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ROBERT ORANGE

BEING A CONTINUATION OF THE
HISTORY OF ROBERT ORANGE, M.P.

AND A SEQUEL TO THE
SCHOOL FOR SAINTS

By
John Oliver Hobbes

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CHAPTER I

[1]

One afternoon during the first weeks of October, 1869, while wind, dust, and rain were struggling each for supremacy in the streets, a small yellow brougham, swung in the old-fashioned style on cumbersome springs and attached to a pair of fine greys, was standing before the Earl of Garrow's town residence in St. James's Square. The hall clock within that mansion chimed four, the great doors were thrown open by two footmen, and a young lady wearing a mauve silk skirt deeply flounced, a black cloth jacket embroidered in gold, and a mauve hat trimmed with plumes—appeared upon the threshold. She paused for a moment to admire the shrubs arranged in boxes on each window-sill, the crimson vines that brightened the grey walls; to criticise the fresh brown rosette under the near horse's ear; to bestow a swift glance upon the harness, the coachman's livery, and the groom's boots. Then she stepped into the carriage and gave her order—

“To the Carlton Club.”

The groom climbed on to his seat, and the horses, after a brilliant display of their well-disciplined mettle, suffered themselves to be driven, at an easy pace, toward Pall Mall.

[2]

Lady Sara-Louise-Tatiana-Valérie De Treverell, only child of the ninth Earl of Garrow, had been, since her mother's death, the mistress of his house and his chief companion. Essentially a woman of emotions, she was, nevertheless, in appearance somewhat dreamy, romantic, even spiritual. The eyes were blue, bright as a cut sapphire, and shone, as it were, through tears. Her mouth, uneven in its line, had a scarlet eloquence more pleasing than sculpturesque severity. At the moment, she wore no gloves, and her tapering fingers shared their characteristic with her nose, which also tapered, with exquisite lightness of mould, into a point. For colour, she had a gypsy's red and brown. The string of gold beads which she fastened habitually round her throat showed well against the warm tints in her cheek; her long pearl earrings caught in certain lights the dark shadow of her hair—hair black, abundant, and elaborately dressed in the fashion of that time. Passionate yet calculating, imperious yet susceptible of control, generous yet given to suspicion,

an egoist yet capable of self-abandoning enthusiasm—she represented a type of feminine character often recognised but rarely understood.

On this particular afternoon in October she had some pressing matters on her mind. She was considering, among other things, an offer of marriage which she had received by post two days before from a nobleman of great fortune, the Duke of Marshire. But Sara was ambitious—not mercenary. She wanted power. Power, unhappily, was the last thing one could associate with the estimable personality of the suitor under deliberation. [3]

"I must tell papa," she said to herself, "that it would never do."

Here she fell into a reverie; but as her expression changed from one of annoyance to something of wistfulness and sentimentality, the question of marriage with the Duke of Marshire had clearly been dismissed for that moment from her heart. At intervals a shy smile gave an almost childish tenderness to her face. Then, on a sudden, her eyelashes would droop, she would start with a sigh, and, apparently caught by some unwelcome remembrance, sink into a humour as melancholy as it was mysterious. Quiet she sat, absorbed in her own emotions, heedless alike of the streets through which she was passing and the many acquaintances who bowed as she drove by. It was her daily custom, when in town, to call at the Carlton Club for her father and take him for a short drive round the Park before his tea. To-day he was already waiting on the club steps as the brougham halted before the entrance. He smiled, joined Lady Sara at once, and seating himself by her side in his usual corner, maintained his usual imperturbable reserve. As a rule, during these excursions he would either doze, or jot down ideas in his note-book, or hum one of the few songs he cared to hear: "Go tell Augusta, gentle swain," "Revenge, revenge, Timotheus cries," and "She wore a wreath of roses." This time, however, he did neither of these things, but watched the reflection of his daughter's face in the carriage window before him. He had white hair, a dyed moustache and a small imperial—also dyed the deepest black—just under the lower lip. In appearance he was, spite of the false touches, good-looking, sensitive, and perhaps too mild. The cleft in his rounded chin was the sole mark of decision in a countenance whose features were curved—wherever a curve was possible—to a degree approaching caricature. Temples, eyebrows, nostrils, and moustache, all described a series of semi-circles which, accentuated by a livid complexion and curling hair, presented an effect somewhat commonplace and a little tiresome. He had spent his existence among beings to whom nothing seemed natural which did not depart most earnestly from all that nature is and teaches: he had always endeavoured to maintain the ideal of a Christian gentleman where, as a matter of fact, Christianity was understood rather as a good manner than a faith, and ideals were prejudices of race rather than aspirations of the soul. Well-born, well-bred, and moderately learned, he was not, and could never be, more than dull or less than dignified. The second son of his father, he had spent the customary years of idleness at Eton and Oxford, he had journeyed through France, Italy, and Spain, contested unsuccessfully a seat in Mertford, and thought of reading for the Bar. But at four-and-thirty he became, through the influence of his mother's family, groom-in-waiting to the Queen—a post which he held till his elder brother's death, which occurred six months later. At this point his Court career ceased. A weak heart and a constitutional dislike of responsibility assisted him in his firm decision to lead the life of a country nobleman. He retired to his estate, and remained there in solitude, troubling no one except his agent, till a Russian lady, whom he had first met and loved during his early travels on the Continent, happened to come visiting in the neighbourhood. As the daughter of a Russian Prince and Ambassador, she had considered her rank superior to Lord Garrow's, and therefore felt justified, as she informed her relations after he had succeeded to the earldom, in making the first advance toward their common happiness. The marriage was soon arranged; the alliance proved successful if not always serene; one child—Sara-Louise-Tatiana-Valérie—was born, an event which was followed, nine days later, by the death of the Countess. [4]

Lord Garrow, a man of refined ideas rather than profound feelings, displayed in mourning his wife's loss the same gentle, dispassionate, and courteous persistency with which he had remained constant to his first impression of her charms. She had been a beautiful, high-hearted girl; she became a fascinating but wayward woman; she died a creature of such mingled ferocity and sentiment that, had she not perished when she did, she must have existed in misery under the storms of her own temperament. As Garrow watched his daughter's face, he may have been touched to a deeper chord than usual at the sight of her strange and growing resemblance to his dead Tatiana. Did she too possess—as her mother had possessed—the sweet but calamitous gift of loving? He himself had not been the object of his wife's supreme devotion. Before the child's birth she had given him an emerald ring which, she declared, was all that she valued on earth. It was no gift of his; it had belonged to a young attaché to her father's embassy. Affection had taught Lord Garrow something; he asked no questions; the jewel was placed, by his orders, on her dead hand; it was buried with her, and with that burial he included any jealousy of her early romance. He had been sincerely, wholly attached to her; he had been proud of her graces and accomplishments; he knew her virtue and honoured her pure mind; she was the one woman he had ever wished to marry. He did not regret, nay, it was impossible to regret, their marriage. But she had been ever an alien and a stranger. Each had too often considered the other's heart with surprise. True love must rest on a perfect understanding; at the first lifting of the eyes in wonder there is a jar which by and by must make the whole emotion restless. An unconquerable curiosity lay at the very root of their lives. She thought him English and self-sufficient; he thought her foreign and a little superstitious. This ineffable criticism was constant, fretful, and ever nearing the climax of uttered reproach. Sara had inherited all the amazement, but she owned, as well, its comprehension. She adored passionately the mother she had never seen; she loved her father, [5]

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whom she knew by heart. After exchanging an affectionate glance with his lordship, she began to draw on her gloves. Whilst buttoning one she said—

“Have you seen him?”

“No,” he replied; “but, in any case, I think he would have avoided me to-day.”

“Why?”

“From motives of delicacy. Henry Marshire is a man of the nicest feeling. He is never guilty of the least mistake.”

Sara smiled, and so disguised a blush.

“I did not mean Marshire,” she said. “I was thinking then of Robert Orange.”

“Robert Orange,” exclaimed Lord Garrow in astonishment.

“Yes, dear papa. Is he not sometimes at the Carlton with Lord Wight? He seems to me a coming man; and so good-looking. We must really ask him to dinner.”

Some minutes elapsed before the Earl could utter any comment on a suggestion so surprising, and at that particular moment so inconsequent. Was his daughter not weighing—with prayer, he hoped, and certainly with all her senses—the prospect of an alliance with the Duke of Marshire? How, then, could she pause in a meditation of such vital interest to make capricious remarks about a mere acquaintance? [8]

“Does Marshire know him?” he asked at last.

“I hope so. He is a remarkable person. But the party is blind.”

“My dear, the English are an aristocratic people. They do not forgive mysterious blood and ungentle origins. While we have our Howards, our Talbots, and our Poulets—to say nothing of the De Courcys and Cliftons—it would surely seem excessively absurd to endure the intrusion of French *émigrés* into our midst.”

“How I hate the great world!” exclaimed Sara, with vehemence; “how I dislike the class which ambition, wealth, and pride separate from the rest of humanity! My only happiness now is found in solitude.”

“Your mother, dear Sara, had—or fancied so—this same desire to shun companionship and be alone. Her delicate health after our marriage made her fear society.”

“There are days when it seems an arena of wild beasts!”

“Nevertheless, my darling, at your age you must learn to live among your fellow creatures.” [9]

“How can I live where I should be afraid to die?”

“Ought you to give way to these moods? Is it not mistaking the imagination for the soul? Young people do this, and you are very young—but two-and-twenty.”

“I am double-hearted,” said Sara; “and when one is double-hearted the tongue must utter contradictions. I like my advantages while I despise them. I wish to be thought exclusive, yet I condemn the pettiness of my ambition. And so on.”

“I fear,” said Lord Garrow gravely, “that your mind is disturbed by a question which you must soon—very soon, my dearest child—answer.”

“Papa, I cannot.”

“Surely you will gratify me so far as to take time before you object to what might possibly be most desirable.”

“It may be desirable enough, but is it right?”

“Right,” repeated her father, with exasperation. “How could it be otherwise than right to marry a man of Marshire's position, means, stamp, and general fitness? You would be in possession of a station where your interest would be as independent as your spirit. Nothing could have been more brilliant, or flattering, or more cordial than his offer. I argue against my natural selfishness for your welfare. I don't wish to part with you, but I must consider your future.”

He spoke with energy, and Sara knew, from the length and substance of the speech, that the subject had been for some time very near his heart. She resolved, on the instant, not to fail him; but as she foresaw his crowning satisfaction, she permitted herself the luxury of prolonging his suspense. [10]

“I do not love him,” said she.

“In marriage one does not require an unconquerable love but an invincible sympathy.”

“An invincible sympathy!” she exclaimed. “I have had that for certain friends—for one or two, at any rate. For Robert Orange, as an example.”

“That man again? Why do you dwell upon him?”

"He is interesting, he has force, and, as for origin, do people ever repeat pleasant facts about a neighbour's pedigree? I believe that his family is every bit as good as ours. His second name is de Hausée. No one can pretend that we are even so good as a genuine de Hausée. We may make ourselves ridiculous!"

"Let me entreat you to guard against these inequalities in your character. To-day I could even accuse you of levity. Dearest Sara, Marshire is hardly the man to be kept waiting for his reply."

"I am not well," said Sara, almost in tears. "There are hours when I would not give my especial blessings for any other earthly happiness, and then, a moment after, the things which pleased me most become vexations, all but intolerable!"

"How little importance, then, should we attach to our caprices, when we know, by experience, how short is the pleasure and displeasure they can give," was the careful reply. [11]

"Caprices!" said Sara, "yes, you are right. My mind gets weary, disgusted, and dismayed. But the soul is never bored—never tired. Poor prisoner! It has so few opportunities."

She sighed deeply, and her father saw, with distress, the approach of a sentimental mood which he deplored as un-English, and feared as unmanageable.

"What is this languor, this inability to rouse myself, to feel the least interest in things or people?" she continued. "I am not ill, and yet I have scarcely the strength to regret my lassitude."

"What does it mean?"

He put his hand upon her jacket sleeve.

"Is this warm enough?" he said. "The autumn is treacherous. You are careful, I hope."

She glanced out of the window and up at the clouds which, grey, heavy, and impenetrable, moved, darkening all things as they went across the sky.

"I wish it would rain! I like to be out when it rains!"

"A strange fancy," said her father, "but tastes, even odd ones, give a charm to life, whereas passions—" he put some stress upon the word and repeated it, "passions destroy it."

"Marshire, at any rate, does not seem to possess either!" [12]

"Well, a man must begin at some point, and, at some point, he must change. He admires and respects you, my darling, so we may hardly quarrel with his judgment."

Sara shrugged her shoulders and turned her glance away from the few carriages filled with invalids or elderly women which were still lingering in the Row.

"Some people," said she, "are driven by their passions, others, the smaller number, by their virtues. Marshire has asked me to marry him because it is his duty to choose a wife from his own circle. I have no illusions in the matter. Nor, I fancy, has he. We have talked, of course, of love and Platonism till both love and Platonism became a weariness!"

"Very far indeed am I from thinking you just. I have had an extremely kind note from the Duchess."

"An old tyrant! She wants a daughter-in-law who will play piquet with her in the evenings, and feed her peacocks in the morning. She is tired of poor Miss Wilmington. An old tyrant!"

"She hopes to hear soon when the marriage is to take place. I wish I could tell her the day. I do so long to have it fixed."

"Dear papa," she said, with a charming smile, "you are anxious, I see, to be rid of me. I will write to him to-night."

"And to what effect?"

"The wisest." [13]

"That means the happiest, too?" he asked with anxiety.

"For you and him, I hope. As for me—am I a woman who could, by any chance, be both happy and wise at the same moment?"

Her existence was very solitary. The flippancy of the lives around her, the inanity of her relatives' pursuits, their heedlessness of those inner qualities which make the real—indeed, the only considerable difference between man and man, could but fret, and mortify, and abash a heart which, in the absence of any religious faith, had, at any rate, the need of it. Her father, who entertained clear views of "the right thing" and "the wrong thing" in social ethics, was still too rigid a formalist in the exposition of his theories to reach an intelligence with whom the desire of virtues would have to come as a passion—inspiring and inspired or else be utterly repudiated. Utilitarianism, and the greatest happiness of the greatest number, comfortable domestic axioms, little schemes for the elevation of the masses by the classes, had, on their logical basis, no attraction for this sceptical, wayward girl. To be merely useful was, in her eyes, to make oneself meddlesome and absurd. The object of existence was to be heroic or nothing. She could imagine herself a Poor Clare: she could not imagine herself as a great young lady dividing her hours

judiciously between district visiting and the ball-room, between the conquest of eligible bachelors and the salvation of vulgar souls. Marshire, she knew, had sisters and cousins who did these things and were considered patterns. No wonder then that she turned pale and became fretful at the prospect of her views clashing inevitably with his.

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"I cannot be wise and happy at the same moment," she repeated.

At that instant the carriage, which was then rolling toward Hyde Park Corner, came to an abrupt standstill, and, on looking out, Lord Garrow observed that the coachman had halted in obedience to a signal from a gentleman who was galloping, at a hard pace, after their brougham.

"It must be Reckage," said the Earl; "I never knew a man so fond of riding who rode so ill."

"What, I wonder, does he want now?" said Sara, flushing a little. "I didn't know that he was in town."

By that time the pursuer, a handsome man with an auburn beard and very fine blue eyes, had reached them.

"This," he shouted, "is a rushing beast of a horse;" but, before he could explain his errand, the hunter, who was nearly quite thoroughbred and a magnificent animal, dashed on, evidently determined to gain, without delay, some favourite destination.

"Extraordinary!" said Lord Garrow. "Extraordinary!"

"But so like him," observed his daughter.

"And he has made us late for tea. What a stupid fellow!"

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It was exactly five minutes past five when they reached St. James's Square. The sun, a globe, set in thin lines of yellow light, shone out above the trees, which were dull but not yet leafless. Grey and sulphurous and gold-edged clouds floated in masses on the blue sky. It had been a day of changes—yet it seemed to Sara, whose own moods had been as various, the ordinary passing away of time.

"Upon my word," said his lordship, "it is too bad! They may say what they please about Reckage, but I call him a spooney. That horse was a noble horse—a most superior horse. He couldn't manage him. I wish he would sell him."

"He would never do anything so much to his own advantage," was the dry response. "Poor Reckage is a brilliant fool—he's selfish, and therefore he miscalculates."

Sara was now talking mechanically—as she often did when she was with those whom she loved or liked, but from whom she was separated in every thought, interest, and emotion. The lassitude of which she had complained at the beginning of their drive returned upon her. Sighing heavily, she entered the house and mounted the long staircase to the drawing-room, where the tea-table was already spread, the flame quivering under the kettle, the deep pink china laid out on a silver tray. But the homeliness of the scene and its familiarity had no power to soothe that aching, distracted heart. Had she been a man, she thought, she might have sought her refuge in ceaseless work, in great ambitions, in achievements. This eternal tea-pouring and word-mincing, this business of forced laughter and garlanded conversation was more than she could endure. A low cry of impatience, too long and also too loosely imprisoned, escaped from her lips.

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"What is the matter?" asked Lord Garrow, who was following close upon her heels.

"Life," she said, "life! That is all that ever does matter."

"Ain't you happy?"

"No, but I have it in me to be happy—an appalling capability. Let us say no more about it. I must join myself to eternity, and so find rest."

"Well," said her father, who now felt that he had a right to complain, "my poor uncle used to say, if women deserved happiness they would bear it better. Few of them bear it well—and this is a fact I have often brought before me."

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CHAPTER II

When Sara had prepared Lord Garrow's tea and cut the leaves of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, which he invariably read until he dressed for dinner, she stole away to the further room, where she could play the piano, write letters, muse over novels, or indulge in reverie without fear of interruption. But as she entered it that afternoon its air of peace seemed the bleakness of desolation. A terrible and afflicting grief swept, like an icy breeze, through her heart, and, whether from actual physical pain or the excitement of the last few hours, tears started to her eyes, her cheeks flushed, and she fell to passionate weeping. The smiling Nymphs painted on the ceiling above her head and the rose leaves they were for ever scattering to the dancing Hours (a charming group, and considered very cheerful), could not relieve her woe. She cried long and bitterly, and was on the verge of hysterics when the door opened and her most intimate woman

friend, the Viscountess Fitz Rewes, was announced. This bewitching creature—who was a widow, with two long flaxen curls, a sweet figure, and the smile of an angel—embraced her dear, dear Sara with genuine affection, and pretended not to see her swollen eyelids. Sara possessed for Pensée Fitz Rewes the fascination of a desperate nature for a meek one. The audacity, brilliancy, and recklessness of the younger woman at once stimulated and established the other's gentle piety.

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They talked for fifteen minutes about the autumn visits they had paid, the visits they would have to pay, and the visits which nothing in the world would induce them to pay.

"I have been at home, at Catesby, most of the time," said Pensée; "a very quiet, happyish time, on the whole. I had a few people down, but I saw a great deal of a particularly nice person. She is a foreigner—an archduchess really. Her father made a morganatic marriage. I am so glad they don't have morganatic marriages in England. I don't like to be uncharitable, but they seem, in a way, so improper. Madame de Parflete is all one could wish. Her husband was a dreadful man."

"What did he do?" said Sara, who was a little absent.

"Oh, all kinds of things. He committed suicide in the end. And now—she is going to marry a friend of mine."

"Who is he?"

"I never told you about him before," said Pensée, "but I am so miserable to-day that you may as well know. He was a sort of brother, yet much more. One didn't meet him often in our set, because he didn't and doesn't care about it. Life, however, threw us together."

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She covered her wan face with her hands.

"How am I to give him up?" she asked. "How shall I bear it? I get so unhappy. I asked my little boy the other day what he did when I went away from home. He said—'I gather chestnuts and feel lonely.' And I asked my little girl what she did, and she said—'I cry till you come back again.' There's the difference between men and women. I am like my poor Lilian. You, Sara, if you could be wretched, would be more like the boy."

"Do you think so?" said Sara.

"That wonderful passage in the New Testament—I often remember it! After all the agony and separation were over, Simon Peter said to the disciples, *I go a fishing*. He went back to the work he was doing when our Lord first called him. What courage!"

"Go on," said Sara, "go on!"

"Of course, my heart has been taking an undue complacency in the creature, and this seldom fails to injure. I have a wish to be free from distress, and enjoy life. As if we were born to be happy! No, this world is a school to discipline souls and fit them for the other. I must forget my friend."

"Nonsense!"

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"It will be very hard. I took such an interest in his career. If I didn't mention him to you, or to other people, I mentioned him often to God. And now—it is somewhat awkward."

"You little goose," said Sara, "you have a heart of crystal. Nothing could be awkward for you."

"My heart," said Pensée, with a touch of resentment, "is just as dangerous and wicked as any other heart! You misunderstand me wilfully. I like prayer at all times, because it is a help and because it lifts one out of the world. Oh, when shall every thought be brought into captivity?"

"Listen!" said Sara, "listen! If there is an attractiveness in human beings so lovely that it could call your Almighty God Himself from heaven to dwell among them and to die most cruelly for their sakes, is it to be expected that they will not—and who will dare say that they should not?—as mortals themselves, discover qualities in each other which draw out the deepest affection? I have no patience with your religion—none."

"You are most unkind, and I won't tell you any more," replied Pensée, who looked, however, not ungrateful for Sara's view of the situation.

"Let me tell you something about me," said her friend fiercely. "I never say my prayers, because I cannot say them, but I love somebody, too. Whenever I hear his name I could faint. When I see him I could sink into the ground. At the sight of his handwriting I grow cold from head to foot, I tremble, my heart aches so that it seems breaking in two. I long to be with him, yet when I am with him I have nothing to say. I have to escape and be miserable all alone. He is my thought all day: the last before I sleep, the first when I awake. I could cry and cry and cry. I try to read, and I remember not a word. I like playing best, for then I can almost imagine that he is listening. But when I stop playing and look round, I find myself in an empty room. It is awful. I call his name; no one answers. I whisper it; still no answer. I throw myself on the ground, and I say, 'Think of me! think of me! you shall, you must, you do think of me!' It is great torture and a great despair. Perhaps it is a madness too. But it is my way of loving. I want to live while I live. If I knew for certain that he loved me—me only—the joy, I think, would kill me. Love! Do you know, poor little angel, what it means? Sometimes it is a curse."

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Pensée, before this torrent, was shaking like some small flower in a violent gale.

"You say things, Sara, that no one says—things that one ought not to say. You must be quieter. You won't be happy when you are married if you begin with so much feeling!"

"I am not going to marry that one," said Sara bitterly. "I am going to marry Marshire."

Lady Fitz Rewes had too delicate a face to contain any expression of the alarm and horror she felt at this statement. She frowned, bit her lips, and sank back in her chair. What stroke of fate, she wondered, had overtaken the poor girl? Was she sane? Was she herself? Pensée found some relief in the thought that Sara was not herself—a state into which most people are presumed to fall whenever, from stress or emotion, they become either strictly candid or perfectly natural. [22]

"It is a fancy. Fancies are in my blood," said Sara; "you need not be anxious."

"But—but what feeling have you for Marshire?" murmured Pensée.

"I have a faint inclination not to dislike him utterly. And I will be a good wife to him. If I say so, I shall keep my word. You may be sure of that."

"I could never doubt your honour, Sara. Is the other man quite, quite out of the question?"

"Quite."

"But perhaps he does love you."

"Oh no, he doesn't. He may think me picturesque and rather entertaining. It never went deeper than that. I saw at once that his mind was fixed on some other woman."

"I suppose one can always tell when a man's affections are really engaged," said Pensée, with a sigh.

"Yes, beyond any doubt. You feel that they are comparing you at every point, in a silent, cold-blooded way, to the bright particular star. I envy you, Pensée; you, at least, were desperately loved by Lionel. But I—never, never was loved—except once." [23]

"Who was he?"

"He was a Russian, very good-looking, and a genius. But oh, I wasn't old enough to understand him. When he died, I cried for half a day and seven nights. And after that, not a tear. You see, I didn't understand myself either."

"Do I know this other one ... the one, now?"

"I won't tell you his name. Perhaps, another time, when we are all very old ... and he is dead ... or I am dying..."

"Oh, don't say that!" exclaimed Pensée, "don't say that! You are making a lot of misery for yourself."

"Not at all. I am making the most of my one saving grace. There is nothing very nice about me—except that. And he is a man. The only real one among all our friends—the only one for whom I have the least respect. If any woman had his love—how sure, how happy she could be! I could work, and starve, and lay down my life for a man like that. If he had loved me, I think I could have been almost a good woman, a downright good one, a Saint Elizabeth of Hungary. But you see that wasn't to be. And so I am just this—" She looked in the glass and pointed a white finger, loaded with rings of black pearls, at her reflection. "I am just this—a vain, idle fool like all the rest—except you, poor darling." [24]

"Why don't you keep up your music?—your wonderful playing? Every one says it is so wonderful. That's a great outlet for emotion. And your languages—why not work an hour a day each at Italian, Spanish, German, and French? That would kill four hours of the day straight off!"

"Bah!" said Sara, "I cannot play—unless there is some one to play for. As for languages—I cannot talk alone. And as for reading—I cannot find all my world between the covers of a book."

"But live for others, dear Sara."

"I want to live for myself. I have one inseparable companion—that is myself. I want to suffer my own sufferings, and enjoy my own enjoyments. This living for others is absurd. I hate second-hand emotions; they are stale and dull. But, Pensée, you haven't told me the name of your friend."

"I thought I had," said Pensée, simply; "you will see it in the marriage notice the day after tomorrow. It is Robert Orange."

Sara stared for a moment. Then the string of gold beads which she wore round her throat suddenly broke, and the shining ornaments fell all about her to the floor.

"Dear me!" said Sara, kneeling down with a ghastly laugh. Pensée knelt too, and they gathered the scattered necklace between them. "Dear me! I was never more surprised—never; and yet I cannot think why I am surprised. He is very handsome. Any woman would like him." [25]

"I wonder," said Pensée, full of thoughts.

Sara proceeded to count her beads, lest one should be missing. But they were all there, and she tied them up in her handkerchief.

"Pensée," she said, presently. "I will tell his name after all, because you have been so frank with me. The one I ... love is Beauclerk Reckage." As she uttered this lie, she cast down her eyes and blushed to the very heart.

"Beauclerk!" exclaimed Pensée, in amazement. "Then there *is* some hope after all! There is, there must be! Beauclerk! He is engaged to Agnes Carillon, of course. But all the same...."

The conversation flagged. Lord Garrow, who had heard a distant murmuring but not their words, now, as their animation failed, came in.

"My little girl," said he, "has been moping. I am very glad that you called ... very glad indeed. And Sara, my darling...."

"Yes, papa."

"Have you asked Pensée the name of that extremely pretty song she sang for us when we all dined together at Lord Wight's? You remember the evening?"

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But Sara, with a wail, fled away. Pensée caught a glimpse of her white, agonised countenance as she rushed past them, moaning, to her own room.

"This is dreadful," said Lord Garrow, horribly annoyed—"dreadful!"

"It is indeed," replied Lady Fitz Rewes gravely. "I suppose...."

She wanted to say that she hoped the Marshire-de Treverell alliance was still undecided. But something in his lordship's air—a hardness she had never thought to see in his regard—forbade any reference to the subject. He conducted her to her carriage, wished her "Goodbye" in his Court manner, and led her to understand, by an unmistakable glance, that a certain marriage which had been arranged would, inasmuch as it was entirely agreeable to the will of Providence, take place.

CHAPTER III

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Lord Reckage, in the meantime, had not been able to draw rein until he reached Grafton Street, where the hunter, of its own will, stopped short at a door, half glass and half mahogany, before which a groom stood watching, evidently with some suspense, for their approach. At the first sight of the animal and its rider, he hastened forward, and, seizing the bridle, assisted his master to dismount. Once on the ground, the young man satisfied his spleen by hitting the horse several vicious cuts with his whip. Then he informed the servant that it was his intention to walk home, and, with an ominous scowl, watched the "rushing beast" led from his sight. No one, except himself, was permitted to occupy that saddle.

The house which he now entered had been the town mansion for three generations of the Hampshires, but, despised by its then owner, whose young duchess wanted an Italian villa on Piccadilly, or a French château in Park Lane, the lease had been sold to a syndicate of rising politicians who formed a small organisation known, in those days, as the Mirafloresans.

"The little order," we read in the Hon. Hercy Berenville's Memoirs, a malicious work printed for private circulation only—"the little order first came into notice under the name of the 'Bond of Association,' a High Church society founded by my brother, Lord Reckage. He formed his executive committee, however, on timorous and unexpected lines. He had tried to please the spiteful rather than the loyal. The loyal, he urged, were always forbearing, but the spiteful needed every attention. He disappointed alike the warmest and the most selfish among his supporters. True to his policy, he made desperate attempts to win over some vindictive men from among the Radicals, and, finally, in a fit of nervousness, declared, after five months of fruitful folly, his determination to reorganise the whole league on a strictly non-sectarian basis. He described himself as a moral philosopher. Once more he became a figure of interest, again he raised the standard, again he attracted a small company of enthusiasts, again it was expected that God's enemies would be scattered. He invited his former secretary, a Roman Catholic, to join the new society, but he made it clear that Orange, a man of real distinction, was in no sense a prominent member. The precise dogmata of Mirafloresanism—a nickname given, I believe, in ironic sympathy by Mr. Disraeli—were undefined, but the term gradually became associated with those ideals of conduct, government, and Art which poets imagine, heroes realise, and the ignorant destroy. Men of all, sundry, and opposing beliefs presumed to its credentials. Some, because the club appeared to flourish, many because it was not yet overcrowded, and a few because they were in perfect agreement with the varying opinions of its ultimate presiding genius, Disraeli himself. They worked quietly, not in the House of Commons, but outside it, delivering lectures, writing books, starting newspapers, holding meetings, and enlisting the sympathies of rich, idle, ambitious, or titled women. There seemed no end or limit to the variety of their interests, their methods of labour, or their conceit. The club—judged by the leonine measure of success—as a club did little for learning or literary men. It became a mere meeting-house for dining and drinking, but it promoted cordiality among the leading members of the

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young Tory party, and brought persons together who could not, in the ordinary way of life, have met each other at all. Although the more gaudy and best known among them came from the first second-rate families in England, the rank and file were formed mainly by young men of good estate and breeding—the sons of clergy, country squires, or merchants, all sprung from that class which is called Middle, because it represents civilised society neither in its rough beginnings nor in its tawdry decay.”

Berenville's remarks, it will be plainly seen, anticipate our history a little, for, at the time of which we write, the Bond of Association was still maintaining a sickly existence on its original programme. Orange had not yet been invited to join it, nor had Lord Reckage declared himself a moral philosopher. [30]

On this particular afternoon his lordship entered, from the street, a narrow vestibule, the red walls of which were lit up by wax candles set at either end in ponderous bronze chandeliers. From this he passed into a square inner hall, paved with marble, and furnished by carved seats which had once belonged to the choir of an ancient chapel in Northumberland. Here he paused, for his attention was immediately arrested by a small group of four or five individuals who were talking with great earnestness at the foot of the oak staircase. Not that this was, in itself, an unusual event, for ever since a memorable day when the Earl of Bampton and the young Archdeacon of Soham, feeling warm, had ordered their tea to be served in that part of the building, it had been the fashion for distinguished members to assemble there, dispersing themselves in careless profusion among the statues of departed ecclesiastics or reclining pleasantly on the blue velvet divan which occupied the centre of the floor.

Foremost in the little company on this occasion stood Sir Edward Ullweather and Nigel Bradwyn, both private secretaries, and each secretly convinced that his peculiar powers would have found brilliant, volcanic opportunities of demonstration in the other's more promising berth. Ullweather, whose life had been devoted to the study of agricultural problems, was subordinate to the Secretary of State for War. Bradwyn, on the other hand, who had planted his soul in the East, was now learning what he could, at the nation's expense, of the nation's domestic policy. Demoralised by disappointment, and made cynical by toiling over interests for which they had, at best, but a forced regard, little remained in their breasts but a sore determination to make the best of an abiding discontent. In joining Lord Reckage's Committee, they found themselves again, as they believed, in a false position. The second-rate mind, whether represented in a person or by a council, shrinks from the adoption of simple measures, and invariably seeks to make itself conspicuous by so placing others as to make them appear unnecessary. The special genius of Lord Reckage was shown, perhaps, in his abilities in this direction, and, while he missed no opportunity of engaging men of proved capabilities for his service, his jealousy drove him so to employ them that they were never permitted to do their best either for him or for themselves. This policy carried in itself the sting for its own destruction. [31]

Not far from Ullweather and Bradwyn, Randall Hatchett, the youngest member of the Executive, lounged against a pillar. Proud of a distinction which he dared not comprehend (for a commercial shrewdness made him suspect that he owed his position less to merit than to the subtle promises conveyed by a weak chin), this distinguished person tried to look the secrets which his colleagues had never permitted him to learn. In moody weariness he would sometimes condescend to the company of his subordinates on the General Committee and, while listening to their irresponsible prattle, he would seem to forget the onerous public interests the absolute neglect of which was his chief duty at the Council board. [32]

Near this gentleman were two others, Hartley Penborough, the editor of *The Sentinel*, and the Hon. Charles Aumerle, whose guest he was.

As Lord Reckage entered and showed some intention of joining in the conversation, they appeared by a silent and common consent to ignore his approach. He turned to the hall porter, gave him some instructions in a low voice and passed on, livid with annoyance, to the library beyond.

“Hullo!” exclaimed Aumerle, “that was Reckage.”

“I know it,” said Randall Hatchett.

“Why didn't you speak to him?” asked Aumerle.

“Because,” said Bradwyn, “our good Hatchett is not so sure of himself that he can afford to be civil even to a President out of fashion!”

No one smiled except Hatchett himself, because each one felt it was unwise to encourage Bradwyn's peculiar humour.

“I would have spoken to Reckage,” said Ullweather, with a superior air, “but I have never felt the same toward him since he threw over Orange at the time of his election.” [33]

“And several other old friends more recently!” observed the injudicious Bradwyn.

“I don't speak of myself,” said Ullweather, “but Orange was unusually devoted to the fellow; and all I wish to make clear is this, that when Reckage ever said or did the right thing in times past, the credit was solely due to Orange. He weeded prophecy from his speeches, and rudeness from his jokes. Great services, I assure you!”

"True," said Randall Hatchett, "for there is nothing more fatal to a political career than brilliant impromptu and spirited orations. A statesman's words, like butcher's meat, should be well weighed."

"You have so many prescriptions for success," said Bradwyn, "that I wonder you ain't President yourself."

"Reckage has taken us all in," said Ullweather.

"By no means," said Bradwyn. "I maintained from the first that he was overrated. His genial manner—his open-hearted smile! Men always smile at creditors whom they don't intend to pay."

