of this one, Madge should again be queen.

Courthope received a message to the effect that the young ladies wished to see him. There was something in the formal wording of this message, coming after his solitary meal, which made him know that they were ill at ease, that they had taken their mistake more deeply to heart than he would have wished. He had no sooner entered the room where Madge stood than he wished he were well out of it again, so far did his sympathy with her discomfort transcend his own pleasure at being in her presence.

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Madge stood, as upon the first night, behind her sister's chair. Eliz looked frightened and excited, yet as half enjoying the novel excitement. Madge, pale-faced and distressed, showed only too plainly that she had need of all the courage she possessed to lift her eyes to his. Yet she was not going to shirk her duty; she was going to make her apology, and the apology of the household, just as the judge, her father, would have wished to have it made.

It was a little speech, conned beforehand, which she spoke—a quaint mixture of her own girlish wording and the formal phrases which she felt the occasion demanded. Courthope never knew precisely what she said. His feelings were up and in tumult, like the winds on a gusty day, and he was embarrassed for her embarrassment, while he smiled for the very joy of it all.

Madge confessed with grief that Eliz had mistaken Xavier for Courthope. She said the man from the village had shown them what folly it was to suppose that the gentleman could be Xavier's accomplice. She begged that same gentleman's pardon very humbly. At the end he heard some words faltered: she wished it was in their power 'to make any amends.'

Almost before she ceased speaking he took up the word, and his own voice sounded to him merry and bold in comparison with her soft distressful speech; but he could not help that, he must speak with such powers as nature gave him.

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'There are two ways by which you can make amends, and first I would beg that none of our friends who were here last night should be told of it. I should not like to think that Emma and Elizabeth, and Evelina or Marianna Alcoforado should ever hear that I was taken for a thief.'

'You are laughing at us,' said Eliz sharply. 'We know that you will go away and make fun of us to all your friends.'

'If I do you will have one way of punishing me that would give me more pain than I could well endure, you can shut me out next time I come to ask for shelter.'

'Oh, but you can't come again,' said Eliz, with vibrating note of fierce discontent; 'our stepmother will be here.'

He looked at Madge.

'I was going to say that the other way in which you could make amends would be to give me leave to come back; and if *you* give me leave I will come, even if it be necessary, to that end, to get an introduction from all the clergy in Great Britain, or from the Royal Family.'

A ray of hope shot into Madge's dark eyes, the first glimmer of a smile began to show through her distress.

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'It is an old adage that "where there is a will there is a way," and did I not walk on your most impossible snow-shoes and bring back your silver?'

Madge looked down, a pretty red began to mantle her pale face, and, as if the angels who manage the winds and clouds did not wish that the blush of so dear a maiden should betray too much, a ray of scarlet light from the sinking sun just then came winging through the dispersing storm-clouds and caused all the white snow-world to redden, and dyed the frost-flowers on the window-pane, and, entering where the pane was bare, lit all the room with soft vermilion light. So, in the wondrous blush of the white world, the girl's cheeks glowed and yet did not confess too much.

'You will allow me to send in your compliments and inquire after Mr. Woodhouse as I pass?' This was Courthope's farewell to Eliz, and she called joyfully in reply:—

'You need not send back his message, for we shall know that they are "all very indifferent."'

Into the scarlet shining of the western sun, an omen of fair weather and delight, Courthope set forth again from the square tin-roofed house, 'leaving,' as the saying is, 'his heart behind him.' The large farm-horses, restive from long confinement and stimulated by the frost, shook their bells with energy. The Morin women displayed such goodwill and even tenderness in their attentions to the comfort of the second prisoner, in whom they had found an old friend, that, tied in a blanket and lying full length on the straw of a box-sleigh, he looked content with himself and the world, albeit he had not as yet returned from the happy roving-places of the drunken brain. The talkative clerk was glad enough to give Courthope the reins of the masterful horses; he sat on one edge of the blue-painted box and Courthope on the other; thus they started, bravely plunging into the drifts between the poplars. The drifts were all tinged with pink; the poplars, intercepting the red light upon their slender upright boughs, cast, each of them, a clear shadow that seemed to lie in endless length athwart the glowing sward.

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Courthope looked back at the house which had been so dim and phantom-like the night before; the red sun lit the icicles that hung from eaves and lintels, tinged the drifts, glowed upon the windows as if with light from within, and turned the steep tin roof into a gigantic rose; but all his glance was centred upon his lady-love, who stood, regardless of the cold, at the entrance of the drift-encircled porch and watched them as long as the sunlight lay upon the land. Was she looking at the plunging sleigh and at its driver, or at the chasms of light in the rent cloud beyond? His heart told him, as he drove on into the very midst of the sunset which had embraced the glistening land, that the maid, although not regardless of the outer glory, only rejoiced in its beauty because the vision of her heart was focused upon him. His heart, in telling him this, taught him no pride, for had he not learned in the same small space of time only to count himself rich in what she gave?

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Slow was the progress of the great horses; they passed the grove of high elms and birches that, dressed in the snowflakes that had lodged in boughs and branches when the wind dropped, stood up clear against the gulfs of blue that now opened above and beyond. Then the house was hidden, and after that, by degrees, the light of the sunset passed away.

THE END.

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