"I foretold the whole situation," observed Penborough. "I said, 'Let Reckage once get full power, and he will fool us all.' He affects not to be ambitious, and to prefer moral science to immoral politics. I have no faith in these active politicians who make long speeches to the public, and assure their friends, in very short notes, that they prefer trout-fishing to the cares of State! There is but one man who can save the society now." [34]

Bradwyn, Hatchett, and Ullweather looked up, each armed with a modest and repudiating smile.

"Who?" asked Hatchett, looking down.

"Robert Orange," said Penborough.

"Probably," replied Hatchett, after a minute's hesitation. "Probably, Orange ... in time."

"Don't you like him?" said Penborough.

"Like him!" answered Hatchett, rolling up his eyes. "He's an angel!"

"He calls him an angel as though he wished he were one in reality," said Bradwyn. "I know these generous rivals!"

Ullweather stood gnawing his upper lip.

"Orange," he said, at last. "Oh, Orange has arrived. He will get no further. Of course, he won that election, but Dizzy managed that. Dizzy is the devil! And then, he is still devoted to Reckage, and, for a man of his supposed shrewdness, I call that a sign of evident weakness."

At this, Charles Aumerle, who had been listening with the deepest attention to all that passed, looked straight at the speaker.

"You should respect," said he, "that liberty, which we all have to deceive ourselves. Reckage has many good points."

"But," said Penborough, "he has no moral force, no imagination. He judges men by their manners, which is silly. He thinks that every one who is polite to him believes in him. He will have to send in his resignation before long." [35]

"You don't mean it," said Aumerle.

"I mean more," continued Penborough. "He could not choose a better moment than the present. In another month, on its present lines, the whole league will have foundered. Should he remain, he would have to sink with the ship. Now, however, it appears safe enough—people see only what you see—a good cargo of influential names on the committee and a clear horizon. He could plead ill-health, or his marriage—in fact, a dozen excellent reasons for momentary retirement. The world would praise his tact. As for the rest, those who have been disillusioned will lose their heads, those who were merely self-seekers will probably lose their places, but the trimmers always keep something. The thing, then, is to cultivate the art of trimming."

"But you forget that Reckage is going to marry Miss Carillon," said Aumerle. "Miss Carillon will always advise the safe course."

"That's all very well," said Bradwyn, "but there has been too much arrangement in that marriage! I can tell you how the engagement came about. She was intimate with his aunt. He acquired the habit of her society on all decorous occasions. Still, he never proposed. The aunt invited her to Almouth. She stayed two months. Still, not a word. Her papa grew impatient, ordered her home. The next day she came to the breakfast-table with red eyes, and announced her departure. The boxes were packed; she went to take a last look at the dear garden. Reckage followed, Fate accompanied him. He spoke. She sent a telegram to her papa: 'Detained. Important. Will write.' No, the real woman for him was Lady Sara de Treverell." [36]

Ullweather thrust his tongue into his cheek.

"Lady Sara has been called to higher destinies," said he, "than the heavenly 'sweet hand in hand!'"

"I see you know," said Bradwyn, with a mysterious glance.

"Yes," said Ullweather. "The friendship of the Duke of Marshire for Lady Sara increases every day, and the little fit of giddiness which seized him when he was dining with my Chief makes me think that admiration is developing into love. I am in great hopes that this match may come off."

"As to that," said Hatchett, "her father and the Duke were the night before last at Brooks's, but

no conversation passed between them. This does not look as though a very near alliance were in contemplation."

"There are prettier women than she in the world," said Aumerle.

"I have never seen her," said Penborough.

"Large eyes, a small head, and the devil of a temper," said Bradwyn; "and sympathies—there never was a young woman with so many sympathies! There is an old proverb," he added, with a sneer, "'They are not all friends of the bridegroom who seem to be following the bride.'"

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Ullweather was still absorbed in his own meditation.

"Marshire," said he, "is the man for us. We might do something with Marshire."

"Nevertheless," said Penborough, "I have my eye on Orange."

"I say," exclaimed Bradwyn, "be careful. Here is Reckage again. How the dickens did he pass us?"

The men glanced up at a solitary figure which now appeared descending the broad staircase. In silence, and with a studied expression of contempt, without a look either to the right or to the left, the unpopular leader passed through the hall and out into the street.

"A lonely beggar, after all," said Bradwyn.

CHAPTER IV

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Reckage was dining at home that evening with Orange, whose marriage was to take place at the Alberian Embassy on the morrow. The young man was not in good spirits at his friend's step, for he himself was about to take a wife also, and much of the apprehension which he felt on his own account found its vent in dreary soliloquies on the risk, sacrifices, responsibilities, and trouble involved by the single act of saddling oneself for a lifetime with some one woman. Reckage, for his own part, had loved one lady very well, yet not so madly that he could resign himself to loving her only, to the exclusion of all others. He walked along toward Almouth House in a mood of many vexations, cursing the impudence of Bradwyn and Ullweather, wondering whether he had done wisely, after all, in engaging himself to the blameless Miss Carillon, sighing a little over a rumour which had reached him about Sara de Treverell and the Duke of Marshire, deploring the obstinacy of Robert Orange where Mrs. Parflete was concerned. He admitted that Mrs. Parflete was an exceedingly beautiful, young, and, as it happened, rich person. He owned her delightfulness for a man of Robert's dreamy, romantic, intense temperament. But marriage between two idealists so highly strung, and so passionately attached as these two beings were—what would happen? No doubt they would be able to endure the inevitable disillusion—(inevitable because Nature is before all things sensual and has no care for mental prejudices one way or the other)—the inevitable disillusion of family life. It was scarcely possible that the devotion of Robert and Mrs. Parflete would not waver or seem less exquisite under this discipline. Their dream of love would become unparadised. It would gain a sadness, a melancholy, a note of despair hard to endure and most difficult to repress. Reckage had no transcendentalism in his own philosophy: he divided men into two classes—those who read, and those who could not stand, Dante. He included himself among the latter with a frankness at once astonishing and welcome even to numbers who thought him, in most matters, a hypocrite. The hold of the world was growing daily stronger upon him. His ambitions were already sullied by many unworthy and deadening ideas. He dwelt a great deal on the fleetingness of life, and the wisdom of making the best of its few charming things. Food, and wine, and money, and fine houses, and amusements were subjects on which he expended a large amount of silent enthusiasm. But, for all this, he could still see much to admire—perhaps to envy—in Robert's more spiritual mind, and he dreaded—as men often do dread in such cases—the effect of a woman's companionship on so ascetic a character.

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"He knows nothing about women—nothing," he told himself. "He has no experience. He takes them too seriously."

He was, while he admitted his own unreasonableness, a little shocked at the very notion of Orange with a wife and children. It went against the grain, and upset the ideals of austerity which he had carefully planned—not for himself, but for his friend. Robert, he urged, was born to be an example—an encouragement to those who were called, by the mercy of God, to less rigorous vocations. Reckage suffered many scruples of conscience on Robert's account; he surveyed him with a sense of disappointment; he had always supposed that he would ultimately turn Jesuit in sober earnest, and die a martyr's death in the Far East. This would, in his opinion, have been a fine end to a Quixotic, very touching, most remarkable life. Would he now immaturely fall a victim to an enticing face and the cares of a household? Would he be able to sustain his character? One thing was certain. He could never again expect to exercise precisely the same potent influence as he had in the past, over his earth-bound, self-indulgent friends. Self-indulgent people always exacted unusual privations from those who would seek to move them—and Robert's call was clearly to materialists rather than to the righteous. Pusey married, it was true. Keble married. No one thought the less of them on that account. Even the judicious Hooker

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married. And they were clergymen. Reckage called them priests. But Newman did not marry, and, while Reckage was unable to agree in the main with Newman's views, he had a fixed notion that he was the strong man—the master spirit—among them. And another consideration. The passion of love has a danger for very sensitive, reserved, and concentrated minds unknown to creatures of more volatile, expansive, and unreflecting disposition. Reckage knew well that he was himself too selfish a man to let affection for any one creature come between his soul and its God. There was no self-discipline required in his case when a choice had to be made between a human being and his own advantage—whether temporal or eternal. He had never—since he was a youth—felt an immoderate fondness for anybody; he had likes and dislikes, admirations and partialities, jealousies, too, and well-defined tastes where feminine beauty was in question, but it was not in him to err from excess of charity. The imaginative and visionary parts of life—and no one is wholly without them—soon turned into severe reality whenever he found himself confronted with that sole absorbing interest—his career. Marriage, in his own case, seemed an imperative duty. He was an eldest son, the heir to an earldom and a vast estate; he wished to lead a distinguished, comfortable, and edifying existence. His wife would be a helpmate, not a snare; the mother of his children, not the light of his eyes. But what a difference in Robert's case—with his capacity for worship, for really intense and absorbing passion. All this was especially transparent to Reckage, who, as a man of the world, had watched his friend for months, detecting the shattering physical effects of an iron restraint imposed on every thought, mood, and inclination. He had enjoyed the spectacle: it was a good fight—this sharp, unceasing struggle between mere human nature, young, vigorous, sane, indefatigable, and an upright soul full of tenderness, yet forced to live in constant warfare. Awe, too, had mingled in Reckage's sensations while he looked on; something of pity and terror stirred under the callous muscle which he called his heart at the sight of a voiceless, stifled despair outside the range of his personal experience, though not entirely beyond his sympathy. All men did not love after this fashion, he knew, but humanity was full of surprises, and he had been too calm a student of other men's lives to feel astonishment at any fresh revelation either of their pain, their perversity, or their humours. He had felt so sure, however, that Robert would, in the end, get the better of that unhappy attachment; everything in the process of time had to surrender to reason, and it was not possible, he thought, that a strong, self-reliant man could long remain subdued by a mere infatuation.

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“And why doesn't he think of his health?” insisted Reckage; “it is really going between all this sleeplessness, and fasting, and over-work. Flesh and blood cannot bear the strain. He is never idle for one moment. He is afraid of brooding.”

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It was with these sentiments of fear for the one creature he believed in, and hostility toward the woman who had presumed to interfere with the progress of that clear spirit, that he found himself at Almouth House. The blinds of the dining-room were but partially down. He could see the menservants within preparing the table which, set for two covers, showed a pretty display of cut-glass, flowers, old silver, and shining damask under the yellow rays of the lit candles. Some family portraits by Gainsborough and Reynolds, a Holbein, and a Vandyck, with lamps shining like footlights beneath them, were darkly visible on the dull blue walls. The famous mantelpiece inlaid with uncut turquoise was also within sight; and the sideboard with its load of Sèvres china and gold dishes. Reckage took great pride in these possessions, but it shocked his sense of dignity to see them thus exposed to the vulgar gaze.

He let himself into the mansion with a latchkey, stormed at the servants for their carelessness, and made what is commonly known as a scene.

Then he crossed the hall, and went into another fine room, which led by steps into a garden, and caught the sunset.

Here, standing by the window with his back to the door, looking at the clouds, greyer than a gull's wing, which fled like driven souls across the sky, stood Orange.

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He turned as the latch moved, and Reckage, coming in, perceived the pale face, resolute, a little proud, and thoroughly inscrutable of his former secretary. Of fine height and broad-shouldered, Robert bore himself with peculiar firmness and ease. His brown eyes, with their brilliant, defiant glance, his close, dark beard, and powerful aquiline features; the entire absence of vanity, or the desire to produce an impression which showed itself in every line of his face and every movement of his body, indicated a type of individual more likely to attract the confidence of men than the sentimentality of women.

The two young men greeted each other pleasantly, but with a certain reserve on each side.

“So you are here!” said Reckage, seating himself. “I am sorry to be late. The fact is I caught sight of old Garrow and Sara de Treverell driving together in the Park, and it suddenly occurred to me to ask 'em to dine with us to-night. I raced after their brougham, but my brute of a horse—Pluto: you know the beast—gave me such a lot of trouble that I couldn't speak to them. How are you? You don't look very fit. Perhaps you are glad that we are alone. But Sara is a nice girl, and full of kindness. She's a good friend, too—just the friend for your wife. I thought of that.”

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Robert resumed his post at the window, and studied the heavens. But if he sought for any answer to the many impassioned questions which were thronging his heart and mind at that moment, he looked in vain. For himself the struggles of the last year had been to a great degree subconscious. He had been like a sick man who, ignorant of the real gravity of his condition, fights death daily without a thought of the unequal strife, or the suspense of his physicians. He had abandoned himself to study, immersed himself in work; he was neither morbid nor an

amorous; and while he felt a stinging misery for ever in his heart, he bore it with manly reticence, without complaint, without despair. Love, in his case, had meant the idealisation of the whole of life—the life of action and the life within the soul. It had transfigured the world, lit up and illumined every dark corner, answered every turbulent doubt. From the habit of this wholly mental emotion, he had lost, little by little, the sense of the actual bodily existence of the woman herself. It is true that he thought of her always as some one modestly beautiful, of childish form, with a face like a water-nymph's—imperious, magical, elusive, yet, whenever he found himself in her presence, she seemed further away than when they were, in fact, apart. The kiss he had given her on the day of their betrothal had been as strange, indefinable, and unrealisable as the passing of one hour into the next. There had been the time before he kissed her, there was the time afterwards, but the transition had been so swift, and so little recognised, so inevitable, that while it drew both their lives down deep into the wild, pitiless surge of human feeling, she still remained more dearly and completely his by intuition than when he held her—a true woman—in his arms. The moral training of a lifetime, the unceasing, daily discipline of a mind indulgent to others, but most severe with itself, had given him a self-mastery in impulse and desire which, although the aspect of affairs had changed, he could not easily, or even willingly, relax. His soul drew back from its new privileges, sweet as they were—and he was too honest to deny their overpowering sweetness—they seemed like the desecration of a most sacred thought. Vainly he reasoned, vainly he admitted the folly of such scruples. They remained. Asceticism is a faithful quality. It is won by slow and painful stages, with bitter distress and mortifying tears, but once really gained, the losing is even harder than the struggle for its acquisition. [46]

And so the young man found himself in that hard position when judgment and prejudice stand opposed so utterly that victory either way must mean a lasting regret. Perhaps he was not the first bridegroom who felt loath, on the eve of his marriage, to change the delicate, almost ethereal tenderness of betrothed lovers for the close and intimate association of husband and wife. The one relationship has something in it immaterial, exquisite, and unearthly, a bond invisible and yet as potent as the winds we cannot see and the melodies we only hear. The other, with its profound appeals to mortality, its demands upon all that is strongest in affection and eternal in courage, its irreparableness, suffering, and constancy, might, indeed, have the grandeur of all human tragedy, and the dignity of a holy state; but that it could ever be so beautiful as the love which is a silent influence was to Robert then, at least, an inconceivable idea. He felt upon him and around him, in his flesh and in his spirit, in the air and in the whole world, the all-enveloping shadow of remorse. The dormant possibilities of his own fanatical nature rose up before him—pale, inarticulate fiercenesses crushed so long, and now trembling eagerly under his breath at the prospect of a little more liberty in loving. A suspicion that already he loved perhaps too well and far too passionately thrilled through his conscience, and tortured a heart to whom thought was a refuge and feeling a martyrdom. [47]

Reckage, watching Robert from a corner of the room, grew irritated at the silence, and wondered, with a cruel and jealous curiosity, what was passing in his mind. He wondered whether he was praying. An impulse, which had something in it of brute fury, urged him to tear open that still face and drag the thoughts behind it to the light. Why was it that one could never, by any sense, enter into another's spirit? The same torturing mystery had often disturbed him during the half-hours—outwardly placid and commonplace—which he spent, out of etiquette, with his future bride. She, too, retired behind the veil of her countenance to live a hidden life that he could never hope to join. How lonely was companionship in these conditions, and how desolate marriage! [48]

He could not resist the temptation to break in, with a touch of crude satire, upon his friend's solitude.

"What is the matter?" he exclaimed, "are you hungry?"

"No," said Robert, so well accustomed to such violent jars that they could no longer disturb him; "I was only thinking...."

"About what?"

"All sorts of things."

Reckage turned pale from dissatisfied inquisitiveness.

"I think, too," he answered, "but I can throw out a word now and again."

Then, making the remark that he was not dressed for dinner, he left the room.

CHAPTER V

The dinner, in the ordering of which the host had expended all his gastronomical knowledge and much anxiety, seemed long. Orange found himself opposite the famous portrait of "Edwyn, Lord Reckage of Almouth," which represents that nobleman elaborately dressed, reclining on a grassy bank by a spring of water, with a wooded landscape, a sunrise, and a squire holding two horses in the distance. Robert studied, and remembered always, every detail of that singular composition. The warrior's shield, with its motto "*Magica sympathia*," his fat white hands, velvet breeches, [49]

steel cuirass, and stiff lace collar remained for days a grotesque image before his mind. He traced, too, a certain resemblance between Reckage and that ancestor—they both wore pointed red beards, both were fair of skin, both had a dreaming violence in their blue eyes.

"You must have some pheasant," said his lordship, at last. "You are eating nothing. And that Burgundy, you know, is unique of its kind. It was a present from the Emperor of the French to mamma. Her people were civil to him when he was regarded as a sort of adventurer. And he never forgot it. He's a very decent fellow. I dined with him at the Tuileries—did I mention it?" [50]

Robert replied that he fancied he had heard of the occurrence.

"Well," continued his friend, "I might have enjoyed that experience, but I was feeling depressed at the time; a lot of the depression went under the influence of frivolous talk, military music, and champagne. Yet, all the same, do these things really count for much? I felt just as wretched afterwards."

The glimpse he had obtained that afternoon of Sara de Treverell—Sara flushed with agitation, very bright in her glance, exceedingly subtle in her smile, had stirred a great tenderness he had once felt for that young lady. The news, too, that she had been chosen as a bride by the prudent, rich, and most important Duke of Marshire made his lordship feel that perhaps he had committed a blunder in not having secured her, during her first season, for himself. He feared that he had lost an opportunity; and this reflection, while it lowered temporarily his self-esteem, placed Sara on a dangerous eminence. She would be a duchess—one of the great duchesses. Little Sara!

"She was looking extraordinarily handsome," he exclaimed. "Of course she means to take him. But she liked me at one time. I am speaking of Sara de Treverell. Marshire is by way of being a stick. Who could have imagined him going in for a high-spirited, brilliant girl like Sara?" [51]

Formerly he had always spoken of Sara as a clever little devil, but Robert showed no surprise at the new adjective.

"Brilliant!" repeated his lordship. "Don't you agree?"

"Absolutely. She is the most brilliant girl in London."

"But heartless," said his lordship pathetically; "she hasn't one bit of heart."

"There I don't agree with you. Of course she is strange and rather wild."

"*Tête-montée*. And then the Asiatic streak!"

"True. The fiercest wind cannot take the angles out of the bough of a tree an inch thick. You may break it, but you cannot destroy its angles. That is so, no doubt, with one's racial tendencies. The girl is wilful and romantic. It will be very bad for them both if there is no love on her side. She is capable, I should say, of very deep affection."

"She did like me," said his lordship, with emphasis and satisfaction—"she really did. And I wouldn't encourage it. I had no notion then of marrying. Her singularity, too, made me cautious. I couldn't believe in her. She talked like an actress in a play. I felt that she was not the woman for me. Essentially she thought as I did, and seemed to comprehend my embarrassment. The worst of it is now—I may have been wrong." [52]

"I doubt it. You may be sure, on the whole, that your instincts were right."

"Still, there is a distinct misgiving. I was drawn toward her, and, when I made up my mind to put an end to the matter, our friendship was severely strained. But it was not broken. Something I saw in her face to-day makes me sure that it was not broken."

While he was speaking the servant entered with a salver, and on the salver was a note. The address showed Sara's large, defiant hand-writing. Reckage, who had a touch of superstition in his nature, changed colour and even hesitated before he broke the seal. The coincidence seemed extraordinary and fatal. What did it mean? He read the letter with an irresistible feeling of proud delight.

"20A, ST. JAMES'S SQUARE, W.

"MY DEAR BEAUCLERK,—Will you lunch with us to-morrow at two o'clock? Papa has invited a friend—a dreadful, boring friend—who has been absent from England for five years. Do you know the man? Sir Piers Harding? But I want some one to encourage me. You? Do!

"Yours sincerely,

"S. L. V. DE TREVERELL.

"P.S.—I am so happy about you and Agnes. Be kind to her always? Won't you?"

All his life he had found a difficulty in understanding women—the significance of their words, the precise translation of their glances, and their motives generally. He had nourished his experience on French novels; he had corrected it by various friendships; he had crowned it with the confession that one could never tell what the sex meant one way or the other. But this fact remained—he was a coxcomb, and, whenever he owned himself puzzled, it was on a single ground only—how seriously was the lady at stake affected by his charms? Feeling, as he did, the infinite inequality that existed between men, and conscious of his own reputation as a leader among them, it was not in his conscience to encourage any woman whom he did not find [53]

especially attractive or useful. Why spoil her chances? Why make her discontented with the average male creature? Had Sara written to him in ordinary circumstances, inviting him, after some months of mutual coldness, to lunch, he would have replied, with sorrowful dignity, that it was wiser to leave things as they were. But the case had altered. The future Duchess of Marshire was a personage. He made no secret of his admiration for all people of high rank. They represented influence and traditions; what was more, they could exercise a certain power, and introduce, when necessary, the ideas upon which fresh traditions could be based. A friend like Sara de Treverell with her new honours made life itself more rich to him. When he remembered that she was young, handsome, enthusiastic, and impulsive, his pleasure thrilled into something of genuine passion. He told himself that he had always been fond of the girl; that hundreds of times he had felt the hardness of his scrupulous position where she was concerned. If he had been asked what especially he conceived his own duty to be now, he would have said that it was not for him to hang back when she showed a coming spirit. But this was not all. He was a gamester; he was ambitious.

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"This is very odd," said he, reading Sara's note for the second time, "very odd. There's no harm in showing it to you, because there is nothing in it."

He gave it to his friend, and ate, pleasantly, while Orange glanced down the page. His soul's wish was to be left alone. The effort of forcing himself—not to affect but honestly to feel—an interest in Reckage's conversation had proved successful. He had indeed put aside his own thoughts, and followed, with the exaggerated earnestness of a mind determined on self-sacrifice, every word his companion had uttered. The spirit invisible wears the laurel of mental victories, but the body has to bear the exhaustion, the scars, and the soreness. He was tired, but he stirred himself again to consider Sara's note. In the course of that year she had written several letters to Orange—letters about books, new pictures, and new music. Once she had given him a little song of her own composition as something of which she "desired to hear no more for ever." The song was sentimental, and he locked it away, wondering at the time whether she really had an unfortunate affection for Lord Reckage. But in reading her note that evening he decided against his original fear. Women did not write in that strain to men whom they loved, or had ever loved ... even passably well. He returned it to the owner with this comment—

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"A woman, you know, is like your shadow: run away from her and she follows you; run after her and she flies from you. That's an old saying. It is true so long as she does not love the man. And when she loves the man—well, then she ceases to be a shadow. She becomes a living thing."

"That is no answer at all. If you could read her heart and whole thought at this moment, what would you see there?"

"Unhappiness," said Robert; "discontent."

Reckage took the little sheet and folded it into his pocket-book.

"That's wonderful," said he, "because the same things are in my mind, too. I wish I could describe my feelings about Agnes. She satisfies the æsthetic side of my nature. But there is another side. And Sara comes nearer to it than she. Mind you, I know my duty in the matter. There are things which one is compelled to do under tremendous penalties. I have chosen, and I must abide by my choice."

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Robert looked well at his friend, and saw, in his expression, all that he had known would inevitably, either soon or too late, work to the surface.

"Yet the old tremulous affection lies in me," continued Reckage; "my nerves are in a kind of blaze. You couldn't tell anything about it, because you don't know."

The Emperor's burgundy, no doubt, had warmed his spirit to communicativeness. He drew his chair closer to the table, and talked in a low voice about his ghastly solitude of soul. His engagement to Miss Carillon had not been an agreeable experience.

"And marriage," said he, "will be the crowning point of these unbearable days. In the present state of my feelings it would be awful. Agnes is very kind and most conscientious, but she does not know what is in me, what was always and will always be there. Old reminiscences crowd round me. They are very beautiful, although they are so sad."

"What is one to do?" said Robert, "in the presence of fate and facts? It is necessary to look the affair in the face. Do you, or don't you, wish to marry Miss Carillon?"

"I do, and I don't," answered Reckage doggedly. "But I can't close my eyes to the circumstances of the case. I found myself hard bested from the very beginning. I knew that I was expected to marry her. I knew, too, that it was a suitable match in every way. But then every girl is, to some extent, accomplished, pious, virtuous, and intelligent. I believe sometimes that my apparent indifference towards Agnes arises from the fact that I respect her—if anything—too much. She seems too remote—that is the word—for the ordinary wear and tear of domesticity. Other men—who might be called impassioned lovers—would be less scrupulous. I maintain that devotion of that violent kind is worth absolutely nothing. And I claim to know a little about life and love."

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"I should say," said Orange, "that you knew more about mere physiology."

Reckage laughed uneasily.

"You keep your mediæval views!" said he. "Perhaps I envy you. I can't say. I don't think I envy any one. I am quite contented."

"Then what are you driving at?"

"Oh well, a fellow must think. You see, Sara suits me, in a sense. I am not afraid of her. Now a wife is a sacred object. You might as well flirt with the Ten Commandments as fall in love with your wife. I say, never begin love-making with the lady you hope to marry. It will end in disaster. Because the day must come when she will wonder why you have changed. No, a wife should be the one woman in the world with whom you can spend days and weeks of unproved coldness."

They were now smoking, and the tobacco seemed to produce a tranquillising effect upon his lordship. He closed his lips and amused himself by puffing rings of smoke into the air. When he next spoke, he suggested a visit to the theatre. He had engaged a box for the new burlesque, "*The Blue Princess*."

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"It will be very good, and it will cheer us up," said he.

Orange was in no mood for the entertainment, but Reckage's evident misery seemed to require a fresh scene. The streets, as they left the house, were full of a deep purple fog, through which shone out, with a dull and brazen gleam, the lights of lamps and passing carriages. Above them, the sky was but a pall or vapour; the air, charged with the emotions, the struggling energy, the cruelty, confusion, painfulness, and unceasing agitation of life in a vast city, was damp and stifling; a noise of traffic—as loud but not so terrible as a breaking storm—destroyed the peace of night; there were foot passengers of every age and description moving like rooks in the wind, over the pavement, and vehicles filled with men and women—an irremediable pilgrimage bound, for the greater part, on pleasure. Robert felt that he would have given gladly the treasures of a universe for just the time to think a little while of his own love. So far that great attachment had brought him aberrations, sorrow, and perplexities; all its sweetness had flown, moth-like, into his heart, there to be burnt—burnt yet left unburied: all its happiness had glorified his life against his will; all its beauty had been starved with a pitiless rigour. What then had remained? A certain state of mind—a passionate resignation to its own indomitable cravings. And now on the eve of his marriage—a marriage never so much as imagined, far less hoped for—he could not have the leisure to behold, through tears of relief, the complete transformation of his destiny—once so frightful, now so joyous. The theatre was crowded, and when the two young men entered their box the burlesque was at the beginning of the second act. The scene represented an orange grove by moonlight, and a handsome girl in spangled muslin was whispering loudly, to an accompaniment of harps, her eternal fidelity to a gesticulating troubadour. Both performers were immensely popular, and the duet, with its refrain—

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"Love, I will love thee always,
For ever is not too long;
Love, e'en in dark and dreary days,
This shall be my one song,"

was repeated three times to the smiling, serene, and thoroughly convinced audience. Reckage, who attended public places of amusement solely from the desire of exhibiting himself, gave but a side-glance at the stage and turned his opera glass upon the auditorium.

"Really, town is very full," said he; "I suppose many of them are up for the Hauconberg wedding. There's old Cliddesdon—just look at him. Did you ever see such an infernal ass? Hullo! I thought that Millie Warfield wouldn't be far off. She's a perfect rack of bones. Lady Michelmars is getting rather pretty—it's wonderful how these dowdy girls can work up their profiles after a month or two in town. She was a lump as a bride—a regular lump. You never met anything like it. Aumerle is talking to her now. He was at the Capitol this afternoon. He begins to give himself airs. I can't stand him. In fact, I cannot understand those fellows on my sub-committee. Sometimes they are—if anything—too civil. A bit servile, in fact. Then they turn out and look as though they would like to make their teeth meet in my backbone. They sulk, and whisper in groups, and snicker. I am getting sick of it. I must get rid of them. By Jove! there's David Rennes, the painter. I thought he was at Amesbury—with the Carillons, doing Agnes's portrait. It can't be finished. She said distinctly in her letter this morning—"I may not add more because I have to give Mr. Rennes a sitting while the light is good." Where's the letter? I must have left it on the breakfast-table. Anyhow that is what she said. I'll catch Rennes' eye and have him up. He is not a bad sort."

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The act-drop had now descended, the lights were turned on to their full power, and Orange, following the direction of Reckage's gaze, saw, in the last row of the stalls, a large man about nine-and-thirty with an emotional, nervous face, a heavy beard, and dense black hair. He was leaning forward, for the seat in front of him was, at the moment, vacant; his hands were tightly locked, his eyes fixed on the curtain. At last Reckage's determined stare produced its effect. He moved, glanced toward the box, and, in response to his lordship's signal, left his place. Two minutes later Orange heard a tap at the door.

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"That's right," said Reckage, as Rennes entered, "take Orange's chair. He doesn't care a bit about the play, or anything in it. He is going to get married to-morrow. You know Robert Orange, don't you? You ought to paint him. Saint Augustine with a future. *Mon devoir, mes livres, et puis ... et puis, madame, ma femme*."

The Emperor's burgundy, indeed, had not been opened in vain. Rennes could talk well, sometimes brilliantly, often with originality, and, with the tact of all highly sensitive beings, he led the conversation into impersonal themes. He said Miss Carillon's portrait was not yet finished, but he changed that subject immediately, and the evening, which had been to Orange a trial of patience, ended rather better than it began. Lord Reckage invited Rennes to accompany them home. The artist did not appear, at first, in the mood to accept that invitation. He, too, seemed to have many things he wished to think about undisturbed, and in the silence of his own company. His hesitation passed, however; the kindness in his nature had been roused by something unusual, haunting, ominous in Robert's face.

"I will come," said he.

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All the way, on their walk to Almouth House, he kept Reckage amused. Orange never once felt under the necessity to speak. He was able to dream, to hold his breath, to remember that he loved and was loved again, that he would see her to-morrow—to-morrow quite early, and then, no more unutterable farewells, heart-desolating separations. He surprised himself by saying aloud—"I love you ... I love you." The two men, engrossed in talk, did not hear him. But he had caught the words, and it seemed as though he heard his own voice for the first time.

"You must want some supper," said Reckage—"a rum omelette."

"No! no! I couldn't."

He sat down to the table, however, and watched them eat. First the burlesque was discussed, then the actresses, the dresses, the dancing.

"Russia is the place for dancing," said Reckage, "I assure you. There was a dancer at Petersburg.... Something-or-other-*ewski* was her name, and a fellow shot himself while I was there on her account. An awful fool. I can tell you who painted her portrait. A Frenchman called Carolus-Duran. I believe he has a career before him. What is your opinion of French art?"

Rennes had studied in Paris and was well acquainted with the artist in question. They talked about the exhibitions of the year and the prices paid at a recent sale of pictures.

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"Old Garrow has some fine pictures," said Reckage. "I would give a good deal for his Ghirlandajo. Do you know it? And then that noble Tintoret? There are so many persons whose position in life compels them to encourage art without having any real enjoyment of it. Garrow is one of those persons. But his daughter, Lady Sara, has a touch of genius. She's a musician. You have heard her play, haven't you, Robert?"

"Yes."

Robert had, at that instant, observed upon the mantelpiece a letter addressed to himself. It was from Brigit. He grew pale, and retired, with the little envelope lightly written on, to a far corner of the room. For some moments he could not break the seal. The sight of her writing filled him with a kind of agony—something beyond his control, beyond his comprehension. What did it mean—this tightening of the heart, this touch of fear, and love, and fear again, so deep that the whole web of life trembled and its strings grew confused one with another, and all was anguish, darkness, self-renunciation, and a wild, a dreadful mystery of human influence? At last he opened the letter.

"MY DEAREST," it began, "I can never say all that I wish to say, because when I am with you I forget everything and watch your face. When I am away from you I forget your face, and I long to see it again in order that I may remember it more perfectly! It is so hard not to think of you too often. But I have had a great deal of sorrow, and everything I have in the world—except you—is a grief. I know that we are not born to be happy, and so, I wonder, have we stolen our happiness? If it is a gift—I know not what to do with it. I cannot speak a happy language: the atmosphere is strange and frightens me. Dear Robert, I am terrified, uncertain, but when we meet to-morrow you will give me courage. And then, as we shall not part again, I need never again be, as I am now, too anxious. Your BRIGIT."

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Reckage's voice broke in again.

"I do wish you would try this rum omelette. It is capital."

Orange laughed, but left the room. Rennes remarked that he had a powerful face.

"Yes. He has a strong character. And he would never deceive another. But he deceives himself hourly—daily."

"In what way?" asked Rennes.

"He doesn't know," said Reckage, "what a devilish fine chap he is! I wish to God that I could prevent this marriage."

"Why?"

"I say nothing against Mrs. Parflete. She's a high-class woman and so on. Awfully beautiful, too. As clever as they make 'em, and not a breath against her. All the same, I am not very sweet on love matches for men of Orange's calibre. They never answer—never."

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"I don't agree with you there," replied the artist, "because I believe that a love match—even

when it dissolves, as it may, into a mistake—is the best thing that can happen to any man.”

After this they discussed bindings. Lord Reckage was the first amateur authority on the subject.

CHAPTER VI

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At five the next morning Robert was writing letters. Then, as soon as the gates of Hyde Park were open, he walked out. The recurrence of familiar sentiments on the essentials that make up the condition known as happiness would neither convince, nor inspire, the powers of an imagination which, with all its richness, was, apart from the purely artistic faculty, analytical and foreboding. Self-doubt, however, has no part in passion. Of the many miseries it may bring, this, perhaps the worst of human woes, can never be in its train. Men in love—and women also—may distrust all things and all creatures, but their own emotion, like the storm, proves the reality of its force by the mischief it wreaks. Robert's spirit, borne along by this vehemence of feeling, caught the keen sweetness of the early air, not yet infected by the day's traffic. His melancholy—the inevitable melancholy produced by sustained thought on any subject, whether sublime or simple—was dispelled. The Park, which was empty but for a few men on their way to work, and runners anxious to keep in training, had its great trees still beautiful from the lingering glance of summer; the wide and misty stretches of grey grass were fresh in dew; the softness and haze—without the gloom—of autumn were in the atmosphere. The pride of love requited and the instincts of youth could not resist these spells of nature. Robert remembered only that it was his wedding-day: that every throb of his pulse and every second of time brought him nearer to the supreme joy of his life and the supreme moment. He had never used his nerves with bliss and tears, and he did not belong to the large army of young gentlemen who own themselves proudly

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“Light half-believers of our casual creeds,
Who never deeply felt, nor clearly will'd....
Who hesitate and falter life away,
And lose to-morrow the ground won to-day.”

This view of heroism was not possible to him, and he was too strong in mind and body to pretend to it. The two things which affect a career most profoundly are religion, or the lack of it, and marriage—or not marrying; for these things only penetrate to the soul and make what may be called its perpetual atmosphere. The Catholic Faith, which ignores no single possibility in human feeling and no possible flight in human idealism, produces in those who hold it truly a freshness of heart very hard to be understood by the dispassionate critic who weighs character by the newest laws of his favourite degenerate, but never by the primeval tests of God. Robert, therefore, was thinking of his bride's face, the pure curves of her mouth, her sapphirine eyes, her pretty hands, her golden hair, the nose which others found fault with, which he, nevertheless, thought wholly delightful. He wondered what she would say and how she would look when they met. Would she be pale? Would she be frightened? There had always been a certain agony in every former meeting because of the farewell which had to follow. With all his habits of self-control, he had never been able to feel quite sure that the word too much would not be said, that the glance too long would not be given. Her own simplicity, he told himself, had saved him from disaster. She showed her affection so fearlessly—with such tender and discerning trust—that his worst struggles were in solitude—not in her presence at all. It was when he was away from her immediate peaceful influence that the fever, the restlessness, the torments and the desperation (has not old Burton summed up for us the whole situation and all the symptoms in his “*Anatomy*”?) had to be endured and conquered. These trials now—for even a sense of humour could not make them less than trials—were ended. The tragi-comic labour of walking too much and riding too much, working and smoking too much, thinking and sleeping too little—the whole dreary business, in fact, of stifling any absorbing idea or ruling passion, would be no more.

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When he returned to Almouth House, Reckage was already dressed for his official duties as “best man.” He felt an unwonted and genuine excitement about Robert's marriage. He put aside the languor, *ennui*, and depression which he felt too easily on most occasions, and, that day at least, he was, as his own servant expressed it, “nervous and cut-up.”

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“I shall miss the swimming, the boxing, the fencing, and the pistol practice,” he complained, referring to diversions in which Orange was an expert and himself the bored but dutiful participant. “They nearly always drop these things when they marry.” The loss he really feared was the moral support and affection of his former secretary—advantages which a selfish nature is slow to appreciate, yet most tenacious of when once convinced of their use. The nuptial mass had been fixed for eight o'clock, the wedding party were to breakfast at Almouth House afterwards, then the bride and groom were to leave by the mail for Southampton *en route* for Miraflores in Northern France. The two young men drove together to the chapel attached to the Alberian Embassy. Not a word passed between them, but Reckage, under his eyelids, examined every detail of his friend's attire. He wondered at its satisfactoriness on the whole, inasmuch as Orange had not seen fit to consult him on the point. The church was small and grey and sombre; the flowers on the altar (sent by his lordship) were all white; their perfume filled the building.

“They look very nice,” said Reckage, “and in excellent taste. Some of these old pictures on the wall are uncommonly good, and I particularly like that bronze crucifix. Ten to one if it isn't

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genuine eleventh century. I will ask the old fellow afterwards. He's a dear. His Latin is lovely. It's an artistic pleasure to hear him read the Gospel. I looked in the other morning, just to get the run, as it were, of the place. By Jove! Here they are."

Pensée Fitz Rewes came first—very graceful in lavender silk, and accompanied by her little boy, who showed by an unconscious anxiety of expression that he felt instinctively his mother's air of contentment was assumed. Then Baron Zeuill, with Brigit on his arm, followed. The Baron looked grave—too grave for the happy circumstances. Brigit seemed as pale as the lilies on the altar; she was less beautiful but more ethereal than usual. There was something frail, transparent, unsubstantial about her that day which Robert had never noticed before. Had the many emotional strains of the last year tried her delicate youth beyond endurance? She seemed very childish, too, and immature. She took Orange's hand when he met her, held it closely, and watched the others with a kind of wonder most pitiful to witness—as though she had suffered too much from her contact with life and could no more. Her eyes seemed darker than the sapphires to which Robert had so often compared them: this effect, he told himself, was due to the strong contrast given by the pallor of her face. It was quite clear, however, that she was not under the influence then of any dominant thought. Her nerves and senses were strained to that extreme tension resembling apathy, until the vibration given by some touch or tone sets the whole system trembling with all the spiritual and bodily forces which make the mystery of human life. She spoke her responses, signed the register, and walked out from the church on Robert's arm without a single change of countenance or token of feeling. As they drove away from the church, she flushed a little and drew far back, with a new timidity, into her corner. One look she gave of perfect love and confidence. She pressed his hand and held it, for a moment, against her cheek. But neither of them spoke. And indeed, what was there to be said? The identification of their two minds had been full and absolute from the moment of their first encounter long ago in Chambord. The accidental differences of sex and age, training, accomplishments, and education had not affected—and could not affect—a sympathy in temperament which depended—not on the similarity of opinions—but on a similarity of moral fibre. Many forms can be cut, by the same hand, from the same piece of marble, and although one may be a grotesque and the other a cross, one a pursuing goddess and the other an angel for a tomb, the same substance, light, touch, and colour will be characteristic of all four. Marriage, at best, could but give a certain crude emphasis to the strange spiritual bond which united these two beings. Practical as they both were in the common affairs of life, they shrank from anything which would promise to materialise the subtleties of the mind. Some thoughts, they felt, were as impalpable as sounds, and, just as music ceases to be divine when it is poured out of some mechanical contrivance, so the mysteries of the human soul become mere bodily conditions—more or less humiliating—when demonstrated, catalogued, and legalised. There is nothing modern nor uncommon in this especial disposition. One may describe it as ascetic, anæmic, sentimental, hysterical, neurotic; but the men and women who possess this fragile organism show, as a rule, powers of endurance and a strength of will by no means characteristic of the average sanguine and sensual creature who eats, drinks, fights, loves, and does his best in a world which he calls vile, yet would not renounce for all the ecstasies of Paradise.

The carriage wheels rolled on—as swift and noiseless as the sand in an hour-glass. Why was the road so short? Why could they not be carried thus for ever, tranquil with happiness, wanting nothing, seeking nothing, bound no-whither? Foolish questions and a foolish longing: yet happiness consists in being able to formulate wishes with the serene knowledge that a better wisdom directs their fulfilment. Neither passers-by nor other vehicles, neither houses nor streets caught the entranced attention of these young lovers. The delight of being purely self-absorbed is very great and intoxicating to those who are constantly—either by desire or the force of circumstances—unselfish. A faint flush swept into Brigit's face under the effect of an experience so novel. Their twofold consciousness had all the pathos of self-effacement, and all the thrill of satisfied egoism. Such instants cannot last, and they are shortest when one's habits of thought are antagonistic to such luxury. Brigit sighed deeply, and roused herself with a painful sense that the minute she wilfully cut short had been the sweetest in her life.

"Pensée," she said, "has been so kind to me. She gave me her room at Wight House last night. She had the little dressing-room just off it. Did you notice her dress? She was very anxious that you should like it."

"She seemed all right," said Robert; "and wasn't Reckage splendid?"

Having spoiled their perfect moment, they became as mere mortals, more at ease in this planet, where complete joy has an unfamiliar mien. Brigit's actual physical beauty returned. The sunshine stole in at the open window and lit up her golden hair, which was half hidden by a hat with white plumes. She looked down at her hand with its new wedding ring, and was pleasantly aware of Robert's admiration.

"I am so glad," she exclaimed, "that you think my hand is nice. Because I have given it to you for all time. And if you are ever tired, or discouraged, or unhappy, or lonely, and you want me, I shall come to you."

"But you will be with me now always."

"Yes," she answered. "Yes, Robert, always."

They had now reached Almouth House. Her little foot, with its arched instep, seemed too slight and delicate for the pavement. Robert knew that her arm rested upon his, because he felt it

trembling. They crossed the threshold together. The doors closed after them.

"And he never once kissed her on the way from church!" exclaimed the footman.

But the coachman did not think this very peculiar. "I don't hold with kissing," said he; "to my mind there's nothing in it. Kissing is for boys and gals—not for men and wives."

Baron Zeuill was unable to join them all at breakfast, but Pensée, and Reckage, and David Rennes (who had been especially invited the night before because he had proved so entertaining), did more than their duty as friends by talking feverishly, eating immoderately, and affecting the conventional joyousness universally thought proper at such times. Pensée ventured to make a reference to the forthcoming marriage of the "best man," and expressed the faltering hope that "dear Agnes would be as happy as dear Brigit." Reckage scowled. Rennes was seized with a fit of coughing. It was the one unlucky hit in the whole conversation, and it was soon forgotten by every one present except Orange, who remembered it frequently in later days. At last the hour for departure came. Pensée, weeping, kissed Brigit on both cheeks, looked into her grave eyes long and lovingly, put her arms around the slight, girlish form with that exquisite, indefinable tenderness, unconscious, unpremeditated, and protective, which married women show toward very youthful brides. Robert handed his wife into the brougham, the order was given "To Waterloo," the horses started, rice and slippers were thrown.

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"They go into the world for the first time," exclaimed Rennes.

Then Pensée was assisted into the barouche, and drove homewards.

"We shall meet again," she said, as she parted from Reckage; "we meet at Sara's at lunch."

The two men were thus left alone. They decided to smoke, for they were both a little affected by the pathos of the situation.

"Explain Robert," said his lordship, as they returned to the dining-room, "explain that kind of love. You are an artist."

"Well, it isn't my way," rejoined the other, with a forced laugh, "but there are many manifestations of personal magnetism."

"This kind is very interesting," said Reckage, "although it is, of course, high-flown. Orange is romantic and scrupulous—he knows next to nothing of the sensual life; and that next to nothing is merely a source of disgust and remorse. You follow me?"

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"Perfectly," said Rennes. "It is a question of temperament. The wonder is that he has not entered, in some delirium of renunciation, the priesthood."

"That would mean, for his gifts, a closed career. It beats my wits to guess how this marriage will turn out. He is madly in love. He has suffered frightfully. Too much moral anguish has a depraving effect in the long run."

"I am not so sure of that."

"I think so, at any rate. Now many a decent sort of fellow can get along well enough—if he has a woman to his taste and wine which he considers good. You observe I condense the situation as much as possible. But Orange is different."

"Not so different—except in degree, or experience. At present, he oscillates between the woe of love and the joy of life. You compared him to St. Augustine. St. Augustine never pretended that earthly happiness was a delusion. He knew better. He said, 'Do not trust it, but seek the happiness which hath no end.' Personally, I can accept with gratitude as much as I can get. 'Is not the life of men upon earth all trial, without any interval?' This may be; yet it is something to learn how to sympathise with happiness. Our best men and women devote themselves too exclusively to the diagnosis of misery."

"You have thought a lot, I can see," said Reckage.

The artist gave him a quick, friendly glance.

"I have played the fool," said he. "I envy Orange. He will know things that I can never know—now. I haven't lived up to my thoughts. I am not remorseful—I don't believe in remorse. It is a thing for the half-hearted. But if I am not sad, I am not especially gay. The middle course between sentimentality and gallantry seems to me intimately immoral and ridiculous into the bargain. So I am an idealist with senses. There are times when I hate life. And why? Because life is evil? By no means; but because we tell lies about it, and write lies about it, from morning till night."

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"You seem a bit depressed," said Lord Reckage. "But, by the by, how is the portrait going? My brother Hercy, who paints a little, always declared that Agnes was unpaintable. Do you find her unpaintable?"

"No," said Rennes; "oh no!"

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CHAPTER VII

When Reckage asked Rennes whether he found Miss Carillon "unpaintable," the artist was conscious of a swift, piercing emotion, which passed, indeed, but left an ache. And as the day advanced the smart of the wound grew more intense. A visit to the National Gallery, a call at his tailor's, an inspection of maps at his club, afforded little relief to the indefinable misery. He was tortured by the disingenuousness of his own mind. He had done so much, and thought so much, and read so much; he could give so many scientific reasons for each idea and each movement of his mental and physical being, that the joy of life had been cut up in its machinery. He had lost the power of being natural either in his pains or his pleasures. He knew all the answers, but not one of the questions which trouble youth. He had never wondered at anything. Wonder—the lovely mistress of wisdom—had taught him none of her secrets. Dead certainty had dogged his steps from his first appearance on this unknowable world. Once, when a very little boy, he admired a vase full of pink roses. "They will keep twice as long," said his nurse, "in dirty water. It is such a waste to put fresh water on roses!" This remark—slight in itself—remained in his memory as the first truth—the Logos, in fact—from which all other truths generated. He was now nine-and-thirty: he had executed an abnormal amount of work, and he had a just reputation as a portrait-painter. His technical skill was considered unique. The something lacking was that mysteriousness which belongs to all great art, and is, essentially, in life. [79]

"Rennes," said one of his friends, "can work for sixteen hours a day. It is all taken from without. He gives nothing except his undivided attention." The saying was not true; he gave himself absolutely—soul, brain, and heart—to his task, but the gift was too premeditated, too accurately weighed. There was no self-abandonment, nor self-forgetfulness. His admiration for Miss Carillon had been of this kind. Having added up her attractions, her figure, her face, her youth, her intelligence, her grace, he decided that she was exceptional in many ways. He found real happiness in her society—she was so sane, so clear, so unaffected. His attitude toward her had remained for some time one of fraternal affection, partly by force of will, chiefly because his relations with other women were not so restrained. But the position was changing. Certain forces in life were assuming for him a complicated and threatening aspect. What if, after all, there was an incalculable element in man?

"Now to be practical," he said to himself. He had not seen his mother for a fortnight. She lived in Kensington Square. "I must really go and see my mother!" The cab drove quickly; the little grey house was soon reached. David opened the door with his latch-key and rushed upstairs into the small drawing-room, furnished in white and green, with fresh flowers on the mantelpiece, and many shelves of vellum-bound books. A bronze lamp hung from the ceiling, and its globe, covered in violet silk, cast a light like that of the early dawn in hilly regions. A faint odour of lavender filled the air. In one corner of the room there was a chess-table with its chessmen showing an interrupted game. A velvet footstool, much indented by the pressure of a firm foot, stood in front of the carved armchair in which Mrs. Rennes usually sat. Her work-basket, lined with blue satin and shining with steel fittings, stood in its customary place on a gipsy stool near the fireplace. A few old English prints hung on the walls, and between the windows there was a Chippendale cabinet filled with Worcester and Crown Derby china. The aspect of all things was restful, emotionless, and some of its calm seemed to overtake and soothe David's agitated spirit. He sat down at the piano and played, with much passion, bits from Wagner's "*Tristan*," the first performance of which he had seen at Munich. "Good Heavens!" he thought. "What a genius! What a soul! What a phrase!" Suddenly the door opened and Agnes Carillon was ushered in. She hesitated a second, and then recognised Rennes, who had his back to the light. Her first instinct was to retreat; her first feeling was a strange sensation of pleasure and fear. His usually cold and wearied face took an expression of controlled but unmistakable delight. She blushed, though not with resentment, yet she avoided, by appearing to have some difficulty with her muff, his outstretched hand. [80]

"I have called on your mother," said she. "I thought you would be on your way to Rome." [81]

Her lips were red and rather full: her cheeks were pink, her throat and brows were white. Her demeanour was, while modest, neither shy nor self-conscious. David was struck by her height and the extreme slightness of her figure. She wore a large Gainsborough hat with long plumes, a black gown, and a collar of old *point de Venise*. She had come up from the country, and her presence brought its freshness.

"Why are you in town?" he asked abruptly.

"I was bored at home."

"And the trousseau?"

"The trousseau?" she said, lifting her eyes for the first time to his.

"They say it is unlucky to try on your wedding-dress," he continued, seeking relief in the very torture of reminding himself that the date of her marriage with Lord Reckage was fixed.

"I never think about luck," she answered. [82]

"I met Reckage at the play last night. I lunched with him to-day," said Rennes.

"I am so glad that you are friends. I want you to like him."

"No doubt he thinks me mad. Politicians always regard artists as madmen."

"But Beauclerk is considered very cultured. I hate the word. He is interested in art."

"No doubt—as a means of investment, an educational influence, or a topic of conversation for light moments."

"You are severe. Yet I like to hear you talk."

She hoped that his talk would drown the singing in her heart, the whispering in her ears, the footsteps of doubt—doubt of herself, doubt of Reckage, coming nearer and nearer. She had been taught everything. She had discovered nothing. Love itself had come to her in the shape of a cruel code of responsibilities. Lately she had been dwelling with an almost feverish emphasis on the question of duty. She had wearied Reckage; she had exhausted herself by the tenacity of her mind toward that dull subject. And the real truth about much in life was forcing itself upon her. She was essentially a woman of affairs. Her face absorbed the poetry of her nature, just as a flower extracts every excellence from its surrounding soil, and, shining out for the sun, wastes no blossom underground. It had been her earliest ambition to marry a Member of Parliament and help him—by her prayers and counsel—on his conscientious career toward Downing Street. She had received an austere education, and even her native generosity of heart could not soften the indignation she had been trained to feel against any neglect of duty. Duty was a term which she applied to that science of things generally expedient which tradition has presented to us in the household proverbs and maxims of every nation. Early rising, controlling one's temper, paying one's debts, consideration for others, working while it is day, taking stitches in time—all these to that orthodox mind were matters of imperative obligation, if not Divine command. David's impulsive nature and self-indulgent habits filled her with overwhelming sorrow and dismay. She could not understand the rapid changes of mood, the disordered views, the storm and violence which are characteristic of every artist whose work is a form of autobiography rather than a presentment of impersonal forms and effects. [83]

In Rennes there were two principles constantly at work: the David who acted, and the David who observed, criticised, and reproduced in allegorical guise, the inspiring performance. Agnes knew nothing of this common phenomenon in creative genius, and when her friend refreshed his imagination by appearing in a new *rôle*, she was as terrified as a child before some clever trick in experimental chemistry. From time to time he expressed opinions which startled her. She begged him once to paint a "religious" picture. He would not. A feeling that she had experienced some bitter disappointment weighed upon her spirit. Yet when she seemed to give that disappointment a cause, she was careful to leave it in obscurity. She would not permit herself to think, and, pale with suffering, she would check the painful questions which rose already answered. Her affection for Rennes was one of those serious passions which sometimes take root in an unsentimental nature, and derive a strength from philosophy which romantic considerations, pleasant as they are, can never bestow. Romance will add a magical delight to the pleasures of existence, but for the burden of the day one needs a sobriety of thought which would ring singularly flat in a love-lyric, which is certainly opposed to those emotions which produce what is commonly regarded as interesting behaviour. Agnes had not been drawn to Rennes at first sight, but rather by degrees and against her better judgment. She had found him unstable and affected; on the other hand, she admired his fine figure, his talent, his conversation, and the fire in his brilliant eyes. She told herself that she was deeply anxious about his soul, but, in a crowd, she watched for his broad shoulders and his handsome face. Such was her friendship, and she had known him for two years. Her first season had been a startling success. She had the misery of rejecting several suitors of whom her father fully approved—one was an Archdeacon. She had been drawn more than kindly toward a consumptive violinist whom she had met at a Saturday entertainment for the poor at Kensal Green. Not a single word of love ever passed between them. He called once or twice at her aunt's house in Chester Square, and they had played together some of Corelli's sonatas. Her aunt carried her away to Brighton, and no more was heard of the young violinist till a rumour reached them that he was drinking himself to death at St. Moritz. Agnes said many prayers for him. At last a second rumour reached her that the first was wholly incorrect. He had married a very nice girl with a lot of money and was building a villa at Cannes. Agnes told herself that she was thankful to hear it. The next year she became engaged to a young Member of Parliament with really fine prospects. She was not in love, but she liked him better than all her friends. She felt serene, and at last useful. Then a story reached her about another woman, and yet another woman before that one. The story was true and not at all pretty. The Bishop was obliged to support his daughter in her refusal to regard matters in what her betrothed described as a sane and reasonable manner. He had sinned and he was sorry, and what was more, he had every desire to reform. But Agnes remained firm, although she had probably never been so nearly in love with him as she was on the day when she returned all his charming letters and the ring and his photograph. It was a trying moment. She was ordered abroad, and she spent the winter at Rome, where she read ancient history and visited churches and excited a great deal of admiration. Mrs. Rennes and David were also at Rome. The three met at the house of an irreproachable Marchesa. They became friends. Miss Carillon's aunt, who was a maiden lady with means, succumbed to the fascinating eloquence of an amateur *connoisseur* of antique gems. In her new character of *fiancée*, she found it inconvenient to chaperon a young niece. She joined a widowed friend, and gladly assented to the suggestion that dear Agnes should visit Mrs. Rennes in Paris. The Bishop saw no impediment to the plan. He had been at Oxford with the late Archibald Rennes, an odd fellow but high-minded. Mrs. Rennes was the daughter of a General Hughes-Drummond. Every one knew the Hughes-Drummonds. They were very good people. [84]

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indeed. The Bishop hoped that Agnes would enjoy herself, give her kind friend as little trouble as possible, and come home fully restored in spirits. He forgot David. It may be that others omitted to mention him. The Bishop was not pleased when the rumour reached him that this artist was included in the party. What were his habits? What were his prospects? Were his artistic talents such that he might reasonably hope to become a Royal Academician and maintain an establishment? What *class* of pictures did he paint? Were they lofty in tone? Did they exalt and purify the mind? Would they make good engravings—such engravings as one might hang on one's walls? The correspondence and the questions were endless. David spent a week end at the Episcopal Palace, and behaved so well that he became frightened at his own capabilities for John Bullism. He was a little annoyed, too, to find himself at ease in a British home circle. The Bishop was, at all events, satisfied. Agnes was enchanted, and, transfigured by unconscious passion, looked more beautiful than ever. David enjoyed the services in the cathedral; he liked the quiet Sunday afternoon, he was impressed by Dr. Carillon's real earnestness in the pulpit. The visit was a great success. Before he left, he begged Agnes to write to him "when she could spare the time." The young man had tried everything except a Platonic friendship with a lovely girl. He fancied that he found in Agnes Carillon that purity coupled with magnetism which makes such experiments attractive. They corresponded regularly, but they did not meet again for several months. When he returned, a little tired of platonism, letter-writing, intellectuality, and longing a great deal for the sight of her face, he found her engaged to Lord Reckage. So nature revenges itself. He detected a certain triumph and also a certain deep reproach in her gaze. She insisted that she was more than happy, but something under these words seemed to murmur—"You have spoilt our lives." Her manner, nevertheless, never altered. She was invariably sympathetic, gracious, delicately emotional. In letters she signed herself, "Yours affectionately, Agnes Carillon."

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"How I should like to paint you in this light!" he said, all at once. "That is the dress I love best. Don't wear it often." The remark was slight enough as a pretty speech within the bounds of flirtation, but the tone in which he uttered it meant more, and the girl's womanly instinct told her that the dangerous limit in their "friendship" had been reached. He saw her turn pale. She looked away from him, and swallowed thoughts which were far more bitter than any words she could have spoken.

"You never used to say these things," she exclaimed at last; "why do you say them now?"

"I thought them—always," he answered. "But I am a Pagan. I tried to keep my Paganism for others, and what you would call 'the best in me' for you. You may be able to understand. Anyhow, I made a mistake—a terrible mistake. It was a false position, and I couldn't maintain it. Now I don't even want to maintain it. Then it was a kind of vanity. I mean that time when I was at the Palace. I had been reading a lot of beautiful unreal stuff about the soul. I thought I had reached a very high place. Of course I had—because nothing is higher or purer than real human love. But I wouldn't call it love. So I went abroad, and wrote any amount of 'literature' to you. And all the time Reckage was here—asking you, wisely enough, to marry him. And you, wisely enough, accepted him."

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Agnes sat still, with her eyes down, cold, silent, forbidding. She did not understand him. She had neither the knowledge of life, nor the imagination, which could make such understanding possible. But she saw in his look that he loved her, that he was unhappy. She knew that Reckage had never shown so much feeling. Yet had she not given her word to Reckage? Was it not irrevocable? Was Rennes behaving well in speaking out—too late? Was it too late? A torrent of questions poured into her mind. She dragged off her gloves, and spread out her hands, which were slim and white, and stared at her sapphire engagement ring.

"A weak man submits to destiny," said Rennes, "a strong one makes his own. It is what we think of ourselves which determines our fate. If I regard myself as a poor creature, I shall, no doubt, act the part of a poor creature. But," he added, with an ironical smile, "it is never too late to give up one's prejudices. I can't stand by and look on any longer. I intend to leave England for some years. I hope we may never meet again. Don't answer me, because there is nothing for you to say. You have been perfectly kind, perfectly charming, perfectly consistent. You have never deceived me and you have never deceived yourself."

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She interrupted him:

"I hope not. Oh, I hope I have never deceived myself—or you."

"I was grateful for your friendship," he said. "I can't be grateful for it now."

Agnes drew a long breath and murmured random words about the "time." Was it getting late?

"Yes," replied Rennes, "too late. Did I ever tell you why my father, with all his prospects, became a drawing-master? He told me that he had suffered so much learning why he could never paint, nor hope to paint, that he was determined to devote his knowledge to the service of apprentices. It seemed to him such an awful thing to mistake one's vocation. Now I feel that one of us—perhaps both of us, you and I, are doing even a worse thing. We are deliberately throwing happiness to the dogs."

"I don't think so," said Agnes, in a trembling voice. "There is duty, you know; that is something higher than happiness, I believe."

"Are you so sure?"

"Oh, yes!"

"I envy you. I don't even know what you mean by duty. It seems to me another name for the tyranny of false sentiment."

"Don't disturb my ideas," she exclaimed, with an appealing gesture. "Don't say these things. They make me wretched. I can't afford to doubt and question. One must have a few permanent rules of conduct."

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"But if they are fantastic, capricious, insincere?"

"I can't argue. I am not clever. I will not change my views. I dare not. It would make me hate you."

"You are the slave of convention."

"That may be. That is safer, after all, than being the slave of some other will stronger than my own. Why do you try to disturb my life—now—after so many really happy months of friendship?"

"Were they so happy? Agnes, were they happy?"

She hesitated.

"Yes," she said, at last; "relatively, yes."

"It is quite true. Good women drive us to the bad ones."

"Oh! what can you mean? Surely we are saying too much. We shall reproach ourselves later. I live, again and again, through one conversation. The phrases come into my mind with every possible shade of significance."

She pushed back her hat, and pressed her hand to her brow, which was contracting nervously as she spoke.

"I don't wish to be altered by any change in principle," she continued, "nor distracted, from my plain obligations, into other interests. I daresay I sound quite heartless and odd. I daresay you won't like me any more." Her voice faltered, but her lips remained precise. "But one must know one's mind—one *must*. You don't know yours; that is the whole trouble, David."

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She had never called him by his Christian name before, and now the forced sternness of her tone gave it almost the accent of a farewell.

"Perhaps we have helped each other," she went on; "at all events, you have taught me how to look at things. You are clever and original and all that. I am rather commonplace, and I never have new or surprising thoughts. The more I learn, the more I grow attached to the ordinary ways. Once you called me the ideal *bourgeoise*. You were right."

"Not entirely," said Rennes. "You think too much."

"You taught me that. I never used to consider people or notions. I accepted them without criticism."

"The madness of criticism has entered into you," he said. "It is the worst, most destructive thing on earth."

"How could I have accepted you—as my friend—without it?" she asked. "You puzzled me. I tried to understand you. No one had ever puzzled me before. No one, you may be quite sure, will ever puzzle me, in the same degree, again."

She gave him a long, tearful glance, in which defiance, reproach, determination, and a certain cruelty shone like iron under water. He made a movement toward her. The strength of his more emotional nature might have made a final assault—not uselessly—on her assumed "reasonableness." No appeal, no threat could have moved her from the mental attitude she had decided on—the duty of keeping her word to Lord Reckage. But she might have been urged to the more candid course of ascertaining how far his lordship's true happiness was really involved in the question. At that moment, however, Mrs. Rennes came into the room. She gave a little cry of surprise when she saw her son. Then she kissed Agnes, and sat down, looking anxiously from one to the other with something not unlike grief, not unlike jealousy.

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Her life and habits of thought were simple, but she had been highly educated. She was an accomplished linguist, a good musician, a most intelligent companion. Things which she could not comprehend she would, at least, accept on faith. There had never been the shadow of a quarrel between David and herself. But she felt, by intuition, that Agnes Carillon had, in some way, affected his life, his work, his whole nature. She could not blame her, because she knew nothing definite about the understanding which existed, plainly enough, between her son and this young lady. She had a horror, however, of flirtation and flirts. It seemed to her that, under all this talk and correspondence on art, poetry, scenery, and the like, there was a strong under-current of emotion. So she smiled upon Agnes with a certain reserve, as though she were not quite sure whether she had any great reason to feel delighted at her call. At a glance from David, however, her look softened into real friendliness.

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"I was so surprised to see Mr. Rennes here," said Agnes.

"I am surprised, too," said the older woman.

A restraint fell upon all three. David walked about the room, looking for things he did not want, and asking questions he did not wish answered, although he hoped they would interest his mother. But his spirits soon flagged. The conversation became trivial and absurd.

"Where are you staying?" asked Mrs. Rennes.

"I am with Pensée Fitz Rewes," said Agnes; "she has gone in the carriage to do a little shopping. She will send it here for me."

The carriage was at that instant announced. David went down the stairs with Agnes and handed her in. He said nothing. Mrs. Rennes watched the pair from the window and nodded her farewell with much gravity. When David returned to her, he found her reading peacefully Trollope's last novel. It was for these graces that he loved her most. He scribbled letters at her writing-table for the next hour. Then he spoke—

"I am going," said he, "to the East. I need a change. I suppose it will mean six months."

"But how you will enjoy it!"

"And what will you do?"

"I live from day to day, my dear. I am quite contented."

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"This journey is not a mere caprice. I have been contemplating it for some time," he said.

Mrs. Rennes' hair was white and her long, equine countenance, sallow. When her feelings were stirred, she showed it only by a cloudy pallor which would steal over her face as a kind of veil—separating her from the rest of mortals.

"One has to get away from England," continued Rennes: "one has to get away from one's self."

"And where is your self now?" she asked, not venturing to look at him.

"With that girl," he answered, suddenly; "with that girl."

"Do you love her?"

"I don't know. I suppose I do. Oh! I would love her if I could ever be absolutely sincere. But this I do know—I can't see her married to that fellow Reckage. So I must go away."

"I am afraid she is a coquette—a serious coquette, my dear boy."

"She is nothing of the kind. She is a true woman. Don't talk about her."

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CHAPTER VIII

Sara had spent the morning crying bitterly, in bed. Her letter to the Duke of Marshire was on the table by her side. From time to time she had taken it up, turned it over, shed fresh tears, and reproached herself for indecision. She held at bay every thought of Robert Orange, and formed the resolve of banishing him from her mind for ever. When the time came to dress for luncheon, she brightened a little, for the prospect of disguising her true feelings in the presence of Lord Reckage and Pensée appealed to that genius for mischief which animated the whole current of her life. *To baffle the looker-on* seemed not merely a great science, but the one game of wits which could never lose its interest. She was not insincere. She thought that lies, as a rule, were clumsy shifts, and abominable. Even in the moments when she was most thoroughly conscious of her talent for misleading others, she had never brought herself to think well of deception. She would have liked to feel that her heart was an open book for her friends to read. It would have been pleasant, she believed, if all could have known always that she practised a delicate art and played, consummately, fine comedy whenever she found spectators. But a solitary, mismanaged childhood, and the constant sense of being in many ways a foreigner, had taught her the penalty of frankness where sympathy could not supply, from its own knowledge, the unutterable half which makes up every confidence. The bitter pleasures of a conscience which caresses its worst burden were the only real ones of her daily existence. When she could say, at the end of the day, "I have fooled them all: they think I am happy, I am not: they think Reckage amuses me, he doesn't. They think I delight in these dull dinners and balls, I hate them," a sort of exultation—the pride of a spirit singing under torture—would fill her whole being. All youth that is strong and thoughtful has much of this instinct of dissimulation. The world—to a young mind—appears controlled by elderly, suspicious, hateful custodians ever on the alert to capture, or thwart, every high enterprise and every passionate desire. There seems a vast conspiracy against happiness—the withered, dreary wiseacres in opposition to the joy, the daring, the beauty, the reckless vitality of souls still under the spell of spring. When poor Sara could escape from town into the country, mount her horse, and tear through a storm, the neighbours compared her to a witch on a broomstick, and, shaking their heads, would foresee much sipping of sorrow by the spoonful in the future of Lord Garrow. To-day, however, the young lady assumed her most demure expression, and received the guests at luncheon as though she had never learnt the meaning of tears nor joined the gale in spirit.

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Sir Piers Harding was the last to arrive. He was a thick-set, livid man with an unyielding smile and the yellow eyes of one whom rich diet rather than an angry god had rendered melancholy.

"You haven't changed in the least," he said, considering Lord Garrow with some resentment.

"Ah, well!" replied his lordship, "eleven years do not make much difference at my time of life. You, however, are decidedly greyer. Where have you been hiding yourself? I think you were foolish to leave England. Gladstone was remarking but the other day, 'Harding was always so cocksure.' 'And wasn't he right?' said I. 'Of course,' said he; 'and that was the worst of him. He was right. Who could stand it?' That's the world. It's devilish unappreciative of the truth."

Reckage, much bored by the old men, stood by Pensée's chair, where he could watch Sara and angle for her glance. When it happened that she smiled at him a little—either in mere friendship or mockery—he felt a kind of fire steal through his veins, and he told himself that she was a dangerous woman—a woman who could get her own way in the long run. That she was a girl—and, with all her shortcomings, a very innocent one—made her odd powers of fascination but the more insidious. She wore a dress of wine-coloured silk which fitted plainly over her breast and shoulders and fell in graceful flounces from the waist. The warm, olive lines of her cheek and throat appeared the darker in contrast with a twist of white lace which she wore round her neck; and her black hair, dressed higher than usual, was held in place by a large ruby comb which caught the fire-light as she moved. Reckage was conscious, for the first time in his life, of a real embarrassment. He could not talk to her; he felt tongue-tied when she addressed him. Ill at ease, yet not unhappy, he struggled to maintain some coherence in his conversation; but, at each moment, his own ideas grew less certain and Sara's voice more enchanting. It seemed to convey the lulling powers of an anodyne. When he tried to rouse himself, the effort was as painful as the attempt to wake from a dream within a dream.

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"You were at the wedding this morning?" she asked lightly.

"No.... What a fool I am! Yes, of course. You mean Robert's wedding?"

She gave a little smile, and murmured, dropping her voice, "I meant Robert's wedding."

Luncheon was then announced: the sliding doors which separated the dining-room from Lord Garrow's library were rolled back. They all walked in—Pensée and Sara leading the way.

"A sweet creature!" whispered his lordship behind their backs, indicating Lady Fitz Rewes. He sighed as he spoke. He could never feel that there was not something deplorable in Sara's physical brilliancy. Her upper-lip that day had a certain curl which he had learnt to regard as a danger-signal. What would she do next? As he sat down at the table and observed the sweep of her eyelashes toward Reckage, a presentiment of trouble clouded the new hopes he had formed for her career.

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"Who are your strong men now?" asked Harding suddenly, after a moment's contemplation of Reckage, who sat opposite.

"Our strong men?" faltered Lord Garrow.

"Aren't most of 'em place-hunters and self-seekers?"

"You must meet Robert Orange," said Pensée; "Mr. Disraeli believes in Robert Orange."

"I never heard of him," observed Sir Piers. "Who is he?"

"You may well ask," said Lord Garrow. "He claims to be a de Hausée—on his father's side. Reckage can tell you about him. Many have a high opinion of the fellow, and say that if he will stick to one branch of politics, he may become useful. Personally, I don't call him a man of the world."

"Not of our world, perhaps, papa. But there are so many other worlds!"

"Sara likes him. A lot of women like him," said his lordship. He was annoyed at her interruption and took his revenge by a feminine thrust. "The hero," said he, "married some mysterious person this very morning. We may not hear so much about him in the future!"

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"Dear Lord Garrow," said Pensée, "his wife is a friend of mine—she is the most charming person."

Sara put out her hand and touched Reckage on the arm.

"Do you think," she asked, "that the wife will be an obstacle in his way?"

"Who can tell? Of course she has means, and he likes to do everything well."

"Speaking for myself," said Harding, "I have always held that a man's career rests rather on his genius than his marriage."

"But you, my dear fellow," put in Lord Garrow, testily, "you retired from political life because your theories could find no illustration there."

"Pardon me," said Sir Piers, with a grim laugh. "I retired because I had a faultless wife but unfortunately no genius. I shall therefore watch your friend's triumph or failure—for his position would seem to be precisely the reverse of my own—with peculiar sympathy."

"Ah! I fear you are rather heartless," exclaimed Sara. "For a man to have gone so far as Orange, and to know that perhaps—I say, perhaps—he can hope no higher because he made a fool of himself about a woman!"

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"You speak as though it were a romantic marriage—a question of love."

"Of course," said the young lady softly. "It is a great passion."

"Well, after all," observed Harding, who was not insensible himself to Sara's delightfulness, "the British public is absurdly fond of a love-match. They adore a sentimental Prime Minister. They want to see him either marrying for love, or jilted in his youth for a richer man. These things enlist the popular sympathy. What made Henry Fox? His elopement with Lady Caroline Lennox."

"To be sure," said Reckage—"to be sure. That's a point."

"It is a compliment to the sex," continued Harding, "when a great man is taken captive by a pretty face. Men, too, rally round a Lochinvar. Such an evidence of heart—or folly, if you prefer to call it so—is also an evidence of disinterestedness. So, on the whole, I cannot follow your objections to the new Mrs. Orange."

"You have been away so long," said Garrow fussily, "that you have forgotten our prejudices. Orange himself, to begin with, has something mysterious in his origin. They say he is French—related to the old French aristocracy; but the less one says in England about foreign pedigrees the better. All that of itself is against him, and Mrs. Orange, it seems, is more or less French, or Austrian, too. We can't help regarding them as foreigners, and I always distrust foreigners in politics. Why should they care for England? I ask myself."

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"Why, indeed?" said Harding, with irony.

"Have I made myself clearer?" asked Garrow. "I can afford to speak. My own wife was a Russian. But I was not in political life, and she was an Ambassador's daughter."

"You think you would feel more sure of Orange's patriotic instinct if he had chosen an Englishwoman?" said Reckage.

"I am bound to say that he would have shown discretion in settling down with one of our simple-hearted Saxon girls."

"And who was Mrs. Orange before she married Orange?" asked Harding.

"A widow—a Mrs. Parflete," said Garrow.

"Parflete!" exclaimed Harding. "Mrs. Parflete! But I have met her. She married Wrexham Parflete, an extraordinary creature. He lived for years with the Archduke Charles of Alberia. People used to say that Mrs. Parflete was the Archduke's daughter. I ran across Parflete the other day in Sicily."

"But he is dead," said Pensée, much agitated; "he drowned himself."

"I cannot help that," repeated Sir Piers. "I met him last week, and he beat me at *écarté*."

"Then it is not the same man," said Reckage, "quite obviously."

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"Wrexham Parflete had a wife; I heard her sing at a dinner-party in Madrid. She was living with the Countess Des Escas; there was a row and a duel on her account. I never forget names or faces."

"But this looks serious," said Reckage. "Do you quite understand? It's the sort of thing one hardly dares to think. That is to say if you mean what I mean. The marriage can't be legal."

The two women turned pale and looked away from each other.

"I mean as much or as little as you like," said Harding. "But Parflete was alive last Monday."

"But bigamy is so vulgar," observed Lord Garrow. "You must be mistaken. It is too dreadful!"

"Dreadful, indeed! And a great piece of folly into the bargain. It is selling the bear's skin before you have killed the bear."

Lady Fitz Rewes glanced piteously at the three men and wrung her hands.

"Don't you see," she exclaimed, "don't you see that if there is the least doubt of Mr. Parflete's death, we ought to go to them. Some one must follow them."

"There is that touch of the absurd about it," said Reckage, "which makes it difficult for a friend to come forward. To pursue a man on his wedding journey—"

"It is no laughing matter," put in Lord Garrow; "and if the woman has deceived the poor fellow, it's a monstrous crime."

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"Oh, she hasn't; she couldn't deceive him," said Pensée. "I know her intimately."

"She was considered very clever—at Madrid," said Sir Piers, finely. "To you she may appear more to be pitied than she really is."

"Don't say such things! I won't hear them. I love her very much."

"Perhaps she is clever enough to appear stupid in public."

"No, no!" Her voice trembled and tears gushed from her eyes. "You will regret these words. This news will kill her."

"Something must be done," said Sara. "Beauclerk, you ought to follow them and tell them. Pensée is right."

"This will make a horrid scandal," said Lord Garrow, who was appalled at the prospect of being mixed up in so disagreeable an affair. "Why not leave it alone? It is not our business."

"But it is Beauclerk's business, papa. Just put yourself in his place. Surely that is not asking too much."

"We must avoid everything precipitate," said Reckage; "we mustn't be over-hasty."

Lady Fitz Rewes wiped her eyes, rose from the table, and began to draw on her gloves.

"But we must be friends," she said; "if you cannot go to them, I will. Do you realise the poor child's position? An illegal marriage! She is the most gentle, beautiful person I ever saw, with the best head, the purest heart. She professes *nothing*. I judge her by her actions." [106]

"But you must see," said Reckage, "that I can't give Orange all this pain unless I have something more definite to go on. Sir Piers tells us that he played cards with Wrexham Parflete last week." He paused.

"Wait a moment," said Harding; "wait a moment. Does any one present know Parflete's handwriting?"

"I do," said Pensée. "I saw his last letter to his wife. He wrote it before he committed suicide."

Sir Piers took out his pocket-book, and, from the several papers it contained, selected a three-cornered note.

"By the merest chance," said he, "I have this with me."

The others unconsciously left their seats and looked over his shoulder while he smoothed out the sheet. It was dated plainly, "October 7, 1869," and contained the acknowledgment of two £10 notes won at écarté.

"That is the hand," said Pensée. "One could not mistake it."

"Then this is really very serious," said Lord Reckage, with twitching lips. "The whole story has had all along something of unreality about it. Robert seems fated to a renunciant career—colourless, self-annihilating." [107]

"What will you do?" murmured Pensée, with an imploring gesture. "What will you do?"

"They leave Southampton at three o'clock," said Reckage; "it is now half-past two. The steamer goes twice a week only. I can send him a telegram and follow them overland—by way of Calais."

"Then I must go also," said Pensée firmly. "She will need me. I have had a presentiment of trouble so long that now I feel 'Here it is come at last.' I cannot be too thankful to God that it isn't worse."

Nothing showed under the innavigable depths of Sara's eyes. She had moved to the fireplace and stood there holding one small foot to the blaze.

"Are you cold?" asked her father anxiously.

"I am ice," she said, "ice!"

Reckage joined her and said, under his voice, "You think I ought to go, don't you?"

This question—given in a half-whisper—seemed to establish a fresh intimacy between them. It was the renewal of their old friendship on deeper terms.

"Yes, you must go," she answered; "and, Beauclerk, write to me and tell me how he bears it."

"He is accustomed to a repressive discipline on these matters. The philosophic mind, you know, is never quite in health. Probably, he won't show much feeling."

His gaze seemed to burn into her face. It was as though she had been walking in an arbour and suddenly, through some rift in the boughs, found herself exposed to the scorching sun. She felt dominated by a force stronger than her own nature. A little afraid, she shrank instinctively away from him, and as she dared not look up, she did not see the expression of triumph, mingled with other things, which, for a moment, lit up Lord Reckage's ordinarily inscrutable countenance. Lately, he had been somewhat depressed by his encounter with refractory wills. His horse, his colleagues on the Bond of Association, his future bride, had showed themselves fatiguing, perhaps worthless, certainly disheartening and independent accessories to his life. Here, at last, was some one brilliant, stimulating, by no means self-seeking, Quixotic in enthusiasms. [108]

"Sara," he said, obeying an impulse which surprised himself, "do you believe in me?"

This time she gave him a straight glance.

"Yes," she answered. "You might do a great deal if you could forget yourself for a few months."

Pensée, much troubled and full of thoughts, walked over to them.

"Oh, Sara!" she said, "isn't it terrible? If you could have seen them both this morning—she looked so beautiful, perfectly lovely—a sight I never can forget. And now this blow! What man can teach men to understand the will of God?"

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CHAPTER IX

Robert and Brigit were silent with happiness on their way to Southampton. Side by side they watched the country through the carriage windows. There had been a fog in London when they left, and the sun, at intervals, shone out like a live coal among dying embers. All was obscured; the foot-passengers and passing vehicles seemed black straying shadows in the atmosphere. But the express emerged at last from the clinging darkness into autumnal fields, some brown after the harvest, others studded with hay-ricks. At one point in the landscape they noticed a flock of sheep drinking at a stream. The boy who guarded them waved his cap at the train, and this little signal, coming, as it were, from human nature, gave them a reassurance of the day's reality. Near Bishopstoke the clouds were white and dense, but, rippling in places, they disclosed blue stretches of the heaven which, in their masses, they concealed. Southampton began with small houses. One had a tattered garden, where a stone copy of the Medicean Venus stood on a patch of squalid turf near a clothes' line and against an ivy-grown wall. Then the green sands were reached. The sea, like liquid granite, sparkled in the distance. Rows of dull dwellings, shops, public-houses, and hotels came next. The train, with a shriek, rushed into the station. It was still too early for lunch, so they walked down to the pier, where they saw several yachts and pleasure-boats at anchor in the harbour, and the New Forest greenly outlined in the distance. These were the things which engraved themselves on Brigit's mind. The impressibility of youth is retentive for outward objects, but the inner mood—the sensation and idea which make the mental state—lives unconsciously, and is recognised only in the long process of time. Brigit could have described the scene, but her emotions did not seem to her, emotions. Absorbed by them, and in them, she neither abandoned herself to the hour nor asked herself what the hour held. She and the hour were one—a single note; and the joy she felt at being with Robert, leaning on his arm and hearing his voice, was so simple that, even if a psychologist of the deepest experience had been able to probe into the workings of her mind, he would have found nothing there to analyse. Hers was a child's affection—the first love of a heart still immature, and not yet made suspicious of itself by contact with others less innocent. Parflete had been too worldly-wise not to guard and value—at its true price—a disposition so graceful in its very essence. She had a knowledge of affairs beyond her years, yet her own instincts, her education, her few friendships, had kept her curiously ignorant of evil, of much also that is neither good nor evil, but merely human. The sombre sentimentality which lurks in most young girls of seventeen was not in her character at all, and in its stead she possessed the gaiety and carelessness of feeling which belongs to imaginative rather than to sensuous natures. A boy-like spirit showed itself in all her words, movements, moods; her womanhood still slept, and thus, while her intelligence made her an unusual companion and her beauty presented a constant appeal to all that is romantic, it was inevitable that melancholy and reserve should enter largely into the passionate love which Robert felt for her. He told himself that he would not have her different. The glance of her eyes, which stirred him strangely to the very depths of his being, never varied in its sweetness nor its calm. When her lightest touch could sway his body and spirit, she, unconscious of her power, would press his hand against her cheek and talk about the geraniums in the convent garden or the chances of the Carlist war. It was all wonderful. It had seemed perfect. And yet—and yet. She was not cold, but was she unearthly? Was she, perhaps, some straying angel—some fervid, bright spirit, flame-coloured and intangible, a being of the elfin race? As they stood together looking at the distant coastline a depression which he could neither fathom nor control came over him. His bride seemed so much younger than he had ever realised. She cared for him—how could he doubt it? But was the indefinable, indispensable feeling absent?

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"Do you remember our journey from Catesby?" she asked suddenly. "I slept. Wasn't I dull? Did you mind?"

No one could see them. He stooped and kissed her fragrant, animated face. "I wish," said he, "I wish that you were not quite such a child."

The feeling of solitariness weighed upon his soul with a crushing weight unknown until that day—the day of days, his wedding day. Heretofore he had craved for solitude because it had been full of her imagined companionship. Now that she actually lived and talked by his side, the fancied image of her paled, vanished. The real creature was adorable, but, for some reason, maddening, and not, at all events, the being of his fancy. Their old relations—ethereal and exquisite, no doubt—now seemed an empty mockery, self-deluding foolishness. He coloured at the remembrance of all that Disraeli had hinted, and Reckage had brutally declared, on the large topic of idealism in passion. A man, in spite of all determinations to be uncomplaining, knows the How much and How little that he may demand, merely as a man, from any given advantage or disadvantage in existence. Robert, hating himself, condemning himself, was conscious, in spite of himself, that

Brigit's affection for him was not love in the full human sense of the word. He had exchanged an ordinary self-restraint for an impossibly false position. She could inspire his life, but could she enter into it, be it, live it with him daily? Would there not have to be great reservations, half statements, and, worst of all, a subtle kind of hypocrisy? He reproached himself for selfishness, yet the fear came and it remained. He had captured the rainbow and married the goddess. Were there not many legends illustrating this folly?—stories of men who had married divinities and perished, not because the divinities were at fault, but because mortals must wed with mortals. The sight of his wife's beauty caused a sudden, violent irritation. He wished she had none, for then, perhaps, he thought he would have been satisfied, more than content, in the placid consideration of her charms of character. He found himself reduced to the absurd predicament of deciding to banish her from his thoughts—a last sophism which showed him, all too clearly, how wretched he was. Their silence, which had been due in the first instance to the sufficient delight of being in each other's company, became that long pause which arises from an unutterable embarrassment. Brigit felt by instinct some change in Robert's mood, but as she could not account for it then, her sympathy failed. The keen salt air filled her with its own free buoyancy; her delicate skin flushed in the wind; she forgot the nervous strain of the morning, the awfulness of the grey chapel, the new state of things, griefs that were past, responsibilities that were to come. She turned to Orange as a child would turn to its inseparable comrade, and clapped her hands with amusement at an organ-grinder with a monkey and a dog whom she noticed sitting at the end of the pier, waiting, apparently, for one of the excursion steamers bound for the Isle of Wight.

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"Pennies for the monkey, Robert," she cried; "a lot of pennies! And then we must have our lunch. May I have some chicken and one of those very droll, very stupid, English rice puddings? Please let me have one.... And may I kiss the dog? It is a nice little dog—quite as nice as Pensée's Fidelio. Now I am going to talk to the monkey."

She ran toward the little animal, who was shivering, pathetic and grotesque, in a military cap and red petticoat trimmed with yellow braid. The dog, which was a young pug with excellent points, gave Brigit, after many entreaties, his paw. She addressed the monkey in Italian, and laughed till she cried at its absurdities. Robert looked on, consumed by a sensation which he recognised, with much shame, as jealousy. He thought the pug dull and the monkey revolting. Yet she kissed one, and showered heavenly smiles on both.

"I did not know that you were so fond of animals," he said, as they walked to the hotel for lunch.

"I am not," she answered frankly, "as a rule. But when I am with you I feel so happy that I want to kiss everything—the ground, and the trees, and chairs, and poodle dogs, and the whole world!"

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"Then why not—me?"

She looked at him, blushed a little, and waited some moments before she replied.

"I don't know," she said at last. "It must be because I am not in the habit of doing so. I am not accustomed to you yet. I keep thinking 'I shall wake up in a minute and he will be miles away.' Can't you understand? So I am pretending to myself all the time that you are not really here."

"I see."

"No, dearest, you don't quite understand; and you are a little disappointed in me because I seem—I must seem—rather flippant. I daren't be serious—I daren't. I daren't believe that I am your wife."

"But why not?"

She shook her head, and her whole face became clouded by the old, terrible, unnatural sadness which he knew so much better than her laughter.

"I am not used to joy," she said. "Perhaps, if we ever get to Heaven, our first impulse will be to run back again to Purgatory, where we are more at home!"

"You have too much wit, darling, to be happy anywhere!"

"No! no! I don't ask to be conventionally happy, but I want you always. That is all ... you, always, on any terms—on a rag-heap, in a storm, with jackals howling at us!"

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"What a picture!"

"My idea of unalloyed bliss, or, at least, the only one I have ever permitted myself. I can even believe that might be realised." A smile hovered again about her lips, but she looked steadily ahead, as though she were still resolved not to reassure herself, by any too-frequent glances, of his much-loved presence.

The peculiar tenderness of her voice was in itself a charm against ill-humour. A rush of bitter self-reproach told Robert that his dissatisfaction had been the inevitable result of too many blessings on a base nature. He tried to speak; he watched instead, with a desperate, eager gaze, the play of her expressive features.

"I wonder," she said, "what our life is to be? Not that I wish to pry into the future, but, for some reason, I can never feel settled. Every morning is a surprise. I think, too, about your character ... your career. Have I helped you, or have I been a hindrance? I am perverse, capricious—not an

angel. No human influence can help me very much. I must depend on the discipline of God. Oh, if I could know all that He wants me to do!"

"Most of us have that desire, Brigit. At least it is better to be damned, in the world's opinion, trying to do the will of God than saved—doing nothing! One has to take a good many chances—even the chance of displeasing Him—if it comes to a crisis."

"Many people would call that reckless."

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"Let them call it anything," said the young man; "names do not matter. The ghastly, unspeakable dread is to be timorous, halting, the creature of indecision."

"We are too much alike," she sighed. "Oh, Robert, if we did not suffer horribly within ourselves when we do wrong, I believe we should both defy every law in the world! I am a born rebel."

More than a note of her mother's insolence was in the speech, but the whole spirit of the dead actress seemed to possess Brigit for that moment. Her being rippled, as it were, with the new disturbance, just as a pond will tremble to its edges at the mere dip of a swallow's wing. The artistic hatred of all restraint and the wild desire of liberty were the imperious passions of her heart—more vehement than any other feeling—even her love for Orange.

"I could fight," she said, "a visible devil, but this struggle with moods and tastes is deadening."

"What are the moods and tastes?" he asked.

"I cannot describe them well. But music calls me; I hear it trilling, and sobbing, and whispering everywhere; and sometimes it is so loud and so beautiful that I wonder why every one else doesn't stop to listen. They never do. So I sing back my answer. It is silent singing. You would only wonder why I was so quiet all at once."

"But I have heard you sing."

"Not with my real voice, Robert. It is stronger than it used to be." She checked herself and hesitated, stopped by a sudden scruple—a sort of delicacy. She thought nothing at all of her beauty and never of her fortune; but in giving Robert her voice, and the nameless ambitions which enveloped it, she was conscious that she had made, in some way, a renunciation.

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"Say what you were going to say, dearest?"

"I cannot forget," she exclaimed desperately, "that mama was an actress. And I remember some of the nights at the theatre.... I liked the theatre.... I believe I could act.... I have learned the whole of *Phédre* and the whole of *Juliet*. That is why I live."

This avowal of her secret over-ruling instinct set free the sanguine strength which circumstances had imprisoned, but could not destroy, in her character. The constant effort of hiding from all observation the irrepressible yearnings of a talent that would not be denied, had given her that quality of mysteriousness, of dreamy habits of thought, of languor, which, even to Robert, had looked as though she might find this earth too rough to live on. But the despair which comes from fighting, unsuccessfully, the world, is not that appearance of weakness which is the result of fighting—more or less effectively—one's own energy. In this latter issue the beaten foe joins forces obediently enough with the conqueror, till at last the opposing elements are directed, whether for good or evil, by one will.

"So you want to go on the stage," said Orange quietly.

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She turned to him and saw, with anguish, the deep amazement his words had not expressed.

"No," she said, "no. I have you instead. I want to devote myself to you—to exist for you."

"Oh, don't you see, my dear child, that this is a kind of—of pity—of anything you like, except the one thing——"

"I adore you, Robert. Oh, I can't get at what I want to say! Any talk about love always sounds very stilted or hollow. I only know that I want to live intensely in all that concerns you; that just to think of you makes me perfectly happy. When I said that learning *Phédre* and *Juliet* was the reason I lived, I was thinking of the time when I had no right to think of you. Of course I loved you always, from the beginning. It began at Chambord when I first met you. I very seldom say these things, and it is better that they should remain unsaid for the most part. But you must never doubt me, and I feel to-day, in spite of all we know about each other and all we have suffered, that you are doubting me now. You fear I don't know my own mind. Isn't this the trouble?"

The intuition which comes to men and women through suffering has always the certain sharpness of a surgeon's knife. It may be a reassurance to have the inmost thought plucked at by some loving spirit, and yet it is seldom that the touch can be given without inflicting agony. Orange could not reply at once. In his resolve to be unselfish—to put aside that personal equation which was nothing less than his whole nature—he had to steel his heart to her, contradicting painfully, by curt, unfelt phrases, the promptings of a soul turned in upon itself, desolate and confused.

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"I have been selfish and thoughtless," he said abruptly; "a missed vocation is irreplaceable and it is also indestructible. You hear the echo of the call as long as you live—perhaps afterwards. At your age you could feel, but you could not wholly understand your talents. If you had told me all

this before——”

She laughed with real joyousness and clung more closely to his arm.

“I didn't tell you,” she exclaimed, “because you would have said just what you are saying now. You are the one. All the rest is a means of forgetting you. It is something resembling happiness to be alone in the turmoil of the world with one unspoilt illusion. This illusion in my case is a little idea that I could be a great actress—perhaps! Don't look grave, Robert. It makes you sad when I talk this way.”

“Those who can be disillusioned have no convictions. Disillusion is the failure of a half-belief. I learnt that long ago. But I hate the very word in your mouth. Woe to us both if we cannot be resolute now. I could have waited—had I seen any reason to wait. Time could make no difference in my love. As it is, I have stolen you from yourself. But now I have stolen you I will keep you. I cannot—cannot give you back again to anything or anybody.”

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He spoke with that almost mocking tenderness which disassembles its passion. At the practical difficulty which now confronted him, all that was merely romantic and speculative in his soul took flight, as birds that are frightened from a quiet orchard by the yelp of dogs. He became aware that he was bitterly independent of the joys he had once found in the mere spectacle of the exterior world—the play of light and shade, the changing visions of the sky, the charm of the earth. His own thoughts were now the sole realities, and the dulness which suddenly came over his vision for outward things seemed to render it the more acute and concentrated for the things of the mind. As distant hills and tree tops show most distinctly before a storm, so every possibility which can arise from a conflict of duties stood out with a decisive clearness for his consideration. He had married in haste a child-bride. There was no blinking the fact. She had the strenuous religious fibre, and with it real Bohemian blood. She was also at the yielding age, when a dominant influence could do much to divert or modify every natural trait. He could not doubt that he had this power over her then. How far, and to what purpose, should he exert it? For himself he wished to discourage any hankering on her part for public life, and, most of all, public life behind the footlights, under an artificial sky. No one knew better than he that there are certain things of love, of nobility, of temperament, of pride, in certain lives which the world at large would rather calumniate than comprehend. People in general clung to their opinions not because they were true, but because they were their own, and among pretty general opinions—particularly in the year 1869—there was a strong prejudice against handsome young women who went on the stage. It was not in him to consider—even as an egoistic reflection to be put aside—how far Brigit's project, carried into action, could effect his own political career. His apprehensions were all for her and her own content.

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“Promise me,” he said, “that you will always tell me when the acting mood comes over you. Never fight it, never try to resist it, give it the liberty to die, but also the right to live. There is an old Hindoo proverb: ‘Find the flower which can bloom in the silence that follows—not that which precedes—the storm.’ This applies perfectly to a talent or a vocation. If the mood is there, in spite of fatigue, or discouragement, or other claims—happiness for that matter—you may depend that it is the ruling motive of your life and not to be vanquished. You must follow the bent or you will suffer—suffer till you die of it.”

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“How? in what way?”

“Either in your vanity or your conscience; either by the world's judgment on your conduct or by your own estimate of your conduct. You have no vanity, so the world doesn't count. But you have a conscience, and that counts for all!”

He had not calculated, and he could not have foreseen, the effect of his words. Her eyes filled with tears.

“My dearest,” she said, “don't you see how trivial everything is to me in comparison with you? But I dare not love you so much as I can! So I encourage other enthusiasms—out of fear. Sometimes it seems as though the extraordinary, impossible ideal would be to have you with me for ever, and be an actress as well. But that is out of the question. And if I had my choice—if I could be as great as Rachel or Mrs. Siddons, or live with you on my dear rag-heap, with the jackals howling—do you think that I would hesitate, that I could hesitate?”

“If I believed you I should be a dreadful coxcomb!”

“Risk the coxcomb,” she said. “I can!”

A clanging bell and the noise of traffic on the quay recalled them to the moment. They had barely time to reach the steamer and get on board. A strong, cold breeze was blowing; the sun shone full on the sea, which, near the horizon, was as green as the sky on a summer evening. But clouds were gathering in the north-west, and the peculiar brightness which presages rain lent a fugitive brilliancy to the atmosphere. The town and its spires glittered; the water, frothing round the paddle-wheels, sent its shining spray upon the brown boards of the wharf. Brigit kissed her hands toward France.

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“Soon,” she exclaimed, “soon I can kiss its ground. How I love my country and the place where you lived, Robert, as a boy!”

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CHAPTER X

Lady Fitz Rewes had determined to prevent the marriage of Lord Reckage with Agnes Carillon. She could not forget the dreadful scene with Sara when that poor girl was endeavouring to reconcile herself to the Duke of Marshire's proposal. Pensée had studied each person concerned in the possible tragedy. She saw that Agnes was by no means serene, that the portrait by Rennes somehow made no progress, that Reckage was feverish and excitable. His bearing toward Sara during the lunch confirmed Pensée's suspicion that the love which had existed between them as boy and girl was still unextinguished on either side. He would have been less than mortal, she thought, if he had not felt, with all the bitterness of a conscious fool, that he had missed his true destiny. Sara possessed the warmth and wealth of heart which were the complements his own bleak nature required. Agnes Carillon, with her accurate, invariable beauty, had a prim disposition, wholesome enough for a man of strange, dark humours like David Rennes, but perilous always in its effect on any frigid or calculating mind. And Reckage was known to be supremely selfish. It seemed to Pensée that Sara had behaved very naturally, very touchingly, through the trying conversation on the subject of rising men and their marriages. Her demeanour had been unsurpassable. But it was not in nature that a woman who understood a man could look on, inactive and indifferent, while he fettered himself with some damaging influence. Perhaps her ladyship felt the situation the more keenly, because, much as she loved Mrs. Parflete, she could not bring herself to think that she was the wife for Robert. She had spent many weeks refusing admittance to this thought, yet prudence was prudence, and, by virtue of its stability, it prevailed. The union, even viewed in the most favourable light, had always seemed imprudent. It was too hurried. Shocking, mortifying as the possibility of its being illegal was, Pensée's conviction that Almighty God ordered all things for the best seemed less a faith and more a matter of pure reason than was usual in the ordinary run of hard cases which made demands upon her piety. "Two diamonds do not easily form cup and socket," was an old saying in her home circle. The more she had seen of Brigit Parflete the more she had been struck with her—struck with her moodiness, struck with her contempt for received opinions, her vigour and independence of will. Was she the wife to further the advance of a man of extraordinary ability, already much handicapped on the world's course by a proud spirit, a reckless, impetuous disdain of creatures generally considered the pink of human excellence? He was passionately in love, and the strength of this sentiment carried, for the time, every thought of his being along with it. But love was not unalterable. The change would surely come. The fever and folly, the exaltation and ardours would fade into a sacred affection—an instinctive tenderness; yet other interests, as vital, and in their season more absorbing, would flock into his life. What then?

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Pensée and Reckage did not exchange many words till they found themselves alone, face to face, in the railway carriage bound for Dover. Then they looked with wonder at each other, stupefied at the errand on which they were bound, and the strangeness of the whole proceeding. Reckage noticed that his companion was attired so correctly and with such discretion that no one could have told she was a pretty woman. Her veil was not unusually thick, yet it disguised every charm of expression and feature. He had bought her a novel, some papers, and a few magazines; she turned these over listlessly, and murmured, as the train sped along—

"Of course, I had to come. No one will say a word when the circumstances are known. I hope poor Renshaw is comfortable in the next carriage."

Reckage replied—

"You have behaved like an angel!"

He probably but half understood Pensée's character: he underrated her intellect, and he misconstrued her friendship for Orange into a weak infatuation. Agnes Carillon shared his view on this point, for, as he and his future bride could never be confidential with each other, they managed an appearance of intimacy by discussing with great freedom the private affairs of their friends. Agnes, in the fervour of godliness, had even seen much that was reprehensible in Lady Fitz Rewes's devotion to a man who had no idea of marrying her. She had declared that she could not understand it—an attitude pleasing to her fancy and gratifying to her pride. Reckage had thought it was not quite clear that the danger was immediate. Such was his feeling now toward Pensée, although he was conscious of a certain curiosity with regard to her motive in taking Brigit's part with such magnificent self-effacement. This seemed to him unnatural; and although she had impressed him with the highest opinion of her kindness, he could not believe that a woman of genuinely tender sensibilities could have approached such an altruistic height. She was an excellent creature—as creatures went, he thought, but hard in a feeble way. Then he closed his eyes and called up the elusive image of Sara de Treverell—very dark, very handsome, with her superb black hair reaching to her knees—as he had often seen it when she was a little girl—her blue eyes shining with a strange light, her lips smiling, her white arms held out....

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"Sara may not be a happy girl," said Pensée suddenly, "but she is a clever one."

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Reckage started from his reverie.

"How odd!" he exclaimed, surprised into candour. "I was thinking of her at that very moment."

Pensée had read as much on his face, but she did not tell him so.

"I feel for her very much," she observed instead. "She must be the greatest possible comfort to her father, although he may not realise it. Yet he is forcing on the engagement to Marshire. She

keeps up in the most courageous way, but she has ideals, and no persuasion will induce her to change them."

He turned red, and said, looking out of the window—

"Ideals do no harm when, for some reason or other, we are unable to carry them out."

"I cannot imagine what she will do, or how she will bear her life if things continue as they are."

"What things?"

"She is like a slave to Lord Garrow. She is with him constantly, reading to him, and doing everything for him. She will be a cruel loss to his home when she marries."

"I rather revel at the thought of the dismay which will attend her final capture of Marshire."

"I used to hope that you perhaps——"

He glanced up and smiled with an air of satisfaction.

"I don't like the appearance of measuring myself against Marshire.... But—but he certainly seems, in character, the culminating point of mediocrity! In fact, Mr. Disraeli, whom I seldom quote, so described him." [130]

"What a husband for that brilliant, affectionate girl! She likes all that is simple and grand. A real love—if it were a happy one—would make her even more charming, and if it caused her suffering, it would make her even more noble. But failing this, there will be a frightful void in her life."

Reckage, whose imagination began to play round this thought, replied with unusual seriousness—

"I should be horribly grieved to see any declension from her better nature. I think I am getting to think less of mere social power. I feel more than I used to do that, if one could literally *live* one's theories on moral strength, it would be a complete refutation of these ideas about the influence of money or a big accidental position. Old Harding was right when he said at luncheon to-day that disinterestedness counted very highly in the popular vote. The point about Henry Fox's elopement with Caroline Lennox was sound."

"It would not have been sound," said Pensée, "if Caroline Lennox had been a third-rate woman. A man can be desperate so long as his choice, on the whole, justifies, either by her beauty, or her talents, or something uncommon, an extreme measure. Now, Robert may not have made a wise choice, but it is certainly a distinguished one. It can be understood and it commands respect." [131]

"Oh, yes, his is a thorough-going emotion, and one couldn't find a fault with its object. A strong man is always a man who feels strongly *and* who can carry his feeling into action. Robert, with all his mysticism, is never subject to the deep depressions of spirit which usually afflict men of his gifts. He does not know what it is to be languid; or to have invincible indecisions. He will die game—even if he does know German metaphysic backwards!"

She was astonished.

"How well you understand him!"

He leant forward a little and adopted a more confidential tone—

"Sara spoke of him at lunch. Her judgment of men and affairs—for so young a woman—is nothing short of amazing. I attribute it to the Asiatic streak on her mother's side. It is a kind of second-sight. What a wife for a Prime Minister! And Marshire, a fellow of middling ability and no experience, has had the sense to perceive her qualities!... My feelings can't be easily defined, nor, indeed, is it necessary they should.... I have gone so far that I cannot see anything for it but to go on."

"You mean—in your own marriage?"

He sighed profoundly, remained for several minutes silent, and finally roused himself with a painful effort.

"There are some griefs which can defy any consolation save that of time. Time ultimately cures everything. It is a matter of history that I was once very much attached to Sara." [132]

"I know," murmured Pensée. "I know."

He covered his eyes with one hand and looked through his fingers at her face, asking himself by what transition he could best arrive at a frank exposition of his embarrassed sentiments. It seemed to him that she was intelligent as well as trustworthy, and he felt impelled to call in her assistance, being sure that, in any cause where love could be pleaded, she would show a judicious leniency.

"If you have not observed that I am still—too interested, you have not observed with your usual sagacity," said he.

"I think—if I may say so—that time seems only to deepen a sorrow of that kind."

"Particularly when it is associated—as in this case—with a certain self-reproach. In times of trial my pen is my refuge. I could not write for a year after I had decided—irrevocably as I believed—

that Sara and I could not make each other happy.”

“Then you never actually proposed to her? There was never any tacit understanding?”

“Never. And if there be any part of my conduct in life upon which I can look with entire satisfaction, it is my behaviour with regard to Sara. I did not mislead her in any way. I was even over-scrupulous, and purposely avoided opportunities of meeting. I say this in order that you may know how very determined a man's will must be—if he does not wish to be selfish. A course of struggling is miserable indeed. I spared her any knowledge of my misery.”

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“She might have been happier had she known of it! Last year she remained entirely alone; and solitude is full of bad things—it is very dangerous, however much one is accustomed to it.”

“Poor girl! But I could not, in honour, suffer a false impression to be formed. As a matter of fact, my family wouldn't hear of the match. There is no denying that they were set on my marrying Agnes.”

At last he had been able to mention her. He leant back and relied on his companion's tact to elaborate the theme.

Pensée murmured—

“Dear Agnes! If there are storms, they won't come from her side. She is of a very elevated spirit —”

He winced, but she continued—

“Generous, sternly honest, greatly esteemed by every one. Neither pique nor passion nor petty feelings could ever influence her mind. She is the most angelic, good woman I ever met—she is one to whom one may complain, and be a bore. She has such utter patience!”

“You would not be impressed by professions, nor am I very clever at making them,” said he, “but you know, by sympathy, that my affection for her is—is the heroic feeling of devotion which has also a kind of exclusiveness——”

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He could not finish the sentence.

“It leads you to imagine that you could never survive her loss,” said Pensée gravely. “But need you lose her—as a friend?” Something in his countenance encouraged her to pursue this train of thought. “Agnes has the deepest admiration for your qualities. No doubt, you truly realise the high standard of character which she would hope for in one to whom she gave her love. You have proved yourself worthy to call out her best feelings.”

Reckage was very touched by this tribute.

“And *her* best feelings,” said he, “ought to make us—at our best—very humble.”

Pensée lifted her veil just above her eyes, clasped her hands tightly together, and kept her earnest glance full upon his.

“I believe,” she continued, “that if it were in man, or woman, to command the heart, you would have her entire affection. I believe she is unhappy. During the last week she has had many ups and downs. She has passed with astonishing rapidity from the lowest despair to the height of joy. She has tried to distract her mind by incessant occupation. But you know her manner—it is transparent near the surface, difficult to sound in its depths.”

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“Yes, she has a childlike openness—up to a certain point.”

“I can only tell you, therefore, what I think, judging as a woman, by outward signs. I seem to detect a sort of self-doubt—as though she feared making some error. She has become of late strangely intense and vivid—she is fascinated by books, and drawn to music, as she never was before. Perhaps she sees that you give her a priceless, beautiful friendship which must indeed be flattering. Yet—yet in marriage friendship is not enough. So she is acquiring a stock of interests which are impersonal.”

Loyalty to Agnes forbade any reference to David Rennes. She had no intention of giving the least hint of her own private conviction on the subject. She desired merely that Reckage should learn how the engagement might be broken off without giving unimaginable grief to the young lady. The move under this aspect was skilful and successful. Reckage received her words as a subtle appeal to his honour and kindness.

He said at once—

“I am glad you have told me this. I could bear my own mistakes. I could not bear hers. Let me look at the step which I have taken! The choice is for life. Agnes is inflexibly conscientious and self-denying. Several years of attachment have tried us both. She knows my faults; I know where her”—he paused for a moment—“her qualities might clash with mine. We spoke of this together; we considered every circumstance that could, by any remote chance, weigh against our common happiness.”

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Pensée shook her head.

“Of course, that was right,” she said doubtfully.

"It is no easy matter to get a promise from Agnes," he went on; "but when once given it is inviolate. This throws a grisly responsibility upon me. I must risk everything, if I am to do anything. You have expressed a dread which I have been endeavouring to stifle. I am making her wretched."

"I don't say that *you* are making her wretched; I say she seems disturbed and unsettled when she ought to be full of the brightest hopes."

"Quite so. I fear the unsettlement is exceedingly great. A neutrality on your part is all I could in reason expect; but your counsel in such a grave matter——"

Pensée summoned all her energy, and breathed a little prayer for the well-being of the two women whose lives were at stake.

"I saw Agnes this morning," she said, speaking at a rapid pace; "she came up for some shopping, and she returned home directly after tea."

"She ought to have told me that she was in town," he exclaimed.

"My dear Beauclerk, you know her sweetness! She said, 'I don't wish to take up his time; an engagement ought not to be a servitude.' That is the reason why she did not tell you."

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"She ought to have told me," he repeated. "Such extreme delicacy was most uncalled for. It wasn't even friendly. When we were old friends, and nothing more, she would have told me."

"Yes, when you were friends."

"I think she gave me a nasty rap in so acting; I do, indeed. One would infer that I had failed in some ordinary attentiveness. It is a distinct reprimand."

"You are quite wrong. She meant it in the noblest way."

"Then it is a desperately near thing between noble conduct and a downright snub. I can't help lashing out about it."

In Pensée's own private perception this outburst of temper was no bad sign. It convinced her, at least, of the sincerity of his feelings towards Agnes and his genuine desire to behave well at every point in their relationship.

"Don't you understand," she said, "that Agnes *dares* not love you. This being the case, I cannot see that she could go on in what might be called a natural way. Will you bear with me, and, if I am indiscreet, forgive me? She wants all the sympathy and support she can get. She is suffering very much from want of courage. She trusts, perhaps, in her friends' prayers. It seems as though something very momentous were going on, but that she has nothing to do but to wait for it. I think there may be a way out still; God may overrule people's hearts."

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She had never intended to say so much, and she trembled with an excitement which she could not subdue.

"I must admit," said Reckage, "that for some time I have had a conviction, weaker or stronger, but, on the whole, constantly growing, that Agnes and I are unsuited to each other. I am too much accustomed to this idea to feel pain at it."

"O, it makes my heart ache—I mean so much painfulness for every one concerned!"

"This conviction must, sooner or later, lead me to action. The world is indulgent to the impetuous, because they appear strong; and it is most severe to those who hesitate, because hesitation is taken for a sign of weakness. Lookers-on have no patience with moral combats—and least of all in affairs of this kind. But no opinion will force me to do what I do not think right. If our engagement is a mistake, I don't intend to 'lump it,' as they say. We must mend the evil. And, thank God, it is not too late. The merciful part is that in relieving my own mind I shall also greatly relieve hers. It is clear she doesn't love me. This last act proves the fact conclusively."

Pensée did not agree with this, but she remained silent, fearing lest a rash word should spoil her good work.

"For a long, long time," he continued, "my constant question has been, 'Can this last? is it a delusion?' But I do not shut my eyes now. I knew they were all wrong at home when they made out that she was in love with me, and expected me to propose. We are both the victims of an impertinent, if well-meant, interference—what Robert calls 'the jabbering of the damned.' Poor Robert, we are forgetting him. I am ashamed to talk so much about myself."

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"In his case, I see no help but resignation to the will of God," said Pensée.

"But that resignation is an awful thing," said Reckage. "It is a shade better than the atheism of despair; yet only a shade better."

By degrees Pensée was learning why Robert had such a strong, tenacious attachment to this man. He was always faithful to his mood. All he did and all he said represented accurately all he thought and all he felt. Some live a dual life—he lived but one; and, with his faults, peculiarities, and egoism, there was never the least dissimulation. It was true that, if occasion required, he could hold his tongue; but he abhorred tact and hated doctrines of expediency—everything, in fact, which put any restraint upon the "development of his inclinations."

The train was now approaching Dover. He decided to put his own troubles aside, and, out of mere decency, concentrate his thoughts on the severe trial in store for Orange.

"This business about Parflete," said he, "is a great blow. One becomes indifferent to what is said of, or done to, one's self; but that all this uncommon, saddening, sickening trouble should come upon Robert is too bad. It seems a kind of hacking and hacking, bit by bit." [140]

"You are certainly very fond of him," said Pensée.

"Yes, I am. He's so dependable."

Pensée engaged a private cabin for the crossing, and she retired there with her maid. Too tired and over-strung to sleep, she lay down, closed her eyes, and lived again through the many fatiguing, agitating moments of that day. Her affection for Orange had been so steeped in hopelessness from the hour, months before, when he told her of his love for Brigit, that the wedding of these two had been a relief rather than a final anguish. The agonising possibilities which had sometimes darted into her mind would never again surprise her: the questions which she had always striven to prohibit were no longer even in existence. He had taken the unredeemable step: he was married. Jealousy had no part in her suffering. Robert had never given her the smallest right to feel slighted, or neglected, or abandoned. Some women are jealous by temperament, but the greater number are jealous only when their trust is insulted or their dignity brought down to the humiliating struggle for a lost empire. Empire over Orange she had never possessed or claimed: she could feel no bitterness, therefore, at the thought of the small place she occupied in his destiny. The sorrow which cut and severed her heart was loneliness. She felt that, after the wedding, she could hardly do anything or take interest in anything. It seemed as if the waters were gathered in heaps on either side; things, she thought, could not be better, or worse. God was with her still, and her children—her dear children—were with her still, but she could not disguise the greatness of the loss. Her single wish, as far as she dared have a wish, had been to benefit Robert and to win his confidence. She had seen his mind working in various directions, and although she was not, in the faintest sense, his fit companion intellectually, she had a knowledge and experience of life which made her friendship valuable—a gift worth offering to any man. She had been able to advise him. Brigit now had even this privilege also. "I shall seem an intruder," thought Pensée, again and again. [141]

It was altogether a terrible crisis. How she should struggle through all the parts of it, or what she should be when it was over, she could not trust herself to say. The world seemed too heavy a burden to be fought against. Yet with what thoughts and aspirations and earnest prayers she had stood by Brigit's side at the altar rails. She had been given a supernatural strength for the marriage ceremony. She was by nature and before all things, from first to last, unalterably a good friend, and at that moment of intensest difficulty the sight of Robert's happiness had made her oblivious to every other consideration. Glad tears had risen to her eyes. She had been swayed by one feeling—a deep, sincere thankfulness that his love-story, which had promised sorrow only from the very beginning, was ending, unexpectedly, so well. She might have feared that he was changing one form of unhappiness for another, but she knew his impatient spirit, and, knowing it, she could not imagine that any earthly pain could try him so sorely as a lifelong separation from the one woman he loved—loved to the pitch of madness. [142]

And then—in one moment—the strange tidings came which drove her from the stupor of resignation to fevers of anxiety more consuming than any she had ever felt before. A great flame, successive flames, of terror swept over her, as she feigned placid sleep in the little cabin, at the thought of the news poor Reckage would have to break on the morrow. How would Robert bear it? That he would act a noble and true part she could not doubt. But at a certain degree of suffering, the strongest man can think of nothing except himself, and she felt already, in anticipation, the dumb torture she would have to endure in looking on, helpless and unnoticed, at an agony which she could neither share nor relieve. The fear of losing him had been dreadful, but it was even more dreadful to know that although she might have, after all, a certain right now to offer him sympathy, she could never make him happy, that she could never hope to learn the secret regrets, griefs, and torments, the unspoken broodings which would surely enough prey upon his spirit. She pictured herself sitting at his side, or walking with him, for hours—he absorbed in his own sorrowful thoughts, she striving vainly to distract him by a tinkling prattle on every topic except the one nearest his heart. Oh, how fearfully wide asunder they were! A sensation of the enormous distance which can exist between two souls in daily companionship filled her with a sickening, shivering heaviness. She thought she would have to cry out because of the slow fire which seemed to scorch her dry and aching eyes. Robert would never really need her, never really care about her. This new trouble would take him farther away than ever. He would burn all his ships, and any poor little tenderness he might have had in the past for her, with them. Some great revulsion would take place in his character; he would perhaps grow silent, reserved, enigmatic, his face would show to the world the terrible, false, unknowable peace which is the veil of the dead. It was useless to smooth her difficulties which existed. It was foolish and wrong to encourage herself in unreal ideas about him. It was best always to be straightforward and admit the truth—no matter how bitter. And yet he had been kind and helpful to her in a way in which scarce any one else could have been. She clung to the belief that she would be able to do something to make his hour of trial less severe. The hope which insinuates itself into every unrequited love still lingered. He could at least always talk to her about Brigit: that common memory would be a constant link between them. She had earned his esteem, and perhaps with his esteem an affection deeper than he himself realised. Under the pressure of a sudden and tragical necessity, he would turn to her with the certainty that she would not fail him. [143] [144]

She was modest enough about her own powers. A remark she had once heard Reckage pass, to the effect that religious women of devoted lives were unhappily conspicuous, as a rule, for feebleness of mind and strength of prejudice, haunted her as a kind of doom from which there was no appeal. She knew, too, the verdict usually passed on those of either sex who have the courage to maintain an unselfish attitude whether toward God or some fellow-creature. But here she comforted herself by deciding that her utter isolation in this universe rested on the fact that she did not much deserve to be loved by anybody. This granted—not without a pang—she felt the signs of weariness in her heart, but none of wavering. She resolved to be foolish in the eyes of the self-satisfied.

Lord Reckage meanwhile was pacing the deck. His conversation with Pensée had cast a darkness over his spirit. He had made up his mind, weeks before, that the marriage years of his life would be the best, the most distinguished, and most useful. With the utmost pains he had chosen a wife. He had acted with the greatest caution in no weak or superficial, or haphazard, or fitful way. Nevertheless, the outlook was dismal. This first step in decline from his ideal caused him much pain and restlessness, and led him to think cynically of many doctrines to which, in serene moments, he had unconditionally subscribed. He compared his own case with Robert's. Robert, in his headstrong passion, had certainly rattled up sleeping lions, heedless of all consequences, and in defiance of every warning. He had now met, poor fellow, with an appalling chastisement, but could any one pretend that he had not brought it, to a great extent, upon himself? He (Reckage), however, had behaved, from first to last, in an unexceptionable manner. He had studiously avoided the one girl of whom he was inclined to be immoderately fond. It was true that he had practised this restraint less in her interest than his own. But this was because he feared—as every creature will fear by instinct its mortal enemy—the power of an ardent attachment. His mind had revolted in a panic at the thought of becoming dependent on a woman's humours. The noblest of the sex were capricious, and far and away the best course was to select a partner whose unavoidable nonsense would leave one, merely from indifference, undisturbed. Sara de Treverell, in the past, had been, by her vagaries, directly responsible for several sleepless nights, and a sleepless night was one of the few things he simply could not stand. Thoughts of her had seemed to unfit him for his work, to weaken his nerves, to act, in various ways, to his disadvantage. She had been exacting in her demands upon his nature. They were not uttered demands, or demands which he could formulate, but he had been conscious of them always. He had been obliged to pause and ask himself at every thought, at every step—"What would Sara say to this?" It was a tyranny—if not a species of witchcraft. And so he had determined to see her no more. Following the usual, most correct method in such procedures, he went abroad. After a week of irritating meditations, furtive, all but unconquerable desires, after he had passed the day on which it had been his custom for months to call upon her, after he had learned how to discipline the hours he had used to spend riding with her in the Row, he felt as a convalescent after some exhausting malady—quiescent, dulled, possessed by a drowsy stupidity, inaccessible to any serious emotion. He was cured of his fancy, although no effort of will could protect the soreness of the bruise. He had persevered in his course of treatment—congratulating himself, at the end, on his escape from a dangerous obsession. The picture of Sara grew paler and paler before his eyes—indeed, it seemed to fade all too quickly, and, with the perversity of consistent egoism, he felt many twinges of sadness to think that he had forgotten her so soon. His vanity would have preferred a longer combat—for even the most shallow admit the romantic admirableness of an obstinate love. Still, what could he ask better than this triumph over a cruel, an obstructive memory? He had regained, so he believed, his old independence as the man of action, energetic, self-controlled, moved by one passion only, and that the finest of all—ambition. In surveying once more the great design of his career, he found it an effort to bring up—from the far recesses of his experience—the poor little sentimental episode, so insignificant and commonplace, which, in a kind of aberration, he had taken for an affair of the heart. He returned to England. He threw himself with vigour into the questions which were then disturbing Churchmen. He revived a touching acquaintance with Agnes Carillon, an acquaintance which was peculiarly soothing to his preoccupied mind. Here was a girl, he thought, who could be a fit helpmate. She asked for nothing, absorbed nothing, and gave a great deal of gentle, kind companionship when he wanted it. When he did not want it, she understood perfectly—possessing, in an eminent degree, the rare domestic art of being able to make herself scarce—alike in his thoughts and his engagements. The truths did not occur to him that a woman in love could never have been so unnaturally prudent, or that a woman whom he loved could not have interested him so slightly. He took great pride in her perfect skin and hair and eyes, in her beautiful, graceful, and gracious manners, but his soul never kindled at her approach, his pulse beat no slower at her departure. He requited her agreeableness with respect. And so they had become engaged—to the unbounded gratification of all his relatives, amidst the congratulations of his friends. There seemed a certain shadowiness in his conception of their future existence together as man and wife: something which he recognised as an interior voice chimed in, from time to time, with provoking interrogations, mostly unanswerable. A plaintive need of happiness, melancholy, obscure, but recurrent, mixed in his fluctuating thoughts. Finally, it pursued him, haunted him, and caught him with the strange tenacity of an incorporeal grasp. Sara, now dethroned from her place of power, loomed in all his dreams. Irresistibly, he was drawn toward the forbidden recollection of her delightfulness. There seemed no longer any danger in these musings. He had entrusted his actual life to the safe-keeping of the nicest woman he had ever known. Where then was the harm in harking back, merely in reverie, to the frivolous, amusing phantom of a renounced sentiment? Yet, after a reverie of the kind, why did he often wonder how he and Agnes could look in one another's faces and pretend to any sort of real intimacy? Sara knew him better than he knew himself. Her sympathy ran into a hundred sinuosities—she

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understood his silence as well as his conversation. He was never conscious of the smallest strain, the least dissimulation, in her society. Beneath their curious disparities an identity seemed to unite them. There was an unrepenting quality in her conscience which braced and stimulated his moral courage. Agnes, on the contrary, with her instinct of behaviour, made him over-cautious and encouraged the tendency to indecision which interfered with the comfortable balance of his soul. And he wished his faculties to work with astronomic punctuality. It is certain, however, that he would have accepted his choice as a thing settled beyond any readjustment, but for the news of the Duke of Marshire's proposal, and the sight of Sara herself on the fatal afternoon when he was feeling especially forlorn. She had thrown him a glance in which defiance, disdain, and an indistinct affection were blended in one provoking dart. He was a moralist who believed that there is always, between men and women, the dormant principles of mistrust and hatred. He had discussed this theory frequently with Robert, who found the notion as repulsive as it was false. But it seemed a truth beyond contradiction to Reckage, who possessed, in his own mind, constant irrefutable testimony in support of the view. Sara had never before defied him. She had never before seemed to feel her power as a creature incomparably superior in brilliancy to all the other girls in their circle. She had never before seemed to pity him as a man who had feared to do what Marshire—a being considered remarkable only for his family and his fortune—had boldly, gladly volunteered to carry out to the ultimate consequence. That glance pierced his self-love, his pride, his will. After his long hesitations, after the wearisome, interminable debates between his judgment and his inclination, he decided suddenly, all at once, without further reflection, that he no longer belonged to himself. He was the slave once more of doubts, fears, and temptations. His excited nerves and troubled senses asserted their right to be regarded as threads, at least, in the web of destiny. From the hour of that chance encounter in the Park, till he and Sara met at Lord Garrow's that day, he had not been able to escape from the inexorable cruelty of an ill-used passion, once more, in full command. Every individual has his rule—could one but find it out—and a rule to which there are no exceptions. With Reckage it was simple enough: he invariably followed the line of his own glory. The distress he suffered—really, and not colourably—took its rise from the intervention of Marshire. He felt as a racing man feels when he sees a friendless horse, which he might have purchased, beat the Derby favourite by some three lengths and a half. He winced at the suspicion that he had committed an error in judgment, and lost a great opportunity. The words of Sir Piers Harding on the subject of audacity in love had fallen on his ears with startling force. It was an illustration of that old saying—"The appetite, the occasion, and the ripe fruit." Convinced now that his reputation, his career, and his comfort depended on his conduct toward Sara, all hesitation left him. He would have to drive Marshire, in confusion, from the field, and bear away the prize himself. Pensée's observations with regard to Agnes had cleared away most, if not all, of his difficulties in that particular quarter. No one had ever accused him of cowardice. Whenever he took refuge in procrastination or deceit, it was never because he was afraid, but in order that nothing might interfere with the purpose he had in hand. The growing miseries of the situation which he saw, already in part, served only to augment the violence of his resolve. His vanity forbade him to believe that Agnes would not suffer very much when he told her, as he intended, that they had both mistaken a profound esteem—based on reason—for love, which, as all the world admits, is something remote indeed from one's will and one's power. He was desirous to remain her friend, but he could not, without insincerity—and by God's grace, he would not—continue longer in a position which was false in itself and an injustice to each of them. He proposed to dwell very frankly, but in deep sadness, on the fact that although their engagement had been a seeming success—outwardly—the success had been by no means proved either to his satisfaction, or, he ventured to think, to hers. He would pray that she would not consider herself under any restraint in speaking freely to him, from her heart, at all times. He hoped that the inevitable criticism of malicious or ignorant persons would never shake her faith in his unwavering loyalty, his singular desire for her happiness. On the other hand, he did not wish to involve her in justifying his action to the world. There was no call for that. She might be assured that he would do as little as possible to protract the agony—he used the word advisedly—of their separation. He believed it would be the best way—if God gave them the ability—not to meet until they had trained themselves to the peaceful, sweet relationship of their first acquaintance. All this and more he composed and turned over in his mind as he paced the deck. His eyes frequently filled with tears, and he thought how little, how fearfully little, he had ever suspected this severance from a noble life with which he had wished most earnestly to join his own. He was unhappy according to the measure of his capacity, and he was genuine in so far as he regretted the necessary suffering of the innocent with the guilty. But guilt is in the intention, and he could say, with truth, that he had never intended to give pain, or to make trouble, in his life.

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CHAPTER XI

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The Southampton steamer approached St. Malo about three o'clock on the following afternoon. Robert and Brigit had spent the night on deck—it was better than going below into the close, dreary cabin—and so they counted the stars, and kept their gaze, through the vast reaches of atmosphere, for the first sight of land. The moon, then at its full strength, lit up the whole blue dome above them, and cast its glancing, silver path upon the water—a path which the ship ever crossed but never followed. On and on they sped, and, as their ears grew accustomed to the monotonous churning of the paddle-wheels, the silence seemed intense. The splendour of the night made sleep, to minds as passionate as theirs toward all manifestations of the world's

beauty, impossible. Unconscious of any particular thought, they shared a dreamless reverie which was so perfect in its rest and so complete in its still contentment that they did not know that they were resting, nor could they realise that such sweet hours, even as bitter ones, do not loiter in their passing or come again. Soon enough Robert saw himself very far gone from the undissembled sternness of his old resolutions. If he could but be rid of that altogether! He thought he had obtained a mystic recognition of the terrorless but uncommunicating Joy of life which while men live they pursue, desiring it with the one human craving which survives every misfortune, every thwarted hope, all enslavement of the heart's small freedom—the thirst for happiness. Was man, whom God had made in His own Image, but a shadow on the unstable wind? Could it be true that he came in with vanity and departed in darkness, his soul bereft of God, knowing not his time, finding not the work that is done under the sun, born to companion worms in the dust? Should he remain unresisting and without influence on the decision of his own destiny? Yet he remembered the precept of Christ: "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it"—words which put forth a great mystery, perhaps a warning. Plainly, in all that a man could bring to the world, or take from it, there was vanity and death; but many things were vain merely because they were not eternal, and many things perished because where life is, change must be. Immutable, permanent possessions were the gifts of God to men. But the gifts of men to God would always be imperfect—whether they offered the sacrifice of their wills or their imagined earthly happiness. Yet if this imperfection were a mean one, something less grand than the immeasurable sanctity of Divine strength made human and therefore sorrowful, therefore not omnipotent, therefore liable to error—where then was the merit of renouncing a manhood already too squalid to be endured, friends that were phantoms, loves that were lies, joys that were void promises invented by the cruel for the disappointment of the foolish? He looked down at Brigit, who, wrapped in her furs, was stretched out by his side, her beautiful, child-like countenance turned toward him, smiling in faith and deep unspeakable tenderness. He could hear her tremulous breath and catch the fragrance of her face, which, in the moonlight, seemed as white and delicate as a cloud. The knowledge that she belonged to him at last entered into his heart, his blood, his brain, his thoughts, became the very life within his life—an element which was neither wholly love nor wholly passion, but a necessity from which he could not depart and without which he would cease to be. All men need to have near them, allied in close association with them, either a force to strengthen their weakness or else a weakness which insists upon some demonstration of their strength. In conceivable circumstances it might be a duty to dissever such a bond; it might be a duty to die of starvation rather than steal a loaf, and, as death would ultimately quench the craving stomach, so a broken soul, in time, would cease lamenting for its maimed energy. Let heart-sickness pass beyond a certain bitter-point and the heart loses its life for ever. Had Robert's marriage been impossible, had he decided, on that account, to go away from Brigit's influence, had he vowed, in some paroxysm of despair, to see her no more, to pluck out his eye—to forget her—what would have happened? Would he have been able to say to himself at the end of three years, seven years, nine years, "I did my duty. I have my reward"? Is it so easy even to acquiesce in the great bereavements caused naturally, against our will, by death? Does one ever, in the hidden depths of the mind, mistake the cinders of a consumed anguish for the stars of peace? A man need not be a prophet in order to foresee the effect of certain measures on his own character. Indeed, if self-knowledge be not regarded as a sentinel to the judgment, its laborious acquisition would be worth the travail of no honest will. Gained, it remains like an interdict upon all undertakings, projects, ambitions, setting forth clearly all that one may, or may not, attempt in common life, and, above all, in heroism—heroism understood truly, not the false ideals of idle, untaxed sentiment. Robert shrank from examining the sharpest nail of the several which had been piercing his heart for weeks—from the day when he had first received the news of Parflete's death. Had he not often suspected, until then, that, for some reason, he had been called to renounce the hope of marriage? True, he had never been certain of this, and, certainly, the chain of events, even considered without prejudice, seemed altogether favourable to an opposite view. His resolution had been to remain single so long as he could not marry the woman of his choice. Firmly enough he had taken his stand on that ground, realising to the utmost every difficulty to be encountered, every interest to be thrown aside, from the exigencies of such a position. The misunderstandings which would arise, the restraint, the loneliness, the possible morbidity of his own feeling, the sure absence of charity in all outside criticism of his conduct, were not overlooked or under-estimated by a man so versed as himself in the tariff of the market-place. He had known full well that his decision, robbed of its romantic and picturesque motives, would affect very seriously every step in his career, and influence, as only violence to one's human affections can influence, his character, his mode of thought, his whole view of life and his work in life. This he had known—known, that is to say, as much as anything may be known of a plan not yet executed and destined to a slow accomplishment which finds its final seal of success or failure neither in this existence nor in death, but beyond the grave. Now, however, that the exterior obstacles to a happier scheme were apparently removed, the more formidable opposition of his own secret ideals stirred ominously in his conscience. Men's designs are never so indefinite and confused as when they meet with no outward resistance. A close attack has proved the salvation of most human wills and roused the energy of many drooping convictions. It is seldom good that one should enter into any vocation very easily, sweetly, and without strife. The best apprenticeships, whether ecclesiastical or religious, or civil or military, or political or artistic, are never the most calm. Whether we study the lives of saints or the lives of those distinguished in any walk of human endeavour where perfection, in some degree or other, has been at least the goal, we always find that the first years of the pursuit have been one bitter history of temptations, doubts, despondencies, struggles, and agonising inconsistencies of volition. To natures cold originally, or extinguished by a false asceticism, many seeming acts of sacrifice are

but the subtle indulgence of that curious selfishness which is not the more spiritual because it is independent of others, or the less repulsive because it is most contented in its isolation from every responsibility. A renunciation means the deliberate putting away of something keenly loved, anxiously desired, or actually possessed; it does not mean a well-weighed acceptance of the lesser, rather than the greater, trials of life. When Orange had faced the desolate road before him it was as though men ploughed into his heart and left it mangled. Submission to the severities of God whatever they might be, obedience to authority, a companionless existence—these were the conditions, he knew, of the meagre joy permitted to those who, full of intellect, feeling, and kindness, undertook the rigorous discipline of a solitary journey. The world seldom takes account of the unhappy sensitiveness in devout souls; it thinks them insensible not only because they know how to keep silent, but how to sacrifice their secret woes. And what, after all, are the gratified expectations of any career in comparison with its hidden despairs?

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It may be a fact that love, in every imaginative mind, approaches madness; on the other hand, the least imaginative are often not merely attracted but carried away, without any sort of consent, by some over-mastering human magnetism. To love well is a quality in temperament, just as to preach well, or to conduct a siege well, or to tend the sick well, or, in fact, to do anything well, is a special distinction, a ruling motive in the great pursuit of absolute felicity—a pursuit which is the inalienable right of all human creatures, whether fixed mistakenly in this world, or wisely in the next. No calling can be obeyed without suffering, but as in the old legend each man's cross was found exquisitely fitted to his own back, so a vocation is found to be just when, on the whole, one has fewer misgivings that way than in any other. By the exercise of self-discipline one may do much that is not repulsive only but suicidal—a man may so treat his spirit that it becomes a sort of petrified vapour. When, however, he has dosed, reduced, tortured, and killed every vital instinct in his nature till he is an empty shape and nothing more, he must not flatter himself that he has accomplished a great work. Life is not for the dead, but for the living, and in crucifying our flesh we have to be quite certain that we are playing no ghost's farce, inflicting airy penalties on some handfuls of harsh dust. Robert could not feel that absorbing interest in himself which enables so many to cut themselves adrift, painfully, no doubt, from every creature and all impersonal anxieties. If he wished for fame, power, wealth, it was that he might use them to the advantage of his friends, or for the reparation, in some degree, of his father's sin. But all the joy and all the melancholy in love give a free rein to egoism, and now that he had gained, as he believed, the desire of his eyes, the confused, tyrannical, inexplicable, triumphant selfishness dormant in him, as in all of us, began to assert its terrible power. He forgot the agonies, storms, and fevers of the past. Work had not always been able to dominate his unrest. There had been times when he had been compelled to follow the beckoning dreams; when, in tightening his clasp about the mockeries of his hope, he lost the pale happiness which he held already. Whole days had passed when some oppressive thought had spread its dark wings, as a bird of prey, over his whole being, crushing him gradually down to the earth. Now the occasion, the solitude, the glory of the night cast their spell over his soul. For the first time his emotion, so long dumb and imprisoned, found speech. Brigit listened, almost afraid, to his burning words, which, new and strange to her, were, in reality, but the echo of his interior life, his secret intimate thoughts, the pent-up eloquence of a latent habitual devotion long distrusted for its very strength and kept till that hour in strict silence, lest in the torrent of feeling it should say too much. The love to which he had long since surrendered himself now had complete possession of him. He spoke as he had never spoken before—as he never spoke again. The storm was restrained, subservient possibly still, but it was there, not to be forbidden, denied, or gainsayed. One has to be very strong in order to support the realisation of a long deferred, almost abandoned, hope. Affliction seems to intensify a personality, adding to it a distinctness, a power altogether commanding and irresistible, but even in our purest happiness we lose something of ourselves, and become, momentarily at least, less our own masters, and more pliant to the reproof of chance, the sport of destiny. As Robert uttered his passionate confession, he was conscious that much in him which had once seemed strong was conquerable enough, and, in the torture of the indescribable variety of vague, menacing feelings which this suspicion called forth, he revolted against the influence which held him, which left him neither liberty, nor security; which, for a few days of mad exultation, cost him a thousand bewildering, desolating fears. Did he guess that when one most eagerly desires happiness, one is most near to it? Already, he remembered, with a sudden pallor, and a sharp contraction of the lips, that death, in time, would certainly claim both of them, and his soul was pierced at the thought, for nothing seemed imaginably so perfect as the wild gladness of that poor human hour then gliding, with pitiless beats, toward the past. Already the moon had ceased to weave her magic; the sun rose over the unrebukable sea, and the distant coast, obscured in a purple vapour, seemed but a line of darkness against the flushed horizon. The sky was grey, opalescent in the north, tenderest green and azure in the east, while large, motionless clouds, as blue as vine-clad hills, shadowed in great clusters the vast canopy. But if the dawn of day wrought a progressive disenchantment of the dreamer, Robert felt with the recurrence of the morning the usual prayer rise to his lips in a long weeping, inarticulate cry to God—"Thou knowest that I love Thee: Thou knowest that all my life is but a desire of Thee: Thy Will, not mine." And he heard again the promise: "*Thou art My servant, I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away. Fear thou not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee: yea, I will help thee.*" As the silent disquietude of night gave place to the intense tranquillity of day, the impenetrable secret of life, though still profound, unviolated, and eluding, was hidden in a shining, though not a blinding, mist. Was night less night because it paled gloriously before the sun? Was day less day because it darkened into evening? Was joy a false thing because it passed? Did not sorrow pass also? If that sweet journey was the first and last in all his life, was it not still a miracle of blessing, nay, every blessing, to have known even once the

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power of mortal happiness?

"What are you thinking of?" asked Brigit suddenly, touching his arm with her hand.

"I am thinking that there is but one way of resisting the woe of life—the infinite must oppose the infinite. Infinite sorrow must be met by infinite love."

"I suppose we have the sorrow, and the infinite love is God's. We mustn't call even our love infinite, Robert."

He hesitated for a few moments before he replied—

"I call it no name."

"Still," she said, "the very book in which the vanity of all things is most insisted on has lived itself nearly three thousand years. Solomon has given the lie to his own despair of being remembered. This is why I never feel sad now when I think about the other fears which made him discontented."

"Were they fears? I believe he wanted to conquer the world, which is strong, and his own weakness, which was even stronger, as an adversary. We must know the measure of a man's desires before we can sound the depths of his regrets."

Again she put out her hand, but this time she took his, following the instinct of a child who finds itself with a trusted companion in a gloomy road.

"Nothing unknown can be wished for," she said gently, "and so, if some few things did not last, we should not have this dissatisfaction at the thought of their perishing. But what is troubling you? The greatest cross is to be without a cross. You, dearest, are never at ease unless you are at least suffering tortures for some friend." [164]

"I am thinking of myself now—myself only. I can't forget that every supreme blessing must be bought with long sadness, both before and after, and now we are together, I am wondering what I should do—if—if we were separated. I must have the courage to face that thought. I can't put it away because it has defied me, and when a thought defies me, I have to meet it fairly. I do not believe in denying its force, or running away in an opposite direction. I hear its argument and I try to answer it."

She moved towards him and said in a low voice—

"I have one prayer, and this is that I may outlive you. When you die, I shall soon follow you. It won't seem so very long. But if I should die first I should have to wait, because you would never yield, and your grief would cut sharply and slowly, a little more and a little more each day. And although I might be with you, you could not see me. I should know all your thoughts and yet I could say nothing. Almighty God is too kind to let me be so unhappy after I am dead. This is 'the confidence wherein I trust.' This is why I have no fears now. We may have great trials—how can we expect to be exempt from them? But we must help each other to bear them and then they will seem more precious than joys. You see, don't you? You understand, don't you?" [165]

He could not trust himself to reply. There are certain utterances, certain turns of thought, which are so restricted to one sex or the other, so exclusively feminine or masculine, as the case may be, that their entire comprehension by both sexes is not possible. Intuition, imagination, sympathy may help a great deal; men and women will accept much from each other which they cannot to their reasoning satisfaction account for, and, if the difference serves only to enhance, by its mystery, the melodiousness of the eternal human duet, it also proves that, while the singers may be in harmony, they are never in absolute unison.

"You know how much I love you," said Brigit, "you know it. Yet there is an interior cloister of your mind which you keep wholly to yourself. You never ask me there. I watch your face—it tells me nothing. You have not yet made me your friend. If you were in trouble you would go to Pensée, because she is older and she is used to responsibilities. But you hide things from me because you are afraid of giving me pain."

"There is reason enough why I should not tell you of every passing mood, nor draw you into some invincible personal sadness, and why I should not invite you into the 'interior cloister' of my mind. Nobody deliberates to do what he cannot help. There is always something questioning within me, and a truth is not to be set aside by any other truth whatever. We can only fix our jaws and grip our hands in useless wonder at the contradictions of the soul. I would tell you all my heart," he added, with a laugh, "but it would take too long!" [166]

He had been startled by the acuteness of her perception. Too probably he had carried his reserve to the selfish pitch, and in over-mastering, with silence, his own moods, afflicted her who had become now, by love, inseparable from his spiritual as well as his outward life. But there is something in beauty—just as there is something in youth—which one fears to disturb, lest a change should alter, or mar, in the faintest degree, the sufficient loveliness, the unconscious charm. Is it not for this cause that many dependent natures find classic perfection cold, superb scenery unsympathetic, and the spectacle of careless happiness embittering? Others, of imaginative temperament, prefer that their idols should remain impassive, and, granted the inspiration arising from a fair appearance, ask no more, but find their delight in bestowing, from the riches of their own gratitude, adorable attributes and endless worship. Orange, as many

other men of idealising tendencies, took his human solace for the discouragements, fatigues, and ordeals of life in the mere existence of the woman he loved. He was at the moment of humility which is the first and last in all really great passions. He asked for nothing; it was all too glorious even to have the privilege of offering gifts, of feeling the readiness to die ten deaths for her sake, of finding all the recompenses of eternity in the soft depths of her bright eyes. But as he was too much in earnest to analyse these sentiments, he could neither gauge his own reticence nor justify it to Brigit herself. Nor could she, with all her tenderness and womanly instincts, help him in that matter—their one possibility of estrangement. She lacked the knowledge which renders verbal confidences unnecessary; she was too loving and too human to be happy as an inspiration and an inspiration only; she also had a great desire to give, to aid, to prove her devotion, to be the friend and the fellow-pilgrim.

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CHAPTER XII

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Brilliant sunlight lit up the grey spires and threatening pinnacles of St. Malo. The back of the ancient fortress was hidden in white mist, but the houses which rose above the battlements facing the harbour, and the shops and little taverns near the quay, shone out in brightness, their windows glittering under the sky where straying clouds, driven by the wind, were melting, as they fled, into the all-encompassing blue ether. Some pigeons and wild gulls circled above the earthworks, darting down, at times, between the massive oak piles which, forced deep into the sand, were covered with shining seaweed. The piercing note of the military bugle, the crack of the cabmen's long whips, the clatter of wooden shoes, and the Angelus bells then chiming, made up a volume of sound which fell on Robert's ears with all the poignant strangeness of an old song heard again after many years. A hundred memories flocked into his mind at the first distant view of that familiar scene: memories of his boyhood, its errors, its visions, its ambitions; his revolt against nature as he understood it, and his desire to keep his heart and soul and senses for the service of God, and the custody of his own ideals. The very centre of his thoughts was here: here he had found the first beginnings of his faith and love. How often he had walked alone upon those ramparts with his New Testament and the *Morte d'Arthur*, striving, in the fervour of romantic sentiment, to combine the standards of knightly chivalry with the austere counsels of the gospel. The divinity of Christ is the object of eternal contemplations, and at every age—not of the world only, but of the individual—His Humanity, under our fresh knowledge, demands a different study and a fuller understanding. What changes, therefore, experience and suffering had wrought in those early, untried speculations! The ideals remained, but they made for swords, not peace; the sweetness of the dream had become an inflexible law of conscience; the doctrine of a transcendent disdain of this world, accepted in solitude by the obscure youth brought up in a provincial town, had exacted its tax to the uttermost farthing from the man who struggled now with the rich and powerful in a great city of the great universe of affairs.... He thought of his dead godmother, Madame Bertin, with her still, pale face and beautiful hands—a cold, blameless woman who had treated him kindly and misunderstood him always. She had been his father's friend; she had loved him, in her own stern, silent fashion, for his father's sake. O, if she might only know now how much he treasured every impression he had formed of her strong character! She had given him all the tenderness she had, and all the motherly influence his childhood had received. What might his life have been without that early association with a noble if somewhat restricted nature? But these and similar thoughts, while they went deep, passed swiftly and did not return again till a very different moment, when they came with agony and remained for ever.

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He and Brigit were the last to leave the boat. They had been so happy there that, by an instinct, they lingered behind the others, unwilling to break the enchantment of their isolation from the land, and half-dreading the unknown trials, or joys, which awaited, surely enough, their first steps upon the soil. As they crossed the plank they looked back, obeying a common impulse, at the deserted deck. Their chairs had already been moved away, and the leeward corner, which had seemed so much their own, was filled up by a small group of sailors who were quarrelling about the division of *pourboires*. The drive to Miraflores is long and winding, past several small villages, and approached finally through a large tract of fields and orchards. But for the changing crimson of the vines, it might have been August weather. Robins, however, were singing, and the golden, brown, and russet butterflies of autumn were floating languidly above the wayside hedges. The cawing of rooks, the cooing of wood-pigeons, and the hum of insects invaded the stillness of the lonely farms which, at long distances, gave picturesque evidence of the human toil expended on the careful, rather melancholy charm of that northern landscape. The Villa Miraflores—an elaborate reproduction of the celebrated Villa Madama near Rome—stood on a wooded hill rising out of a river, facing the rocky sea-coast. Built by the Archduke Charles of Alberia for his morganatic wife, Henriette Duboc, and pulled down since for the erection of a convent, it is never mentioned in history, and it has been long forgotten by the few inhabitants of the neighbourhood. But as the young couple entered the lodge gates that day, and drove along the stately avenue, the beautiful ill-fated structure rose before them as some castle in the air brought down to earth by a magician's wand. Was this their home? They dared not speak lest the vision should fade too soon. But Orange remembered it all—this was no dream. There were the winding alleys leading to peeps of water, land and sky; there was the path which he had followed, years before, in search of his destiny. He drew a long breath, drinking in the intoxicating strength of the fresh sea air wafted through pine-trees. The atmosphere was charged with the very madness of youth and joy. Who could have hoped for such a miracle as this? Had the whole

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course of fate a like to show? Did it not seem a triumph over life and its threatened deceptions? His own servant and Brigit's maid—whom they had sent there some days before—were watching for them at the open door, and the sight of those well-known faces gave him a still further assurance of the scene's actuality. They crossed the hall without noticing a small blue telegram on one of the malachite tables. They walked together through every room, wondering at their treasures, looking out of the windows, amazed, bewitched, gradually becoming used to the fact of each other's company in such a solitude. What were the woes and cryings of the outer world to them, lost in the impenetrable silence of that retreat? A strange, double sensation of delight and forgetfulness surged in them both. All knowledge of disturbing human influences, of the fret, and discord, and inquietude of common existence seemed trivial and even false. They looked with confidence into each other's eyes, as though they were the sole inhabitants of some brilliant, inaccessible star set far above the earth and its evil. They were to remain there a month—one month at least—and after that would trials, or labour, or sorrow deluge in bitterness the sweet, eternal recollection of such days? A table had been set for them in one of the small pavilions leading on to a balcony. The scent of flowers, mingling with the sunlight, came in through the open windows, bringing the garden's freshness to the faded lilacs on the carpet and tapestry. Brigit went to the looking-glass, took off her hat, and apologised for her "frightful appearance." She had thrown her veil and gloves on the sofa, and the mere sight of them there gave a homeliness to that forsaken room which, with its rococo decorations, painted ceilings, and gilded doors, had something of the dead gaiety of an empty theatre. Brigit made the tea, following the English custom taught her by Pensée. Was the water boiling? Did he like sugar? How absurd not to know whether one's husband took cream! The two had seen so little of each other in domestic surroundings that this little commonplace intimacy had an intoxicating charm.

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"Are you happy?" she asked suddenly. "Do you know that you are all I love in the world, and I am yours for ever and ever?"

"Yes, I know."

"And how much do you love me?"

"I shall never be able to say how much."

She took his hand, kissed it, pressed it to her heart, then asked him, with some confusion, if he liked grapes better than pears.

"You are so beautiful," he replied.

"Not to-day," she answered; "to-day I am quite dull. But you are handsome. I saw them looking at you on the boat. And I was proud—oh, so proud to think that you were mine."

When they had finished their meal, she opened the piano and struck out some chords, which echoed with a kind of wail through the long corridors outside. The instrument was out of tune, and the strings seemed muffled.

"Something is inside," she said.

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They looked and discovered a few sheets of music which had slipped down upon the wires. The sheets were dusty, stained with age, blurred by damp, but one bore the name "Henriette" written in the corner in a large, defiant hand. Joining the fragments, they found it was an arrangement in manuscript of Poe's ballad, "Annabel Lee."

*It was many and many a year ago,
In a kingdom by the sea,
That a maiden there lived whom you may know
By the name of Annabel Lee;
And this maiden she lived with no other thought
Than to love and be loved by me.*

*But our love it was stronger by far than the love
Of those that were older than we—
Of many far wiser than we—
And neither the angels in heaven above,
Nor the demons down under the sea,
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee."*

As Brigit read aloud these words of haunting pathos, the very trees, rustling outside in the October wind, the far-away sound of the waves beating upon the sand, seemed to Robert an ominous accompaniment—half a warning, half a promise.

"I wonder," he said, "I wonder why that was there?"

He was uneasy, he could not say why. He was conscious of some influence in the room. He felt, unaccountably, that they were not alone. Looking round for some confirmation of this strange instinct his eyes fell on the small blue envelope which had been placed on the mantelpiece by his servant. It was addressed to himself. Fortunately, whilst he was opening it, Brigit's attention was still riveted on the old song which she was humming over at the piano. She spoke to him three times before he answered.

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"This telegram," he said, at last, trying to control his voice, "is from Reckage. He is on his way now to see me."

"He is coming here? Why is he coming here?"

He put his arm round her, in a desperate, long embrace, kissing her face, her eyes, her hair.

"What is it, Robert?" she said, clinging to him, for she heard something like a sob under his breath. "You have had bad news. You must tell me."

"It may not be so serious ... perhaps it is badly worded ... but Pensée is coming with him and he says quite plainly that there is some legal difficulty about our marriage."

"Some legal difficulty!" she repeated. "What is the use of that now? I can't leave you again. I'll die first. I can't bear it. O, Robert, I am so tired of the law. There are no laws for the birds, or for the flowers, or for the trees, or for any thing that is happy! Why should we be made so miserable—just to please the magistrates and mayors!"

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"But it is more than that—I am certain. Suppose it has something to do with Parflete?"

"With Wrexham? How could that be? He is dead."

"He may not be dead."

She sank down to the floor on her knees.

"O my God! You know that he is living."

"Reckage doesn't say so. But would he and Pensée come unless they felt we should need them?"

"I need no one except you. I don't want to see them. I don't want to hear their news. They are killing you. You seem calm, but your face! you have never looked like this before. O, darling, it can't be what you think it is."

He lifted her from the ground and took her in his arms again, as though he could defy the cruel, invisible fate which had decreed their separation.

"In any case," he said, "I won't give you back—I cannot. It is too much to ask. You are mine—you were never his—never. God is not unjust, and this is unjust. As for other people and outside opinion, they have not mattered to me at any time, and least of all can they matter now. I won't give you back."

She held him closer, already feeling, in spite of his words, the first agony of their inevitable farewell.

"You love me!" she said, "you must never leave me. Kiss me, and promise me that you will never leave me."

Grief and horror had broken down every barrier of reserve between them. The pent-up passion on his side, the intense unconscious tenderness on hers seemed to meet and blend in the one consuming thought that they belonged to each other—that, in the awful struggle between the force of circumstances and the force of life—they might have to part.

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"Why should we two matter in so large a world?" she cried. "Surely we need not suffer so much just for the discipline of our own souls? I cannot, cannot, cannot go away. I can't live without you. I can't die without you. I am tired of being alone. I am tired of trying to forget you. And I have tried so hard."

Her face, from which all colour and joy and animation had departed, seemed like a June rose dead, in all its perfection, on the tree. One may see many such in a garden after a sudden frost.

"You mustn't leave me. They all frighten me. I have no one but you," she continued; "God will understand. He doesn't ask any one to be alone. He wasn't even crucified—alone. He didn't enter into Paradise—alone. Ask me to do anything, but don't ask me to go away—to go back to Wrexham. You are much stronger than I am. If you thought you ought to cut out your heart by little pieces, you would do it. But you must think of me. They may have all my money—that is all they care for. But I must have you."

Although she made the appeal, he had resolved, in silence, long before, that, come what might, he would not give her back. The decision rose on the instant, without hesitation, doubt, or misgiving—a deliberate choice between two courses.

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"You cannot return to Parflete," he said quietly. "Don't despair. Your marriage with him may be annulled. That aspect of the question is revolting, abominable; but we are both in such a false position now that we owe it as much to other people as we do to ourselves to put everything in a true light. You are so brave, Brigit—"

"I am tired of being brave."

Her slender arms tightened about his neck; he could feel, from the whole abandonment of her attitude and the slight weight of her childish form, how little fitted she was physically for the squalid ordeal of the law-courts. If she could live at all through horrors of the kind, it would have to be by a miracle. And has one the right to hope for miracles where the question of happiness or

unhappiness in human love is the egoistic point at stake? But, right or no right, there was in them both that supreme and fatal force of affection which, if it be unusual, is at least usual enough to be at the root of most mortal tragedies.

"I am tired or being brave," she repeated. "I want to rest."

In the mirror opposite them he saw the reflection of the bright garden outside. How calm and still it seemed! Had he wandered there, years before, with a beating heart, in search of his destiny, merely to find it at last after the humiliation of a public scandal? Had his idyllic, almost mystical romance, with all its aspirations, grace, and unspeakable strength, been given to him just to be called from the house-tops and discussed in the streets? Was this the end of all sublime ideals? Did every delicate, secret sentiment have to endure, soon or late, the awful test of degradation and mockery? Did it have to come—this terrible day of trial when the Love which moves the sun and the other stars had to pass through the common sieve with dust, ashes, and much that was infinitely viler? No, he told himself, no: ten thousand times, no.

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"Listen," he said, "listen. You need not go back to him: he knows—every one knows now that we love each other. We can't live together because our marriage is not a marriage. Your marriage with Parflete was not a marriage, but it appears so to the world. Is it worth while to undeceive the world? When I think of the cost of such a proof—I say it is too great. But if you are courageous—and you will be for my sake—we can defy every one—on one condition. We must be sure of *ourselves*. We must know that we can depend on ourselves. We may have to separate now for some months—perhaps a year—perhaps longer; we must school ourselves to look upon each other as friends—friends, nothing more. It will be very hard—for me, and it is on my account only that we must separate now. But you will accept this, even if you cannot understand it, because my life here depends on you. I don't say anything about my happiness. I leave that out of the reckoning. But if I am to live—to get through the day's work, I must love you and I must see you. Later on, we may be able to meet quite often. This will be something to which I can look forward. All this has been in my mind always—ever since I first met you. I feel now as though every thought, every hour, every event of the last five months has been a preparation for this moment. On one point, however, I have never wavered. We can't desecrate our love by some odious lawsuit. If this life were all, it would be different. But it isn't all. It seems as though we are not to be everything to each other. Yet we can be more than everything—we can be one existence even if we cannot be man and wife. We can help each other, we may see each other—in time."

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"In time?" she repeated. The certainty that she would have to be deprived of his presence for the greater part, at all events, of her life came over her with intolerable anguish, and with it she felt a presentiment of the future struggle to be waged against the profound instinct which drew them, with all the strength of a river's current, toward each other.

"No, no," she said, "if you send me away, I shall die. They frighten me; they tell me lies. My mother is dead; my father is dead. I have no one but you. You can't forsake me. You love me too much. I know you won't leave me."

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Her innocence made the recklessness of her appeal the more compelling. The beseeching, intense affection of her soul transfigured her face with an almost unearthly sweetness. White, trembling, and despairing she laid her head upon his shoulder, holding him with both arms, and swaying from the agony of a grief without hope and without tears.

"You must try to understand," he said, "you must try. You are so young—such a child, but you do know that we can't live together, in the same house, if our marriage is not valid. That would compromise your honour. How else can I say what I must say?"

"I shouldn't mind. God would understand."

"But the world wouldn't understand. And one has to avoid the appearance of evil."

"They may say anything they please. I should be very proud if they misjudged me for your sake."

Then a thought suddenly pierced her. What would they say about his honour? Would the world misjudge him? Her weakness became strength under coercion of this new possibility; her cheeks burned at the light thrown upon her first selfish impulse.

"O, why have I said such things?" she said, tearing herself away from him, "and I used to think once that women like me were too bad to live. I used to wonder how they could be so evil. That was because I had never been tempted. And now I see how hard it is—how hard to fight. It is so easy to judge others when you are married to some one you love. But I begin to understand now—I ought to hide myself in a cell and pray till I die for women who are unhappy."

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She pushed back the soft golden hair which had fallen a little over her face, brightening its sorrow. Every feature quivered under the invisible cutting hand of cruel experience. In those last sharp moments of introspection she had gained such a knowledge of suffering that a fire seemed to have consumed her vision of life, reducing it to a frightful desert of eternal woe and unavailing sacrifice. Partially stunned, and partially blinded by misery, she felt the awful helplessness and pain of what is sometimes called the second birth, a crisis in all human development when the first true realisation comes that the soul is a stranger, a rebel, strong as eternity, weak as the flesh, free as the illimitable air.

"O, I do understand!" she said. "I have been pretending to myself that we could do impossible things. But I didn't want to speak my own death-warrant. No, don't come to me. Don't say one

word to me. I know so well now what must be done. We mustn't hesitate—we mustn't think. It is something to know where you can't trust yourself. I can't trust my heart at this moment. So I must just depend on the things I have been taught—things which I accepted, oh, so easily, when I applied them to other people. You must go away. You must leave me here with the servants. Esther is good and kind. Pensée chose her for me. You can leave me with her.”

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She supported herself by holding, in a desperate grasp, the heavy silk draperies by the window. The image of her, leaning against the faded scarlet curtain, tall, fragile, yet resolute, with heaving breast, closed eyes, and pallid lips, remained before him night and day for months, and though, in the process of time, the vividness of the picture waned, it lived always among his unforgettable impressions.

“You must leave me,” she said again.

“Yes, but I will come in the morning.”

“You will rest, you will try to sleep—for my sake.”

This time she lifted her head, and, turning towards him, met once more the glance which she felt must have called her to life had she been dead.

“You will come in the morning?”

“Yes.”

Once more she held out her arms. He kissed her mouth, and eyes, and hair once more. Neither could speak, and both were tearless. Then she went with him to the door, opened it, and seemed to lead the way through the long corridor, down some stone steps to the garden. She knew that he would not leave the spot while she was in sight. So she walked back to the house alone and mounted the steps, turning at each one to wave her hand. He saw her enter at last, and close the window. Then she fell and was helpless till she was found by Esther. Robert watched till the lights were lit, and for some hours after they were finally extinguished. The stars came out, and the moon made the languid night seem white with beauty. Orange walked toward the town and the small cemetery where Madame Bertin was buried. Then he threw himself by the lonely grave which held the one creature on earth whom he seemed to have a right to love without scruple and without restraint. And there he remained till daybreak, weeping.

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CHAPTER XIII

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Lady Sara had written to the Duke of Marshire, and so fulfilled, in part, her promise to her father. But, while she said much that was graceful, coquettish, and characteristic, the Duke felt unable to regard it as an acceptance of his offer. She was very kind with that kindness which has no sort of encouragement in it. Among other things, she begged for another week on the plea that “seven days furnished a very short speculation when the result might possibly decide the whole course of her life.” In much anxiety, for his Grace was very much in love, he composed, after three hours of careful thought, a reply, and, having read the least tender but most sensible passages to his lawyer, he himself left the communication, together with a beautifully bound copy of “Lettres Choisies,” by Madame de Sévigné, at St. James's Square. The parcel and the missive arrived when the young lady was reading and re-reading two other letters which she had received that morning from the North of France. One was from Lord Reckage; the other was from Pensée Fitz Rewes. Their respective contents ran as follows:—

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MY DEAR SARA (I love the sweeter name of Valérie: may I not use it sometimes?),—I shall never be able to get through all I have to say—no words can reflect the fulness of human nature in such suffering as it has been my privilege—and sorrow—to witness here. In doubt, they tell us, we must stand on the rule of authority. But for this principle I should find it hard to reconcile myself to this deplorable affair of parting two people who love each other, evidently, in an almost lyric sense. You, I know, will understand that this expression contains no sneer at a frame of mind altogether surpassing my own capacity for idealism. Are there many, or any of us nowadays, who feel that there are certain things which we must do, not do, or perish eternally? I have never detected this narrow, vindictive, inherently superstitious view in Orange. I am forced to the conclusion, therefore, that his truest happiness consists always in his submission to the Will (as he understands it) of God (as he understands Him). Men are like horses—unless they are born with staying powers in them, no amount of training can make them really stay. Robert is a born ecclesiastic—I have said so always. His conduct in this present crisis will be a slap in the face to those who insist that religion makes men timorous. Speaking for myself, I never entertained a moment's doubt of his acting in precisely the manner in which he has done; his worst time, however, is, alas! to come; he may have to wait till eternity for his recompense. That trial often embitters the most constant. The devil is never embarrassed, and where virtue is found superhuman, he takes every care to keep it on a sour—if ethereal—diet. You will beg for less comment and more facts. Let me give them. Orange himself, pale, restrained, haggard but superb, met us at the station on our arrival. He had been waiting for us at the hotel; Mrs. Parlete was at the Villa Miraflores. The two had discussed the situation and parted on the mere reading of my telegram. I cannot say that they might have acted otherwise, but only that they acted as they did. There must have been, nevertheless, a considerable scene. The idealist driven into squalid actualities deserves

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a martyr's crown. In one single misfortune he suffers all the calamities of the human race, and in one personal horror he sees the death, emptiness, and corruption of all human endeavours. In this exaggeration, these mystics show their genius; they suffer too much in order that ordinary people may suffer a little less. Poor Orange! He is certainly fine, for, even if I discard the *mannerisms*, the eccentricity, the possibly *natural* self-sufficiency, all that is essential in his character remains and must remain undeniably chivalrous. It was an immense relief to find that he had decided, without suggestions on my part, on his course of conduct. I hate a fellow who tries to be more than friendly, and I dreaded making the experiment. I did venture to point out to him that there might be some way of annulling the Parflete marriage. But idealists abhor law-suits. Parflete, *not* being an idealist, may take some steps on his own account. I refrained from touching on that possibility, although I see much hope that way for our unhappy lovers. The world might cry out a little at first, but success justifies everything. Meanwhile, Robert and Mrs. Parflete have formed a resolution not to meet again for a year or more. After that, they hope to be on the unearthly terms of Laura and her Petrarch. It is magnificent, but is it love? I long to hear your views on the subject. I have no influence over you; I wish I had. I am the most sincere of all your friends. The others either care too little for you, or too much for themselves, to run the risk of giving you offence. But I would risk all, to gain even a little—where you are concerned. May I call on my return? Orange comes back with me. His own instinct tells him that there is a suggestion of the ridiculous—to the mere on-looker—about this interrupted honeymoon. He has determined to face it out in London, and resume his life on the old lines. He will finish his volume of French History, resume his post with Lord Wight, and take his seat in Parliament. If he can succeed in living down this absurdly tragic catastrophe, he will achieve a notable triumph. It gives me a cold feeling at the heart when I think of the dreary heroism he must display. Nothing picturesque, nothing striking. He must simply baffle the scoffers by an inscrutable endurance. Mrs. Parflete is a beautiful creature, but quite a child, and therefore weedy as to figure. I consider her far too young for marriage in any case. She is only seventeen—tall, slight, with a transparent skin, and something actually *babyish* about the eyes. Her dignity, in the circumstances, was wholly admirable. Perfectly self-possessed. Pensée will describe the interviews far better than I could, so I will refer you to her for the details of our mission. Women, I have decided, in every disappointment always look for some future change of circumstances favourable to their wishes. No matter how nominal, shallow, and delusive this faith may be, it sustains them through the worst trials. Thus it is that when a woman sacrifices either her repose or the legitimate compensations of life to a great idea, she suffers far less than a man in similar conditions. The devout female sex drive a good bargain always: they manage somehow to obtain all the sentiment they require from both worlds. Men cannot be happy on sentiment alone; hence, therefore, the dreadful hesitations, self-doubts, and terror which assail so frequently the interior peace of all men drawn, like Orange, by certain qualities of temperament, toward the mortification of their humanity. Laying aside the proud idea of the independence, vigour, and spiritual-mindedness which this practice is held to secure, there is one drawback which, with a view to that class who are really willing to endure many afflictions for the sake of any one definite advantage, ought not to be overlooked. The weak, under such discipline, become sugary: the strong grow hard. Robert has backbone; he is a man of ability, perhaps even genius, but there is always a danger that, either from the accumulation of scruples or the want of romantic incentive, he may throw up the political game and bury himself in a monastery where his dreams may find their sole expression in prayer. Another point occurs to me. Will the rank and file ever trust a person so far above their comprehension? The very word "mystical" is a word of reproach in the mouth of the world. People continually ask questions about Robert. No questions, on the other hand, are asked about Aumerle. Aumerle lives like the rest of us: he does everything he ought not to do—he surprises nobody: he delivers his neighbours over to the absolute power of accomplished facts. (A way of saying that he doesn't care a rap about the fellow who falls among thieves.) Dear Valérie! What a pleasure it is to write to you! I can utter my inmost thoughts. I am often suspected of callousness. This letter will show you how truly I feel the sorrows of my few real friends. I cannot bear to think that Orange should be beaten, as it were, by Parflete. A more fawning, wretched creature than Parflete one never saw. I shall not be set right in my own idea of the Divine Justice unless this battle, at any rate, is to the strong. Write to me. I don't want to whine, but I may tell you that I am not happy.

Your affectionate friend,

BEAUCLERK R.

Sara sat on a low, embroidered stool by the fender, and, as she studied each line of his lordship's despatch (for so he regarded it), she would dip her fingers from time to time into a blue satin sweet-box, select, after due consideration, a chocolate or a sugared-almond, and nibble it somewhat fastidiously, with an air of making concessions to her human side. The exercise of divining the many hidden meanings in Reckage's epistle was certainly purely intellectual. Nevertheless, as she read the last sentences, she smiled with malicious triumph, for did they not convey a declaration of strong friendship in a letter designed, beyond doubt, as an argument in disfavour of all merely sentimental ties between men and women, and as a frank confession of his own inability to sustain any relation of the kind? How often had he maintained an opposite opinion—seeming contemptuous, indolent, invulnerable, unconscious of her beauty, amused rather than attracted by her brilliant spirit. Every instinct of the coquette, jealous of her own power and wretched from the sterile suffering of wounded pride, resented bitterly the unpardonable ease which he had appeared to enjoy in her society. Now, however, that he appealed to her womanliness by a humble surrender, her better, more generous nature asserted itself. Some of the old affection she had long felt for him revived. Where there had once been love, a kind of desperate fidelity still lingered, and, although Robert Orange was the ideal passion of her heart, Reckage possessed a certain influence over her which was not the less powerful

because it had its root and constant nourishment in their common memory of a childhood and first youth spent together in the same county, with the same friends and the same bores. She slipped his letter, with a sigh, into her belt, and turned her attention for the third time to Pensée's tear-stained pages.

MY DARLING SARA,—I can scarcely write. Although I know the mercy and wisdom hidden in these sad events, my heart is heavy. The best thing is to preach resignation *till* you have it; and then, *because* you have it, you *will* preach it. Robert's love of Brigit makes little outward show, but I know that it is terribly real. We are never so near to our loved ones as when we have left them for God, but *nearness* of that intangible, invisible kind amounts to agony. At least, I think so. Robert's self-restraint is killing me. When we first met, he shook from head to foot, his very face quivered, but he said nothing. I felt that he would never allow any one to speak of this trouble or offer him the least sympathy. In the necessary discussion of the legal aspects of the case, he was very calm, and seemed rather an adviser himself than the person chiefly concerned. It is not easy to understand him; yet I appreciate reserve. If everybody could understand us, what joy would there be in discovering our souls to those whom we love! Brigit has shut herself up in a room. She cries incessantly (she is so young) and is dreadfully changed. She wishes to go to Paris—for she has some idea of resuming her musical studies. Her voice is one of her great gifts, yet I can't imagine any one singing in such a tortured state of mind. I don't like to say that actually I fear for her reason, but she has, I see, far more heart, poor child, than I ever supposed. How wrong it is to attempt any judgment or estimate of another person's capacity for suffering! She is in a pitiable condition, unnaturally patient in a sense—for it is patience on the rack. Our Lord dreaded suffering and even feared it. Of course, one might easily say that an unhappy love affair is very common, that it is almost profane to compare such an ordinary trouble with the serious, exceptional trials of life. But although Lord Byron declared that "man's love was of man's life a thing apart," his own poems and his own career gave the lie absolutely to the statement (indeed, I am often tempted to believe that women exhibit, on the whole, greater strength of will in their affections than men). I must say, therefore, that the spectacle of a bride and bridegroom, devoted to each other, yet separated on their very wedding day, is quite as serious and sorrowful as (say) the death of a parent, or the loss of a child, or any other melancholy occurrence of everyday life. And what is worse, an atmosphere of *scandal* penetrates this story—making it most shocking to all refined minds, and peculiarly so to temperaments of extraordinary delicacy. It will take every atom of *my* courage and constant prayers to bear it *for* them. What must it be, therefore, to themselves? I tremble at the appalling things in future for us. As for my uncle, I dare not read his letter yet. He must be so upset, so *horrified*. I have never before been called on for such a proof of friendship. It is quite dreadful to be mixed up in a kind of *cause célèbre*. The great justice of God is always mixed with great hardships, and is often executed by those worthy neither of confidence nor respect. I am sure that we shall all have to go through many humiliations before this matter is settled. I know, darling, that *you* will say I am making a rather narrow-minded fuss. But I do hate publicity, and if it doesn't kill Robert outright, it will have some shattering effect upon his character and his health. Really, I am not thinking so much of myself. Your own *reckless* bravery, however, would quail a little, I fancy, at the idea of having your most intimate feelings called out from the housetops and discussed in the streets. And remember, please, that Robert is a dreamer—a poet. Of course, in every *active* expedition there must be some few idealistic, Quixotic souls who have to suffer vicariously for the rest. He is such an one. But that sort of feeling of soreness which comes from the sense of martyrdom is not quite the same as a raw wound on one's own *personal* score. I do hope I am clear. I try to look on the bright side, but there are days when the unseen world and its glorious realities become dubious. These are trials of faith, I know. If one could be wise, one would keep silent at such times. Now, dearest Sara, good-night.

Yours ever lovingly,
PENSÉE.

CHAPTER XIV

Lord Garrow and Lady Sara left town the next day for a short visit at Kemmerstone Park, the seat of Arabella, Marchioness of Churleigh. Lady Churleigh had a favourite nephew for whom she was extremely anxious "to do something." Vague by nature, she had never been able to define her ambition in more precise terms, but, as she entertained influential people only, it was considered, in many circles, that she over-did her civilities toward the mammon of unrighteousness. Those who were not invited called her heartless; those who accepted her hospitality found fault with her brains. All praised her cook, and no one ever thought of her nephew. It was known that she could not leave him her money. Every pair of eyes read his name—Lord Douglas Hendlesham—on his bedroom door at the top of the grand staircase, and visitors soon learnt to associate this advertisement with a pale, haughty young man who appeared occasionally at meals, or sometimes listened disdainfully to the music after dinner in the saloon. Distinguished persons, staying at Kemmerstone for the first time, would ask a fellow-guest, "Who is the melancholy youth who looks so ill?" "That," they would be told, "is Douglas Hendlesham, I *think*."

Disraeli called him "a personified hallucination."

The party, on this particular occasion, consisted of Agnes Carillon (who attracted unusual attention as the *fiancée* of Lord Reckage), the Bishop of Hadley (her father), the Duke and

Duchess of Pevensey, Charles Aumerle, and Mr. Disraeli. Lord Garrow lost no time in conveying his version of the Orange scandal to the ex-Minister's ears. It was a damp afternoon, and the two gentlemen marched up and down the smoking-room together, talking so earnestly that the Duke (to his rage) dared not interrupt them, and drove out instead with his Duchess and Lady Churleigh—who bored him beyond sleep. Disraeli had been opposed, from the first, to Robert's marriage with Mrs. Parflete, for, as other diplomatists, he preferred his own plans before those of Providence, and he had wished to see his young friend wisely united to the unexceptionable Viscountess Fitz Rewes.

"But," he observed, shrugging his shoulders, "to talk expediency is not a safe way of opening the game with Orange. Many men have ability, few have genius, but fewer still have character. Orange has a rectangular will and an indomitable character. *Character* is the rarest thing in England."

Lord Garrow stiffened his back.

"I have been educated in a contrary belief," said he. "Our national character is our dearest possession." [196]

"That is because it is so rare. You mistake your education for your experience—a common error. By character I mean that remnant of a man's life which is probably stronger than death, and ought to be stronger than worldly considerations."

"Far be it from me to go into such subtleties," returned his lordship, stealing a glance at Disraeli's powerful face. "Your friend, at all events, has done for himself now. His merits seem to be more interesting than respectable, and this marriage has furnished conversation for the whole town—chiefly because Beauclerk Reckage was his best man. One cannot help feeling sorry for him, but it is certainly a very bad thing. How will he justify his rash conduct?"

"He may think it unwise to be detailed in self-justification."

"That is all well enough, and so far I am with you. In such circumstances, one doesn't want to tell a lie, and yet one doesn't want to tell the truth."

"Well, there are many duties and difficulties in life: there is but one obligation—courage."

He fixed his eyes on the fire blazing in the grate, and repeated the word with great emphasis—"Courage!"

"He will need it. An unpleasant suggestion has been put forward by the lawyers."

"Divorce?" said Disraeli.

"Yes." [197]

"A Bishop was telling me the other day that when one attacks the principle of divorce one forgets that it was originally a Divine institution! But I agree with you—it is unpleasant. You will find that Orange won't hear of such a course. I see great dangers ahead for him, but I see no honourable way of avoiding them. When a man, careless of danger, unconcerned with profit, takes up the cause of God against the world, others may not follow, but they must admire him. Abstract sentiments of virtue do not charm me. Orange is a Roman Catholic, however, and therefore a practical idealist. The practical idealists of England are the Dissenters—mostly the Methodists. John Wesley was considered crack-brained by his contemporaries at Oxford; he was a greater mystic, in several ways, than Newman, but he was not such a poet."

"I know nothing about Dissenters and that class. As for the Catholics—the few I am acquainted with are civil and sensible."

"That is true. Most of the English Catholics imagine that St. Peter's and the Vatican can be maintained on the policy of a parish church in Mayfair! But one moment. There is Aumerle in the hall with a telegram. I wonder if he has any fresh news about poor Derby." [Lord Derby was then lying at the point of death.]

With this unimpeachable excuse he left his noble companion, who, more certain than ever that Disraeli could never be in touch with the upper classes of England, retired to his own room and wrote down in a journal all he could remember of their conversation. [198]

Lady Sara, meanwhile, had invited Agnes Carillon to walk through the famous gardens of Kemmerstone, and, as each girl was anxious to study the other, they started on the expedition in that high pitch of nervous excitement and generous animosity which one may detect in splendid rivals, or even in formal allies. Sara dressed more richly than was the fashion at that time among English unmarried ladies. Her furs, velvets, laces and jewels were referred to an Asiatic, barbaric love of display. Agnes, therefore, who had attired herself, in protest, even more plainly than usual, was a little taken aback to find her remarkable acquaintance in brown cashmere, a cloth jacket, and a severe felt hat of the Tyrolean shape, which, poised upon her chignon, tilted far over her fine blue eyes. Both women, however, were so young and handsome that even the trying fashions of the period could not destroy their brilliant appearance. The chagrin of the one and the ironical triumph of the other soon gave way to more generous feelings. Each took her companion's measure with a swift, intelligent, respectful glance.

"Shall we need umbrellas?" said Agnes.

"I have nothing on that will spoil," replied Sara, "but I am a little anxious about your shoes. Are they thick enough?" [199]

Miss Carillon was above many vanities; she left her facial beauty to take care of itself. But her feet were uncommonly well moulded, and she was careful not to disguise them in the hideous porpoise-hide boots with flat soles and no instep which found favour with her generation.

"They look very nice," continued Sara, "and I really think they are worth a slight cold. Take my arm, for then we can walk better. How nobly Lord Reckage has behaved in this dreadful affair of Robert Orange! You won't think me strange for introducing the subject at once? It must be on both our minds, for you are naturally thinking of Reckage, and I am thinking of dear Pensée."

"Beauclerk is very fond of Mr. Orange."

"He must be. Do notice the autumn tint on those beech-trees. How I envy artists—although it is not their business to contend with Nature. The great vice of the present day is *bravura*—an attempt to do something beyond the truth. That reminds me—how does the portrait grow? David Rennes is extremely clever."

"Beauclerk admires his work. He considers him finer than Millais."

"What does he think of the portrait?"

"He hasn't seen it yet. My people are much pleased with the likeness. I find it flattering." [200]

"Indeed!" said Sara thoughtfully. "Did you give him many sittings?"

"He knows my face pretty well. We are acquaintances of some years' standing. Papa has a high opinion of him."

"And you?"

"I am no judge. Women can know so little about men."

"I don't agree with you there. They are far more conventional than we are. They are trained in batches, thousands are of one pattern—especially in society. But each woman has an individual bringing-up. She is influenced by a foreign governess, or her mother, or her nurse. This must give every girl peculiar personal views of everything. That is why men find us hard to understand. We don't understand each other; we suspect each other: we have no sense of comradeship."

"Perhaps you are right," said Agnes, rather sadly. "Yet our troubles all seem to arise from the fact that we cannot manage men. It matters very little really whether we can manage women. With women, one need only be natural, straightforward, and unselfish. You can't come to grief that way. But with men, it is almost impossible to be quite natural. As for being straightforward, don't they misconstrue our words continually? And when one tries to be unselfish, they accuse one of hardness, coldness, and everything most contrary to one's feelings. Of course," she added quickly, "I speak from observation. I have nothing to complain of myself." [201]

"Of course not. Neither have I. I have grown up with most of my men friends. I had no mother, and I exhausted dozens of governesses and masters, I am sure I was troublesome, but I had an instinctive horror of becoming narrow-minded and getting into a groove. My English relations bored me. My foreign ones made my dear papa jealous and uncomfortable."

"Then you liked them?" said Agnes at once.

"Enormously. You see, I am always an alien among English people."

Agnes, following an instinct of kindness, pressed her arm and murmured, "No, no."

"Yes, my dear, yes. And this is why I am devoted to Mr. Disraeli, and so much interested in Robert Orange. We three are citizens of the world."

"But English people who have lived, for any length of time, abroad are quite as sensible and tolerant as you are. Take Mr. Rennes, of whom we are just speaking."

"To be sure. But artists and poets are like stars—they belong to no land. A strictly national painter or a strictly national poet is bound to be parochial—a kind of village pump. And you may write inscriptions all over him, and build monuments above him, but he remains a pump by a local spring. David Rennes is a genius." [202]

"I am glad you think so," said Agnes, with flushing cheeks. "I wonder whether he will ever be an Academician?"

"Would you feel more sure of his gifts—in that case?"

There was a slight note of sarcasm in the question.

"It is stupid of me, I know," said Agnes frankly, "but one can't help feeling rather shy until one's opinions are officially endorsed."

"How British!"

"I suppose it is my bringing-up. It sounds very feeble. I often feel that if I once began—really began—to think for myself I wouldn't stick at anything."

"That is British, too," said Sara, laughing. "You are a true *Jane Bull*! But as you are going to marry a public man, that is as well. Your life will have many absorbing interests."

"Oh yes," returned Agnes; "I hope to help Beauclerk in his constituency, and with the members of his Association."

"So far as I can make out they are a weak, selfish lot, but these qualities do not affect the question of his duties toward them."

"You express, better than I could, my own feeling. I fear they don't always appreciate his motives."

"Beauclerk," said Sara slowly, "is impulsive. He is never afraid of changing his mind. Many people are called firm merely because they haven't the moral courage to own their second thoughts." [203]

Agnes drew a long sigh, slackened her pace, and stood looking at the strange, autumnal lights in the sky, the martins flying over the paddocks toward the wood, and the crescent moon which already shone out above them.

"I suppose it does mean lack of courage, half the time," she said at last; "and yet how disastrous it is to wonder about the wisdom of any decision once arrived at, of any step once taken! I daresay every one shrinks a little at first from the responsibility of undertaking another person's happiness."

"Not every one," replied Sara; "the generous ones only."

"You have known Beauclerk ever since he was a boy, haven't you?" asked Agnes.

"Yes. He was such a handsome lad, and he has always been the same."

"I am devoted to him," said Agnes. "I am proud to think that he has chosen me for his wife. But one thought is perpetually coming up in my mind: Shall I be able to make him happy? A girl, as a rule, seems to believe that she can make a man happy merely by loving him. Again and again friends of mine have married in this idea. And the hope seldom answers."

She spoke very quietly, yet there was great feeling, even great bitterness in her tone. She was thinking of David Rennes. Sara had a curious magnetism which attracted all those with whom she came into friendly relations. Being imaginative, though never inquisitive, her quick sympathies rendered the most trivial interchange of ideas an emotional exercise. This power, which would have made her a successful actress, found its usual outlet in her pianoforte playing, which affected her hearers as only extraordinary nervous and passionate force can affect people. She had neither the patience nor the sternness of mental quality which is required in a creative genius: the little songs and poems which she sometimes composed were insipid to an astonishing degree. Hers were the executant's gifts, and the fascination which she exerted over men and women depended wholly on the natural charm of a temperament made up of fire and honey. Agnes had always regarded Lady Sara as an odd but chivalrous girl. The stories told in society about her eccentric tastes, sayings, and doings were never to her heart's discredit, no matter how much they puzzled, or dismayed, the conventional set into which she had been born. It was felt that she could be trusted, and, although many were afraid of her brains, no one had ever known her to betray a confidence, to injure another woman's reputation, to show the least spite, or to insist upon an undue share of men's attention. The sex may, and do, pardon the first three sins, but the last has yet to find its atoning virtue. All declared that Sara, with many shortcomings, was neither a poacher nor a grabber. Girls consulted her in their love troubles, and not a few owed their marriages to her wise arbitration. She had the gypsy's spell. Thus it happened, therefore, that Agnes, who was habitually reserved, found herself thinking aloud in the presence of this mysterious but not hostile personality. [204]

"When does Beauclerk return from the North of France?" asked Sara. [205]

"He is coming back with Mr. Orange next Wednesday. I had a letter this morning." Her voice grew husky, and with evident agitation she halted once more.

"You know Beauclerk so well," she said at last, "that I want to ask you something, and you must answer me truly—without the least dread of giving offence—because a great deal may depend on what you tell me. Do you think he seems altogether settled in his mind?"

Sara guessed, from the nature of the question, that the truth in this case would be a relief—not a blow.

"He doesn't seem quite himself—if you understand me," she said, without hesitation.

Agnes caught her arm a little more closely and walked with a lighter step.

"I don't think we love each other sufficiently for marriage," she exclaimed; "his last letter was so affectionate and so full of kindness that it brought tears to my eyes. I saw the effort under it all. We are making a tragic mistake. We drifted into it. We were such good friends, and we felt, I daresay, that it was our duty to love each other. His family were pleased and so were mine. We seem to have pleased everybody except ourselves. Not that I ever expected the joy and stuff, and inward feelings which one reads of. I am too sensible for that. But I wanted to feel *established*—whereas we are both, in reality, rather upset. I am sure of this." [206]

"Perhaps when you see each other——"

"Our letters are far more satisfactory than our meetings. I know he is fond of me."

"You couldn't doubt that. It is worship."

"I can say, at any rate, that I am so sure of his affection that it gives me no pain—not the least—to miss the—the other quality."

"My dear, you are not in love with him, or you couldn't be so resigned."

"I suppose you are right. I have never told him that I loved him. He has never asked me. Perhaps he took it for granted. As for me, I thought that the respect and esteem I felt would do."

Sara shook her head.

"Not for us. We are different, I know, but we have hearts. We can suffer, we can endure, we can be resigned, we can be everything except uncertain, or luke-warm. Isn't that true?"

[207]

"Yes," said Agnes, and she laughed a little. "It isn't my way," she went on, "to talk like this about myself. Yet I can't help seeing that all this keeping silence, and disguising facts from one's own reason, is actually weak. I don't want to be weak. It isn't English. I don't want to be supine. That isn't English either. I want to be just and square all round—in my dealings with others and in my dealings with my own conscience. Papa has always taught us a great deal about individual liberty, and freedom of will. I am beginning to wonder what liberty means."

"That's the first step toward a great change."

The young girl set her lips, and looked steadfastly before her, as though she would pierce the gathering twilight with her bright and candid eyes.

"I daresay you are right. Anyhow, our talk has been a help. When I may seem to lack courage, it is because I lack conviction. Once convinced, I can depend upon myself."

"When did these ideas come to you?" asked Sara.

"They have been coming for some time. I have been abroad a good deal, and I have been meeting people who make opinions. I never gave in when I was with them, but I must have been influenced."

The slight emphasis on the words *people* and *them* was too studied to escape Sara's trained hearing. She knew the force of a woman's rhetorical plural.

"I believe you have your convictions now, at this moment," she said quietly.

[208]

"No—not in the final shape."

"But you can predict the final shape?"

"One more day and then I will decide irrevocably."

"Why do you hesitate?"

"For this reason—I must grieve papa and disappoint my mother."

"Still, both these things have to be done. Some of the best men have been obliged to displease their parents in choosing a vocation. Women, in their marriages, are often driven to the same sad straits."

"I know, but the prospect is most painful. I feel I could bear my own disappointment far better than I could bear theirs. Surely you understand?"

"Too well."

They had now reached the house, and Agnes's habitual manner at once re-asserted itself. Her voice, which had many rich notes, fell into the one unchanging tone she used in ordinary conversation. Her countenance seemed as placid as a pink geranium under glass.

"Thank you for a very pleasant walk," she said to Sara. "I sha'n't forget it."

"Nor I. And, please, after this, always call me Sara. And may I call you Agnes? We have just time now to write a few letters before dinner."

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CHAPTER XV

Robert, accompanied by Lord Reckage, arrived in London the following Wednesday. Pensée and Brigit went from St. Malo to Paris, where the unhappy girl hoped to enter the Conservatoire. All had been arranged by Robert himself, and he had shown a calmness during the ordeal which might have deceived his two friends had they been even a little insincere themselves or a shade less fond. His Journal at that period contains two entries, however, which show that neither Lady Fitz Rewes nor Reckage were wrong in fearing he had received a mortal blow which no earthly

influence could make endurable.

Oct., 1869.—I am once more at Almouth House. Beauclerk's consideration for me is almost more than I can bear. The rest is not borne. If it were not cowardly, I would go away alone, and brood at my leisure and yield to the appalling yet all but irresistible wretchedness which calls me, which I actually crave. An effort not to depress or discourage others may be right and my duty. I cannot be sure of this. Sometimes I feel as though it would be wiser to meet the dark hours and make acquaintance with them.... And what is to become of her? The longing to see her—even in the distance....

To-night I talked with Reckage about his Bond of Association. Most of the members feel toward him that insipid kind of hatred which passes for friendship in public life. If he were naturally observant, he would see this; if he were given at all to self-doubt, he would feel it. But his way is to regard most men as ill-mannered and well-meaning. [210]

Tuesday.—Another day. I begin to see that I have been called to make every sacrifice—marriage, ambition, happiness, all must be abandoned: abandoned while I live, not after I have made myself, by years of self-discipline, indifferent to such considerations.... But for its piety, the *Imitation* is, I think, the most pessimistic book in the world. The *Exercises* of St. Ignatius (perhaps because he was a saint) produce quite an opposite effect upon me; they exhort us to hope, action, courage. They make one a citizen of both worlds. Merely to read him is a campaign in the open air against a worthy foe. I defy any man to go through the *Exercises* with his whole heart, and even whine again. I have resolved to write willingly no more, to speak willingly no more, on the subject of my marriage. That page is turned for ever: there shall be no glancing back. Moods inevitably must come; spasms of despair are as little tractable as spasms of physical pain. But I can at least keep silent about their true cause. The first step toward the cure of egoism is to lock away one's Journal. I shall add no more to this till I have mastered my present state. And I wonder what that mastery will mean? Are some victories better lost?

The Journal ends abruptly at this point, and no more was added that year. His letter to Lord Wight has been preserved because his lordship sent it to Pensée in some anger, begging her to explain such callousness. Pensée, being a woman, brought a gentler understanding to the inquiry. [211]

"Don't you see," she said, "that his heart is broken?"

"I see," returned his lordship drily, "he is a born R. C. ecclesiastic. Religious instinct is the ruling passion of Orange. That poor young woman—with whom he is madly in love—was merely an accident of his career. She has affected his character—yes. I suppose Cardinal Manning's wife had her influence in her day. But Robert will work better than ever after this. Whereas look at me, my dear. When I lost Sybil, I was completely done for. I tried to set up for myself, but I couldn't. I hope I am a Christian; God forbid that I should quarrel with His will. Yet I cannot think I am a better man for my poor darling's death. Don't talk to me. Don't say anything."

The letter in question ran as follows:—

ALMOUTH HOUSE.

MY DEAR LORD WIGHT,—

The messages which you have sent by Lady Fitz Rewes have helped me where I most needed assistance. When I tell you this, it would be more possible for you to imagine my gratitude than for me to express it—at least, in words, and for that matter I can't see how any act of mine could prove even a fraction of it. Shall I resume my work on the 28th? I have had to learn that one does not always choose one's vocation. It is sometimes chosen for us. May I beg you, as one more favour, never to talk to me about the events of the last fortnight? In one sense I am able—too able—to discuss them. This is why I must not indulge myself. In times to come I may find it, perhaps, a certain effort to speak of it all. Then I will tell you gladly anything your kindness may seek to know. But just now it is my duty to keep silent. One cannot fight the wild beasts, and describe them fairly, at the same hour. Either they seem more formidable than they are, or they are even more terrible than they seem. But the order has gone forth—"Face them."

Your affectionate and grateful,
ROBERT de H. ORANGE. [212]

Robert himself, after he had written this final letter, decided to reply in person to a note which he had received that morning from Lady Sara. He walked to St. James's Square wondering, without much interest, whether Fate would have her absent or at home. As a matter of fact, she had felt a presentiment of his call, and he found her, beautifully dressed in violet tints, copying some Mass music in the drawing-room.

"I hoped you would come," she said, when the servant had closed the door. "Nothing else could have shown me that you didn't mind my writing. I had to write. I wrote badly, but indeed I understood. It takes an eternity to sound the infinite. We won't talk of you: we can talk about other people. Ask me what I have been doing."

All this time she held his hand, but in such sisterly, kind fashion, that he felt more at ease with her than it was ever possible to be with Pensée, who was timid, and therefore disturbing.

"Have you accepted Marshire?" he asked at once. [213]

"No," she said, blushing; "I do not love him sufficiently to marry him."

"How is this?"

"You know that I always fly from important mediocrities. You think that sounds heartless. He has been so kind to me. But I love as I must—not as I ought. My dear friend, all the trouble in life is due to forced affection. Look at Beauclerk! Think of Agnes Carillon! What fiery fierceness of sorrow in both their hearts! Papa and I were at Lady Churleigh's last Sunday. Agnes was there, looking, believe me, lovely. No portrait does her justice. One finds marvellous beauty, now and again, in the middle classes. She is an exquisite *bourgeoise*. She is not clever enough to feel bored; she is too well brought up to be fascinating; too handsome to insist on homage. Plain women are exacting and capricious—they make themselves *worth while*. *Il faut se faire valoir!* That is why a man will often adore an ugly woman for ever, whereas an Agnes—an Agnes——"

She paused, gave him a glance, and laughed.

"Does Beauclerk adore Agnes?" said she.

"Can one man judge another in these questions?"

"If neither are hypocrites—yes."

"As for conscious hypocrisy, a priest of great experience once told me that in twenty years he had met but one deliberate hypocrite. You must be less cynical. Men, however, don't watch each other closely as a rule in sentimental matters."

[214]

"If that is a reproof, I thank you for it," she answered. "It may do me good. This wayward soul of mine is all wrong. Be patient with me. I can't help thinking that most men living are, at the bottom, wholly selfish and truly miserable."

"Very few people are truly miserable. If this were not the case, the world and all creatures must have perished long ago."

"Well, I can tell you of three wretches at any rate."

"Three—against the world and all the planets and heaven?" said he.

"Yes. They are Beauclerk, and Agnes and I. We want time and space annihilated in order that we may be happy. We must be humorous studies to those looking on, but we are, nevertheless, utterly desperate. This is true. Scold me now—if you can. Tell me what is to become of us—if you dare."

She stood up. She clenched her small hands, set her lips, and grew so pale that the pearls around her neck seemed dark.

"Tell me what is to become of us—if you dare," she repeated, "because mischief is certain. You belong to those who endure and fight good fights, and keep the faith. Beauclerk and I are of another order altogether. We suffer without endurance, we fight without winning, and the little faith we have is so little that it is taken away from us. As for Agnes—wait! She is encased, at present, in conventionalities. But she is gradually getting rid of these wrappings and trappings. She will surprise you all yet."

[215]

"I can believe that. She is a woman, and a good one. All the surprising, inconceivable things are done by good women."

"And most of the wicked things, too."

"Possibly."

"Let me tell you then that, if it is possible in the circumstances, Agnes ought to give Beauclerk his release. It would be no more than his right to demand this."

"A right is something independent of circumstances, and paramount to them. But when you once talk of your rights and your wrongs in love, all love is gone, or going. I hope it hasn't come to that—with Reckage!"

"You have great knowledge of him and know how to press it home when you choose. Can't you see, plainly enough, that he is on the road to disaster?"

"No. One may easily be a long way from happiness and still be nowhere near disaster," he said, checking a deep sigh. "Of course, if he feels that he cannot in honour remain in his present situation, he must act at once. Men who are desirous to satisfy all their friends soon become irresolute on every occasion. That is all I shall say upon the subject, and this, perhaps, may be saying more than I ought."

[216]

"Another reproof! So be it. But I am thinking of his contentment, and you are thinking of his duty. What is duty? It generally means that which your acquaintances—for no reason and without warrant—expect of you. I take a larger view."

"People of Beauclerk's stamp are so constituted that they can rarely find contentment by defying a general opinion."

"But Agnes is not a pretty, crying, fluttering creature who would excite compassion. Who, for

instance, could jilt Pensée? I don't wish Beauclerk to jilt anybody, however. I want Agnes to take the step."

"Why?" he asked.

"Because he will break his heart and die—if she doesn't. There!"

"Then it will be your fault."

"Mr. Orange!"

"You know it, and I mean it."

She smiled at him and shrugged her shoulders.

"Do you think I would ever take the commonplace course?" she said proudly. "I did hope that you could appreciate motives for which the world at large is slow enough to give credit. Beauclerk is weak, attractive, and in perplexity; I search my heart again and again, and I find nothing but friendship there—for him. I am careful of every word I speak, and every look, and every thought. My interest is unselfish. But," she added, "what can any of us do, after all, toward raising either dead bodies or dead souls?" [217]

"Dead souls?"

"Yes. Beauclerk might have been something once; he is still very clever; he will soon be a man for occasional addresses. I believe in him, you see."

"I know that."

She was smiling, yet almost in tears, and her voice trembled. He wished to speak, if only to break the sudden, oppressive silence which followed her last words; but neither of them could find a thought to offer. They sat facing each other, lost in following out unutterable conjectures, fancies, and doubts, each painfully aware of a certain mystery, each filled with a sure premonition of troubles to come.

"I could almost pray," she exclaimed at last, "that you didn't trust him. Because—in spite of himself—he must disappoint every one. He is not a deliberate traitor—but a born one."

As Sara spoke the double doors were thrown open.

Lord Reckage was announced.

"Beauclerk!" she exclaimed.

His lordship, self-absorbed, did not perceive her confusion—which she was too young to dissemble perfectly.

"The man told me that you were here," he said, addressing Orange and seating himself by Sara. "I call this luck—finding you both together. I have just been with my Committee. They always expect the worst of me now, and they are always cheerful in the expectation." [218]

Sara began to disentangle some silk fringe on her skirt; she did not look up, and she offered no comment.

"What is the matter now?" asked Robert.

"They want to get rid of me. You see, one might practise very considerably on the credulity of the members if one chose, and these fellows on the Executive wish me to take a cautious line with regard to Dr. Temple's nomination. [Mr. Gladstone's nomination of Dr. Temple to the See of Exeter.] It is all very well for Pusey to write, 'Do you prefer your party to Almighty God and to the souls of men?' But, as Aumerle says, Pusey is not in the House of Commons. An attack on Temple will be highly unpopular. We have sounded opinion in various quarters, and we receive the unanimous reply—'Have nothing to do with it.' There is a feeling in the clubs, too, that vapid, colourless orthodoxy is not wanted in England. Healthy disagreement within limits suits us. The question is, then: Ought I to go against this strong tide and get myself disliked?"

"Yes," said Sara at once.

"You think so?"

"Beyond a doubt."

"Of course," said his lordship, readily enough, "a combination in defence of any article of the faith is a noble thing. My original idea was to get up a combination of High and Low and Broad Churchmen, and make a stand on purely legal grounds. For instance, how can the bishops, *without previous explanation*, consecrate one lying under the censure of their House? That is all. There is nothing offensive in that. We merely ask for an explanation: we offer no judgment: we state no prejudice. If Dr. Temple intends to withdraw his paper from *Essays and Reviews*—well and good. Personally, he bears the highest character. He would be, in many ways, an acquisition to the Church. But does he himself believe in the Church as a Divine institution—mark you, a *Divine* institution? Neither the *Outs* nor the *Ins*, I should think, could object to this question. Aumerle and the Executive, however, are dead against any proceedings at all. They think we ought to give our Association a more secular character. They say we are hampered by too [219]

vehement a religious tone. They say that broad Christian principles are more workable. Besides, the word Christian always attracts the Nonconformists in spite of themselves. They are bound to support you if you stick to the line of a believer in Christ—irrespective of particular doctrines. And so on and so on. I prefer something more hard and fast myself. Yet they may be right. One must go with the times.”

He shifted his chair several times during this speech, looking first at Orange and then at Sara for encouragement.

“Your Executive are poor creatures,” said Sara, with a curling lip; “your weak theologians have become flabby politicians—their one rule of action is to avoid everything which demands even the possibility of self-sacrifice or adverse criticism.” [220]

“That is most unfair,” said Reckage hotly. “One must see where one is going.”

“The world,” said Sara, “in the long run, despises those who pander to it.”

“Yes, but it is in the *long* run, and no mistake! What a fellow you are, Robert! Why don't you suggest something? Are you trying to find the civilest thing you can say of the performance?”

“It is the system which you must attack in the present difficulty. The system is at fault—not Dr. Temple,” said Robert.

“No other system can be now looked to as a substitute,” answered Reckage impatiently. “The thing cannot be done away now, the danger is too near.”

“Exactly. The English can never deal with systems or ideas. They can only attack individuals—you depend in a crisis on the passions of men, never on their reason. Whereas if you overhauled their reason, worked it, and trained it, the passions, at the critical moment, would be roused with better effect, and would be properly organised. Organised passions are what you need for a strong public movement. Whirling emotions in contrary currents are utterly futile.” [221]

“I daresay. I hoped we might make such efforts as to fix a lasting impression on both Houses that the State appointment of bishops, coupled with the farce of a *congé d'élire*, is rank blasphemy. This outrage on good taste ought to occupy the attention of every man. It is quite enough to fill the minds of all.”

“It won't,” said Robert. “You must remember that whatever strikes the mind of an average man, as the result of his own observation and discovery, makes always the strongest impression upon him. Now the average man is not engaged in studying Church government. He will not thank you for calling his attention to it.”

“Then what do you want Beauclerk to do?” asked Sara.

“He must fight just the same, of course. I merely wish him to see what he has to encounter. By dragging the clergy into the movement you make it savour—to the popular intelligence—of professional jealousy. By making Dr. Temple your example, you render those who respect his character powerless to express their opinion. Given the system, he is unquestionably the fittest man to profit by it.”

Reckage took many turns round the room.

“The personal character of Dean Ethbin,” he said, at last, “is not exactly square. He acts a trimming part. But now and again he sums up a situation. He says that the English people do not choose to keep up an Established Church which shall be independent of its Sovereign and Legislature. I have seen most of the bishops and archdeacons. They are against Temple; they say very little about the system. Even men with nothing to gain by it,” he added, ingenuously, “don't appear to criticise it.” [222]

“For all that, the Church must deliver her conscience at whatever risk. She ought to assert her will—even against her interest—in order to show England that she is her own mistress!”

“You mean that ironically! What does for Rome, however, doesn't do for us. The Church of England is It—not She—to most people. As for Rome, nothing in her belongs to humanity, except the Vatican discipline—the life of which, I confess, is a permanent miracle!”

“My best friends,” entreated Sara gaily, “do not—do not fight. Be nice to each other and listen to me. The English never read history. Why not get up a kind of Historical Commission and examine the validity of the Anglican Orders? There you can work at the roots of things. After that, introduce a Bill for the admission of clergymen to Parliament. You have spiritual peers, why not spiritual Commons?”

“One at a time,” said Reckage; “what ideas you have! Say them again. I believe they are not half bad. But do go more slowly.”

Sara, with a becoming instinct of meekness, took her favourite seat on the fender, and at the feet of the two men, looking up humbly, began to explain herself with that lightness of phrase only possible to those who have a profound knowledge of their subject. Her submissive attitude, her soft, musical voice, and her docile expression made both men insensible to the actual commands insinuated into the emotional wit and acute arguments of her little speech. Reckage was fascinated. He sat there drinking in her beauty and wisdom—the one stimulated his senses, the other pierced his intelligence, making him feel that, with such a companion ever by his side, he [223]

might achieve heroism with a good conscience. As matters were, he was often dissatisfied, sleepless, and oppressed—particularly under praise. He was not often set right, as he would have said it, in his own opinion—even when the world and his Executive Committee were disposed to cry out—“Well done.”

“I didn't run within pounds of my form,” was the cry of self-reproach he invariably heard above the applause of his colleagues or the commendation of the Press. Sara, he believed, would give him the courage of his own better nature. These thoughts were passing rosilily in his heart, when Lord Garrow, accompanied by Agnes Carillon, entered the room.

“My love,” said Lord Garrow to Sara, “I met Miss Carillon on the steps of the London Library, and I have brought her in to tea. But why do you sit in the firelight? Why haven't they lit the gas? And who is here?”

A sudden flame from the grate illuminated the faces of Orange and Lord Reckage. The two ladies greeted each other. All spoke, and then all were silent. It was an awkward meeting for every one present. Lord Garrow rang the bell, and the small company sat there without a word, watching the footman light the gas in the glass chandelier. [224]

“What do you suppose we have been talking about?” asked Sara desperately.

“I can't imagine, my dear,” said her father. “I am far too cross. I hate these odd ways.”

“We were discussing the validity of Anglican Orders.”

“God bless my soul!” exclaimed his lordship; “what next?”

Agnes, who was looking pale and worried, frowned with displeasure.

“But how disloyal!” she said severely. “As if one could even discuss such a question!”

“Mr. Orange is a Roman Catholic,” answered Sara, “so he is not disloyal. I am nothing—so I have no obligations. Lord Reckage is in public life and has to meet the problems of the age. Don't be narrow, dear Agnes.”

“I think it too bad, all the same,” replied Miss Carillon—“even in fun. I am sure I am right.”

Lord Reckage tried to conceal his annoyance, but his voice shook a little as he said—

“We were not joking. New men will come in, not improbably with new ideas. I must be ready for them. An ignorance of men's moods is fatal.” [225]

He hoped she would take this warning to herself. She was, however, too stirred to consider anything except the cause of their common agitation.

“Dr. Benson was saying to papa only last week,” she answered, “that there is no apparent recognition of the Divine presence in our daily affairs. It is most shocking.”

“The clergy are doing their level best, by bigotry, to make Benson's assertion true. At any rate, I am not going about, as the French put it, with my paws in the air. I feel strongly tempted to throw up my present line, and give the whole Association to the best qualified hypocrite of my acquaintance.”

“The sure way out of that temptation is not to think yourself exposed to it,” said Robert quickly.

“I hate sophistries,” said Agnes, tightening her lips. “And I hope, Beauclerk, that you will never remain in any painful situation against your will.”

These words seemed to bear an ominous significance. Agnes herself, having uttered them, received one of those sudden inward illuminations which, in some natures, amount to second-sight. But she was unimaginative and not especially observant, sensitive, or skilled in discerning the signs of any psychological disturbance. She felt only, on this occasion, that a crisis had been reached, that Reckage was vexed with himself, with her, with life generally. She had a letter in her pocket from David Rennes—a beautiful, touching letter, full of longing for a faith, a hope—love, he said, he possessed, alas! What a difference in the two men! [226]

“You don't understand,” said Sara. “You are right because you haven't heard enough. Mr. Orange is going to give a lecture on Church History, and Lord Reckage has promised to be chairman. They will hold the meeting at St. James's Hall, and I am sure it will be most interesting. More I cannot tell you, because they have gone no further in their plans.”

But misfortune had entered the room, and that wayfarer—once admitted—asserts her ill-will without let or hindrance. Agnes, barely touching her tea, rose to say goodbye. Lord Garrow and Reckage escorted her to the hall. They helped her into a carriage (lent her for that afternoon by the Duchess of Pevensey), and she drove away, trembling, tearful, afraid, not reminding her *fiancé* that they were to meet at dinner in the evening. He walked homeward, but not until he had decided, after much hesitation, that he could scarcely go back again to Lady Sara. His thoughts were fixed now to one refrain—“I must have my freedom.” Freedom, at that moment, had a mocking, lovely face, the darkest blue eyes, and quantities of long, black hair. She wore a violet dress, her hands were white, and she talked like a Blue Book set to music by Beethoven. Yes, he must have his freedom and live.

Sara and Orange, meanwhile, left alone in the drawing-room, were exchanging interrogatory

glances, "What do you think now?" she asked; "do you pretend to believe that Agnes and Beauclerk can make each other even moderately contented?" [227]

"Then you are to blame."

A flush swept over her face. She looked bitter reproaches, but she made no answer.

"And why are you so interested in Anglican Orders?" he continued. "How is it that you know your subject so well? For you do know it well."

"Catholic questions always appeal to me," she said coldly. "I have no religion, but I come from a race of politicians and soldiers—on my mother's side. I must have an intellectual *piéd à terre*, and I require a good cause. Party politics are too parochial for me. So I am on the side of the Vatican."

"*La reine s'amuse*," said Robert. "Is that all?"

"Yes, that's all."

She turned over the music on her writing-table and hummed some bars from the Kyrie of Mozart's Twelfth Mass.

"If you were a Jesuit," said she, "you would try to convert me."

"St. Ignatius never wasted time over insincere women."

"I am not insincere," she said frankly. "I own I may seem so. But you are not kind, and some day you may be sorry for this."

Her eyes filled with tears—which he noticed and attributed to fatigue.

"I wonder how men ever accomplish anything!" she exclaimed. [228]

"Why?"

"They have no insight. They mistake self-control for coldness, and despair for flippancy. Isn't that the case?"

"One can be light and true as well as light and false. Now you are witty, beautiful, brilliant—but you don't always ring true."

She seemed confused for a minute, and hung her head.

"All the same," she said, suddenly, "I am always sincere with you. It is not in my power to be so with every one. 'Fate overrules my will.'"

"That is the trouble with most of us."

Then he wished her goodbye, promising, however, to call again with regard to the Meeting. Lord Garrow met him on the staircase.

"I congratulate you on your election to Brookes's," stammered his lordship, "but for Heaven's sake be cautious at play. Really, the younger men there are trying to revive the worst traditions in gaming. The loo was rather high at Chetwynd's last night," he added, with a studied air of guilt. "I won £500 from my host. I call that the limit—even on old Cabinet Steinberg!"

He smiled, he waved his hand, feeling that he had displayed great taste in a situation of enormous difficulty. Something unusual, too, in the young man's face touched his heart. It seemed to him that here was one who had felt the world's buffets. [229]

"I have never been just in my estimate of Mr. Orange," said he to Sara, as he re-entered the drawing-room. "I quite took to him to-day. He has a fine countenance, and I am sure he is very much cut up by this painful affair. It's a pity he's a Catholic, for he would make such an excellent canon for St. Paul's. He would *look* the part so well."

"'Happiness, that nymph with unreturning feet,' has passed him by," said Sara, watching herself in one of the mirrors.

"She has passed a good many," sighed his lordship. "But play me that lovely air which Titens sings in *Il Flauto Magico*." [230]

CHAPTER XVI

Agnes was too ill to appear at the Duchess of Pevensy's dinner that evening. Lord Reckage's melancholy, absent air during the entertainment, and his early withdrawal from the distinguished party, were referred, with sympathy, to the very proper distress he felt at Miss Carillon's tiresome indisposition. The time passed well enough for him—far better, in fact, than he had expected, for he was relieved from the strain of "dancing attendance" on his betrothed—a thing which he, even more than most men, found silly. In the chivalrous days of tournaments, troubadours and crusades this romantic exercise of seeming enslaved was, he held, justifiable,

even interesting. But in modern life it had an appearance of over-emphasis.

Poor Agnes, however, could neither eat, nor sleep, nor rest. Her temples throbbed, her eyes ached; every nerve was a barbed wire; her soul was manacled by promises; she would not use her reason; the fever in her veins was not to be quelled, and the one agitating relief to her physical suffering was a constant perusal of David Rennes's letter. It was the first passionate love-letter she had ever received. Just as a river may stream peacefully through pastoral lands till it joins the sea and becomes one with that vast element of unrest, so the little flame of her girl's nature was absorbed at last into the great fire underlying all humanity. Was she in love? she asked herself. When she was with Rennes she became silent, incapable of conversation, of thought. All she asked was to be near him, to watch him, to hear him. [231]

Was this love? Was it love to press his letter to her heart, to read it again and again, to keep it under her pillow at night? Was it love to think of him every moment of the day, to compare all others to him and find them wanting, to see his face always before her eyes? Was it love to know that if he called her, as he called her now, she would leave home, father, mother, friends, all things, all people, and follow him to the world's end, to the beginning of hell, or—further? At one-and-twenty such questions need no answer. They belong to the innocent rhetoric of youth which will cry out to June, "Are you fair?" and to the autumnal moon in mist, "Must there be rain?" Neither June nor the moon make reply, but youth has no doubts. The girl, weeping tears of joy over Rennes's perilous words, had but one clear regret in her mind—she could not see him for some hours. His declaration dispelled the terrible bitterness, scepticism, and indifference to all sentiment which had gradually permeated, during their acquaintance, her whole heart. Repulsed affection may turn to hatred in haughty, impatient souls. But in Agnes it produced a moral languor—a mental indolence—the feeling that no one was in earnest, and nothing ought to matter. The more this feeling deepened, the more attentively did she observe the mere outward etiquette of all that passes for seriousness, attending scrupulously to the minor obligations of existence and exhausting her courage in those petty matters which die with the day and yield no apparent fruit. How different now seemed the colourless, harsh fabric which she had mistaken for duty and wrapped—as a shroud—about her secret hopes! She had held every aspiration implying happiness as a "proverb of reproach"; she had endeavoured to believe that all poetry—except hymns—was false prophecy leading one to hard entanglements and grievous falls. [232]

And what had been the impoverishment of her soul under this grim discipline? How could she tell the many thoughts which had travelled unquestioned over the highway of her heart during that process of disillusion? But all was changed now, and all that had been difficult, painful or obscure in the world seemed perfect with the inexhaustible glory of young passion. Rennes begged her to see him once more before he left England for some years. Would she meet him in Kensington Gardens? She had often walked there, under the old trees, with himself and Mrs. Rennes, and the place had become very dear, very familiar to her from these associations. At any other time, however, the idea of a clandestine meeting with David would have been intolerable. To go now was misery, yet she dared not stay away. The sunny morning mixed with her mood, which was one of determination to risk all in order to win all. Driven by a sense of her capabilities for endurance, she faced, with a kind of exultation, the possible disaster or remorse which might follow her action. Was there not a possible joy also? For ten days now she had been ill in body as well as mind; she had suffered a hard struggle. She knew now that she could not, could not, could not, no matter what happened, become the wife of Lord Reckage. The result of great self-delusion for so long a period was a condition of mind in which she was practically unable to distinguish between candour and disingenuousness. Any appearance of deceit—which she regarded as wrong in itself—always excited her scorn, but desperation now urged a step which might lead, she thought, to much good or much evil. That it could lead to more evil than a loveless marriage was not, however, to be feared. She started from the house with feverish cheeks, a beating pulse, and a new strange consciousness of power—power over herself, her fate, the world. [233]

Rennes was waiting for her under the long avenue of trees by the Lancaster Gate walk. She had a tall, stately figure of that type immortalised by Du Maurier—indeed, she herself may be recognised in some of his famous society sketches about the year 1870. The clear, decisive features, the tender discerning expression, the poise of the head, were irresistibly attractive to all artists with a strong sense of grace—even artificial grace—as opposed to rude vigour or homeliness. She possessed naturally that almost unreal elegance which many painters—Frederick Walker, for instance—have been accused of inventing. [234]

"This is very wrong of me," she said, blushing as Rennes advanced, hat in hand, to meet her, "very wrong. I never do these things."

"I said in my letter—right or wrong it matters not—what I thought. This is a thing which runs up into eternity, Agnes. It had to be. We needn't try to justify it."

"I cannot—I dare not regard it as you do."

"But you have come! Let me look at you!"

"Does it require much looking to see that I am really unhappy?"

"I see that you are beautiful, that you are here—with me. Ah, don't be unhappy! When we take into account our scanty time together"—he grew pale at the thought—"and the danger we have just missed of losing each other, perhaps for ever—" She caught his hand for a second and he kept it.

"What is to be done?" she asked, after an agitated silence. "What will people say? Not that I can think of *anything* to do." [235]

"Darling, I know I have asked you to make an impossible sacrifice—to break off a most brilliant marriage, to marry me and share the despair, hardships, tortures of a life very different to any you have seen. Well has Goethe said—

*'Love not the sun too much, nor yet the stars,
Come, follow me to the realms of night.'*

This is what I offer you, dearest. You can hardly realise what a wretched, desolate existence mine has been. Resignation is a miserable refuge. They say work gives one contentment, but unless one is servile and gives in to the spirit of the age, it is rarely understood till one is dead. And so the discouragement is perpetual. Even your sympathy would pain me at such times. I feel then—as I feel now—that I will grasp Fate by the throat; it shall not utterly crush me."

"But," said Agnes, a little frightened at this outburst, "do you never think of God and His Will?"

He returned her anxious glance with gloomy, almost compassionate amazement.

"Does God think of me?" he asked. "Really, I cannot feel that the salvation of my soul is so important. Indeed, any idea of immortality is awful. How could it ever be a consolation—except to a smug, very self-satisfied egoism? Call it the burden—or the cross of immortality—if you call it anything. I wish it could be proved that we end when we die. But physicians dissect *dead* bodies to find the soul. It would not be a soul if they could find it in the dead. And imagine one becoming penitent when the day of grace is over!" [236]

"I keep Clement's words before me, '*The Lord who died for us is not our enemy.*' Surely that is a splendid thought against final despair."

"Many thoughts are splendid," he replied, "if we could believe them now as the early Christians did in the first centuries."

Agnes, with parted, whitening lips, could find no response. Rennes painted her afterwards in the same attitude, and with all he remembered of her expression, in his now famous picture, *Pilate's Wife*.

"You will never be happy—never," she murmured at last. "But perhaps no one is happy."

"I can grant that the saints were always profoundly happy. Let me tell you why. The state of the saint is one of dependence. His convictions, therefore, are enduring and unclouded. He accepts his trials as privileges; he loses all sense of his own identity; his humanity is merged in God; his ecstasies lift him up to heaven and bring him down to a transfigured earth. He has been bought with a ransom, and he is the co-heir with Christ. He is found worthy of suffering. But with artists, all is different. The saint is in search of holiness. The artist thinks chiefly of beauty. Holiness is a state of mind—it is something permanent. Beauty, however, mocks one half the time—it may be a deception. Anyhow, one cannot define it, or keep it, or even satisfactorily catch it. Our inspired moments, therefore, alternate with a miserable knowledge of our individual wretchedness. We learn that we are no stronger than our individuality. That is the barrier between us and our visions. The saint has God before his eyes, and he carries Him in his heart. The artist sees only himself and bears only the weight of his own incompetence. But these, darling, are not the things I meant to say to you, although they may explain my life. The common run of people wouldn't understand all this in the least." [237]

"I want to hear all—I want to enter into all your thoughts, David. I have always known that those who devote themselves to the study of what is sublime and beautiful suffer proportionately from the squalor of actual facts."

She quoted from one of her father's speeches which he invariably gave with much earnestness at the opening of schools of art and similar institutions.

"The world," replied Rennes, "rewards the beautiful only inasmuch as it flatters the senses, and the sublime remains—so far as the general taste is concerned—altogether without response." [238]

"But one would think," said Agnes, "that you were a disappointed or an unsuccessful man, whereas every one admires your genius."

He laughed at her practical bent, which seemed the more fascinating because of her picturesque appearance.

"One often feels cast down without the least cause," said he; "the truth is we all want more praise than we get. We are a vain lot, that's the trouble. Let me paint myself in the blackest colours. You must know the worst—you must realise the bad bargain you may make. Reckage would never bore and tire you in this way. How can you care for me?"

"It *is* hard!" she said, smiling.

"Darling! Do you remember the white violets at Woodbridge, and sitting on that gate looking across that deep valley at the bonfires? Wasn't it perfect? Look through these trees now—see the flames and smoke? They are burning dead leaves and twigs. I wish I could burn my past. This may be a good omen for me. But I must not deceive you; that would be a bad beginning."

"We must decide on some course," said Agnes. "Your letter was quite clear, but I suppose I am not going on as I ought to do. My present position is that of a person telling a lie to people. Before you wrote, however, I had made up my mind to *some* change. I could give no good grounds for carrying out my engagement to Beauclerk. The motives would not bear examination. I intended to be patient till the way was mercifully cleared for me. Even birds, in cold weather, grow tame from distress. So I waited in a dull, frozen way for what might happen."

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He remembered, with a pang of remorse, that he had once called this devoted woman an accomplished, incurable Philistine.

"I must put myself in the wrong with regard to Beauclerk," she continued quietly. "That is merely fair to him. Every one shall know that I have been weak and vacillating. May God forgive me and humble me—for I shall not be understood, even by many good people. But the next worst thing to making an error is to abide by it. Dear David, try to follow my feeling. It has all passed in my mind in such a way that it is impossible for me to describe it. In a sense, giving Reckage up seems to uproot me altogether from all my former life, and the future is only not a blank because it is such a mystery. I am sure, though, that sorrow is never in God's ordinance the *whole* law of life. These are great compensations."

"Anything is better than to sit still and dream," said Rennes. "I have dreamt too long. I find solitude oppressive. Yet you will admit how dreadful it is to live among those who don't know or don't care a bit about art."

"But there are other interests equally engrossing."

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"Not to me. And even Epicurean advice is only the way to ignominious, contemptible happiness. I must have an ideal life or else annihilation—splendid misery or splendid content—nothing between the two."

"You have not half showed your capabilities yet," replied Agnes. "We have to look upon this world as the merest pilgrimage, but we can help each other. I have hope because I have faith. Sara de Treverell said the other day that, in men, experience often makes mere callousness of character. Is this true, David?"

"Not of me; you have saved me from the worst things. But it simply worries and almost exasperates me to hear religious talk from any one. When I hear a sermon I feel an inclination always to say, 'My dear fellow, can't you put your case better?' I want good stuff about Divine and human nature—not this vagueness and platitude. Why don't they tell one something about the optimism of God, even before the spectacle of men's weakness? But, instead, we are told to moan about this vale of tears; we are promised chastisements, disappointments, woes, persecution. A philosophy of suffering makes men strong, but a philosophy of despair is bound to make a generation of pleasure-seekers."

"And why?"

"Because the veritable world, even on its bare merits, *is not so bad*. It is full of beauty, and interest, and enjoyment. It is a lie to call it so many vile names. One's good sense revolts. Do you think, darling, that I could look at you, love you, be loved by you, and call life a bad joke?"

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Since the beginning of time this logic has held its own against all scientific criticism. The two, being secure from observation, kissed each other and accepted the earth with perfect cheerfulness. They made some plans, and after the agony of parting till the next day, each went home to write the other a long letter. In the course of the afternoon Rennes passed through Arlington Street four times in a hansom and twice on foot. Agnes was always at one of the windows innocently observing the weather. He thought her the loveliest thing created. He pitied, with benevolence, all other men, and he spent an hour at his solicitor's office, without begrudging the time, or chafing under the fatigue.

Two days later Lord Reckage received the following communication from Miss Carillon:—

MY DEAR BEAUCLERK,—

This letter will astonish and grieve you. I have written several. None please me. All say too much and yet leave all unsaid. I must send this one and trust to your generosity. I am wholly to blame, wholly in the wrong. I am no actress but I have been acting a part—the part of a happy woman. My effort has deceived many—Papa, Mamma, and, I believe, you among them. Dear Beauclerk, you will think me ungrateful, false, weak. I don't excuse myself. As I have said, the blame is all mine, and the punishment must be all mine.

When you receive this I shall have left England with Mr. Rennes. He had arranged to go to the East for a long time. (This will show you how little he anticipated any change in *my* plans.) When I realised that I should have to say goodbye to him, probably for ever, I found myself unequal to the trial. I could not let him go alone. It is bad for me to dwell too much on my feelings. I ought to admit, however, that I have known all along, in a sort of way, that I should have to give in *if he put the matter before me*. I dislike the talk one hears so often about inevitability—much of it is made an excuse for appalling selfishness. At the same time, I understand what is meant and feel strongly, that, while I am using my own will—I cannot use it, *with a good conscience*, otherwise. Can you follow this? In reality, I was disloyal to Mr. Rennes when I became engaged to you. I was impatient, wilful, blind. I did you both an irreparable—yes, an irreparable injustice. He must always think me fickle, and you will always condemn my weakness. I dare not ask you to forgive me. I dare not hope for

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contentment after such a bad beginning. One of Papa's favourite texts rings in my ears—"Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?" I mustn't be insincere with God. But I do want you to see that my affection for Mr. Rennes has taken such a hold of my life that I simply cannot fight against it. I am not sentimental, as you know: I can be quite as sensible as other people about life and its obligations. I don't expect romance or joy. Had I, by any misfortune, met Mr. Rennes *after* my marriage with you, I cannot bear to think what might have happened. It isn't nice of me to say this. It is a painful, humiliating reflection, and you won't like to think that you ever cared—even a little—for any one so unworthy. In your kindness you will say that this isn't like me. But indeed it is the real me. You have known the *unreal*, sham me. Every one of my friends will be surprised. I am not surprised. And oh! the relief to be quite, quite natural and straightforward at last. Nothing to pretend, nothing to hide. I wish you had never known me. Your ideals are so noble, and you depended on me to realise a few of them. I think of the plans we made, the hopes we formed. Alas! they were not for me. I am going forward into the darkness. I don't see one ray of light. Yet I haven't one misgiving or the least fear, because I have the unalterable conviction that I am fulfilling my true destiny—whatever it may be, good or evil.

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All will agree that you are well rid of me. This is my consolation. You have been kind, considerate, affectionate, thoughtful always. And I have failed you.

Forget me, and never judge other women by me. I have been exceptionally foolish.

Your wretched friend,
AGNES CARILLON.

His lordship's emotion on reading this letter was one of relief for himself—but pity and terror for the girl. He was sincerely fond of Agnes, and the defiant misery of her words filled him with forebodings. But the sense of his own restored liberty soon dominated every other feeling; and his anxiety about Miss Carillon's future found complete assuagement in the thought that character, under suffering, came out with an energy and intensity which made, indisputably, for progress.

When the news, after twenty-four hours, became known, Agnes's wish to place herself in the wrong, beyond sympathy, or hope of pardon, was freely gratified. No criticism seemed too harsh for her conduct. No voice was lifted in mitigation of her offence. Rennes was excused, because he was an artist, erratic and passionate, and she was unfortunately beautiful. The poor old Bishop, however, rallied under the shock, preached more vigorously than ever, and showed a proud countenance to his daughter's adversaries. When he was able to announce to his friends—after a painful fortnight of suspense—that the young couple had travelled to Rome with Mrs. Rennes, and been married at the English Embassy there, he gave way to a little illness and indulged his grief. One could surrender to legalised folly; one could name it. But sin and scandal could only be faced by an implacable reserve. "I may die of dismay," said he to his wife, "but I will not die of disgrace."

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CHAPTER XVII

Scandal, meanwhile, was collecting her eager forces for a great campaign against the Orange marriage. It was unanimously decided that the affair could not be hushed up. Sympathy—within wise limits—was on the side of the lovers, but sympathy, nevertheless, expressed a desire to hear fuller particulars. Society journalism was, at that time, just coming into vogue, and the weekly papers contained several references to the strange rumour of an approaching divorce. Hartley Penborough and the members of the Capitol Club were wondering what line they ought to take. They intended to stand by Robert, but they did not wish to advertise their loyalty. The Carlton set were divided into two camps—those who thought Orange unlucky, and those who thought him an alien adventurer. So far as these opinions touched his career, both were damaging. The friends of Lord Wight and Lady Fitz Rewes had always been jealous of the young man. They discussed him now with ferocious pity, announcing his ruin in every circle. Sara de Treverell's associates were mostly of the Diplomatic Corps. These, well informed about Alberian affairs and Parflete's history, feared much mischief. The old Catholics were dismayed at the new convert's entanglement—especially as he had recently been elected to Parliament. The more timorous among them—in a panic—entertained unfounded doubts about his orthodoxy, and the rest deplored the injudicious attention bestowed on mere recruits to the Ancient Faith. Converts then were looked upon, in England, with a certain suspicion. At that period the magnificent services of Dr. Newman and Cardinal Manning were far more appreciated at Rome than they were in the drawing-rooms of English Catholic society. Orange, following his own instincts and the advice of Newman, avoided rather than sought the small group which attempted to make the Eternal Church a Select Committee of the Uncommonly Good. To one who had spent his youth in a great Catholic nation, and came himself from one of the princely families of France, the servitude necessarily involved by the fact of joining any *coterie*—no matter how agreeable—could possess no sort of attraction. His Catholic friends were chiefly among the Jesuits, an order which, by devotion, genius, and courage, has excited that fear from all men which is the highest homage this world can offer to integrity. His personal sorrow, therefore, was not degraded by any foolish additional worry about the tittle-tattle of this, that, or the other personage. Tongues might wag; for himself, he could but do his duty and keep his account straight with God. He hoped that a public law-suit would be avoided. Baron Zeuill was using his influence, so he declared, to arrive

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at some settlement with Parflete. Parflete's agent was now in communication with Robert's solicitors; he himself was known to be in London, and he had even been seen dining with foreigners at one of the small private hotels near the Strand. The Alberian Ambassador informed Mr. Disraeli that there was nothing to fear because Parflete was not ambitious. "The corruption of egoism and the insatiable love of pleasure" had done its worst to a character never striking for its energy. He would "desert" his wife again if she would give him a sufficient sum. Mrs. Parflete, Disraeli pointed out, was the last woman on earth to agree to such terms. She was also perfectly well aware, he added, that she was the legitimate daughter of the late Archduke Charles.

"But," said the Ambassador, "surely she will love the glory of her country and the respect due to her Imperial father's memory far better than her own legal rights?"

"You can't narrow the question to a mere sentimental issue," said Disraeli. "It is no such thing. She has to defend her character. Orange must clear his reputation."

Disraeli had formed the opinion that Alberia—as represented by His Excellency—was by no means anxious to see Mrs. Parflete's innocence established; that, in fact, the whole disaster had been planned and executed in the sole design of compromising her status. All that had occurred, all that he had observed led him to this conviction more and more. It was decided that Brigit should be summoned at once from Paris to take up her residence at the Convent, where she had been well protected during the earlier part of the year. [248]

"There is to be no appeal *ad misericordiam*," wrote Disraeli to Orange: "what you have done, you have done in good faith and perfect honesty. Parflete, beyond a doubt, will take some action. His conscience provides him, in this difficulty, with the best means of self-advertisement he has yet found. He has consulted several Bishops, the Lord Chief Justice, all the ambassadors, and most of the intelligent Peers. He wanders from one confessional to another: St. Philip, St. Teresa, St. Benedict, and St. Dominic are invoked perpetually for the disarmament of his scruples. Vanity blinds him to the danger of assassination. Alberia is in a red mood. *Carissime*, the dark, inevitable hour will come. Be prepared for it. Depend entirely now on the might of your religious belief. Men cannot assist you. I have helped many, but no one has ever helped me. Political life must be taken as you find it, and it is neither in my disposition, nor, I am sure, in yours, to indulge in complaints of unkindness. I have reached a point now when I should like to quote Dante. Consider him quoted, and believe me,

"Ever yours,
"D."

The course of the intrigue may be followed most conveniently at this point in the document known as Mudara's Confession. [249]

Mudara, it will be remembered, was in the Alberian Secret Service. [See *The School for Saints*, p. 395.] He it was who confirmed the false news of Parflete's suicide, and did so much to hasten Orange's marriage. He says in his narrative:—

The death of the Archduke Charles—which occurred some weeks before it was anticipated—put the Alberian Government to very grave embarrassment.

1. It was impossible to deny the legitimacy of the Archduchess Marie-Brigitte-Henriette (known as Mrs. Parflete). The rumour was officially denied, and every proper measure was taken for the suppression of a fact dangerous at all times and especially so during a national crisis. Had the Archduchess been so ill-advised as to stand upon her legal rights, the case would have been very awkward for the Government. They intended, in any event, to plead ignorance, and had prepared every proof of their good faith in withstanding the claim.

2. It was clear, beyond a doubt, on the highest ecclesiastical authority, that, if application were made, the marriage between the Archduchess and Parflete would be annulled at Rome. Parflete was regarded with great suspicion. He was capable of any treachery. He could not hold his tongue, and we know what that means at Court. The one person he feared was the Archduke Charles, and now that death had removed His Imperial Highness, we understood what to expect from the disgraced Equerry.

3. The Government's Agents had formed a very high opinion of M. de Hausée (known as Robert Orange). It was considered by the Government's advisers that this gentleman would use all his influence to crush any foolish ambition on the part of the Archduchess Marie-Brigitte. M. de Hausée was himself of too noble a family to care in the least for high-sounding titles or empty rights. M. de Hausée (whose mother was Scotch) had become a British subject, and had been elected to the English Parliament. He was under the protection of Mr. Disraeli, had every prospect of a brilliant political career as a Commoner, and he had too much good sense—in view of the very large fortune settled upon the Archduchess—to diminish it by any imprudent insistence on a claim which, extremely valuable as a ground for some advantageous compromise, could only prove ruinous if pressed to any exact recognition. The Government's advisers, therefore, approved most highly of the marriage between M. de Hausée and the Archduchess Marie-Brigitte-Henriette, and were disposed to hasten it on by every means. On the news, *properly authenticated*, of Parflete's suicide on Lord Soham's yacht, I visited England and had interviews with the Archduchess herself, with M. de Hausée at Catesby, and with Baron Zeuill at Claridge's Hotel. The *proofs* of Parflete's death were in perfect order, and the marriage between M. de Hausée and H.I.H. took place in the Chapel of the Alberian Embassy. [250]

As I had made all the arrangements, I engaged the servants for the reception of the bride and groom at the Villa Miraflores. I was able to retain a small room at the back of the house for

my own use. On the day of their arrival, I concealed myself, without difficulty, in the apartment where Mr. Orange and the Archduchess had their *déjeuner*. It was an unfortunate circumstance that I did not destroy the telegram which I saw on the mantel-piece. But I supposed it contained some ordinary congratulations. A more vulgar prudence than mine would have read and burnt it in any case. My fault is, unquestionably, a most inopportune delicacy of feeling. I witnessed the whole scene between Mr. Orange and Her Imperial Highness. It brought tears to my eyes, but as evidence it was valueless for my purpose. She wept, stormed, and showed much feeling. I was reminded in many ways of her mother, Madame Duboc. M. de Hausée, of purer blood, is like those players who, in spite of an air of indifference at great losses, feel them none the less. I consider it my duty as a gentleman to say that his bearing through the ordeal did credit to his noble family and his personal character. The Archduchess, who is foolhardy and insolent, does not deserve such a lover, and it is grievous to think that such a termagant should have so much power over such a man. I regard her as I would some poisonous reptile. Piety—which improves most women—only seems to render her the more defiant, and love—which softens most wills—makes hers the more hard. After parting with M. de Hausée she swooned, and I thought what a merciful thing it would be for all of us if she never regained consciousness. This idea—which may have been an inspiration—was before me, when I heard a slight rustling behind the curtains. I pulled out my revolver (although I had no intention of firing), aimed it, and said, "Who is there?"

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To my amazement, Parflete himself came out.

"For God's sake, don't shoot," said he, "it is I."

He cried bitterly at the sight of the Archduchess—for she was looking extraordinarily beautiful. He cursed himself loudly, put me to terrible anxiety, and I repented of my recklessness in not getting rid of such a fool long ago. With great presence of mind I rang the bell, and we withdrew to my hiding-place while the servant came in, raised a hue and cry, and finally carried the insensible Archduchess to a bedroom. When the coast was clear we emerged. I asked Parflete what he meant to do, why he was there, and how he had got into the house.

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"To sound the soul of another," said he, still maudlin. "You must first have searched deeply your own. Remorse has brought me here. My better nature reasserts itself." And more to that effect. "There is nothing new under the sun!" he wound up.

"Why should there be?" said I, exasperated. "Come to the point."

"My wife is the purest, noblest of beings!" said he.

"You will defend any jade on earth, provided she be handsome," said I, but seeing an ugly light in his eye, I added, "but H.I.H. is certainly respectable. To this we have both been witnesses."

"What is to be done?" he cried, beating his head. "Can I forget her interests? Who, better than I, should take the place of her adviser, her Prime Minister? Affairs in Alberia cannot long remain in this violent state. There must be a *dénouement*."

I answered him sharply.

"You know quite well that the Archduchess can never hope for official recognition from any Alberian Ministry—let alone the sovereigns of Europe. An aggressive attitude on her part could at most and at the worst, but lead to these things—a change of dynasty, and the annexation of Alberia by one of the Powers, or its partition among some of them. We wish Alberia to become another Switzerland—a little Paradise of law-abiding, industrious, rich, independent people!"

"All the same," said he, "my wife may not sell her birth-right. Such a proceeding is directly opposite to the Will of God."

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"She will be a good claimant—after all this scandal with the Carlists and de Hausée," said I. "I can imagine the welcome extended to her by Bismarck! We have seen enough of this kind of thing in France and Spain."

We talked for an hour. He was as obstinate as a mule and as incoherent as running water. I could grasp him nowhere. It was like groping in a well for a lighted torch. No doubt he had formed in his own mind some obscure, incalculable intrigue, but no reason can guess the plans which are made by an unreasoning person.

"The Archduchess is rich, young, and handsome," said I; "it would be folly to change her noble independence for a political slavery fatal to her peace—perhaps her life."

"But duty is above such weak considerations," said he, rolling his eyes. "My wife must remember the nation."

"Do you believe," I rejoined, "that you would get the nation's sanction to the general upset which you propose? You must be mad."

"Nations go mad," said he, smiling; "why not to my advantage, then, as well as yours?"

He refused to tell me how he got into the house, but it must have been by bribery. His sneers and insults were insinuated with such skill that retaliation on the spot was impossible. He made his escape by suddenly extinguishing the lamp, which left the room in pitch darkness. I felt it would be undignified to stumble about in vain pursuit of a man so active and so *canaille*

in all his methods. He must have been on good terms with the servants, for a considerable time elapsed before they replied to my summons, and when I asked them, each in turn, whether he had been seen, one and all assumed the greatest astonishment and innocence, but none appeared in any way alarmed, which they must have done had they not been well aware of his presence in the house. I said no more, for, by treating the matter lightly, I made them look—to themselves—dupes and very ridiculous. I remained at the Villa until the Archduchess and Lady Fitz Rewes departed for Paris. I had a short interview with M. de Hausée in my character of the late Archduke's Agent. Our conversation was purely in connection with H.I.H.'s money matters, although he said with great firmness at the close, "The Archduchess will never embarrass Alberian affairs. Her taste is not for Courts or politics." I know this is his true conviction, but he is in love, and he measures her by his own unselfishness. He won my heart strangely. In all my experience, he is the one honest man who is not a little idiotic into the bargain. I deplore the influence of women on such a character, and I would have saved him from that Judith.

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Here, for the present, we must leave Mudara's narrative.

CHAPTER XVIII

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The Alberian Ambassador, Prince d'Alchingen, considered himself a diplomatist of the Metternich school. He had imagination, sentimentality, and humour: he preferred to attack the strength rather than the weaknesses of mankind, and in all his schemes he counted inconsistency among the passions, and panic among the virtues. He still hoped that Orange might be tempted by the prospect of immediate happiness to press for the nullity of the Parflete marriage. Parflete himself was indulging in the most extravagant demonstrations of remorse. He behaved, as Disraeli said, more like a cunning woman than an able man, and he was an agent of the kind most dangerous to his employers—irregularly scrupulous, fond of boasting of his acquaintance with princes and ministers, so vain that he would rather have had notoriety without glory, than glory without notoriety. He had found the means of ingratiating himself with many persons of high rank, and he knew how to avail himself, with each, of his influence with the others. Never did an intrigue require more urgently a sort of conduct quite out of the common routine. The Prince, therefore, was much perturbed in mind, and cast about him for a trustworthy associate. By an associate he meant some one on whom he could test the quality of his deceit—in other words, he liked to try his sword on gossamer and granite before he struck out at commoner materials. Among his friendships, he prosecuted none with such zeal as that with the Lady Sara de Treverell. As the member of a great Russian house, she was especially attractive to Alberian speculation, but her beauty and cleverness no doubt assisted the Ambassador's determination to make himself agreeable. The two constantly exchanged letters, and, as the Princess d'Alchingen was an invalid who devoted her hours to spiritual reading, she gladly permitted Lady Sara's influence, realising—with the priceless knowledge of a spirit made reasonable through pain—that the girl was romantic and the Prince incurably old. His flaxen wig heightened the tone of a complexion much ravaged by gout and its antidotes. His nebulous eyes with twitching lids were not improved by the gold-rimmed glasses which magnified their insignificance. He possessed a striking nose and chin, but, as these features were more characteristic than delightful, they offered his wife no occasions for serious anxiety. Whenever His Excellency required feminine advice, it was considered quite *en règle* that Lady Sara should be consulted. The Princess herself drove him to St. James's Square on the afternoon following Mr. Disraeli's call. She sent *milles tendresses* to her *chérie*, and bitterly regretted that she was not well enough to leave the carriage. The Prince kissed her hand, bowed superbly, stood bareheaded in a draught till the brougham drove away (in these matters he had no equal), and, having warned Sara of his intended visit by a special messenger, he had the pleasure of finding the young lady alone. Following her custom, she was appropriately dressed for the occasion in prune-coloured velvet, which suggested dignity, and very beautiful antique Spanish lace, which symbolized the long endurance of things apparently too delicate, subtle, and trifling for the assaults of time. The Prince kissed both of her white hands, and lamented the obstacles which had kept them apart for so many insupportable weeks. He had lived on her letters. They had been, however, few and short.

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"What is troubling you, sir?" asked Sara, "you look pale."

"For once in my life I wish to do a foolish thing—*pour encourager les autres*," was his reply. "I intend to meddle with a love-affair."

"Whose love-affair?"

"I will tell you presently. I never venture upon any work trusting alone to my hopes. I am not of those who discover rifts in their harness only on the morning of the battle! I prepare for all contingencies. First, then, let me put you through a little catechism. Do men ever believe evil reports about the women they love?"

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"The *posse non peccare* is not the *non posse peccare*," said Sara quickly.

"Do you mean that they can believe the evil, but, as a rule, they won't?" returned the Prince.

"You translate freely, but you have caught the spirit!"

"Very well. I come to my second question. Is a man better off with a dangerous woman whom he adores than with a good woman who adores *him*?"

"All men who desire love, deserve it," said Sara. "The *means* to this are always, in a manner, certainties, the *end* is always problematical. But those who want love could never be satisfied with mere welfare—never."

"You have a right to direct my opinion," he exclaimed; "where else do I hear such sound good sense? The usual women one meets in our circle are old, ugly, and proud—incapable of conversation with persons of intelligence. My wife," he added smoothly, "makes this complaint about her lady friends. It is very dull and very sad for her, although she is a saint."

No conversation or letter was ever exchanged between Sara and the Prince without some emphatic tribute to the sanctity, prudence, and charm of the Princess.

"The dear Princess!" murmured Sara.

"And now," said His Excellency, drawing his chair an inch nearer, "I must be serious. You have guessed, of course, that I am thinking about Robert Orange and Mrs. Parflete. I stayed at Brookes's till after twelve last night in hopes of seeing Orange. I was discussing him with Lord Reckage." [259]

"What did Reckage say?"

"Reckage doesn't mind raising a blister, but he won't often tell one what he thinks."

Sara shivered a little and compressed her lips.

"Reckage is fond of Orange," she said, "yet there is a certain jealousy.... Formerly, Orange had need of Reckage, and depended on him; now Reckage needs him and depends on Orange. Could he but know it, Orange is the one creature who could pull him through his difficulties with the Bond of Association. A man who has no personal ambition, who desires nothing that any one can give, who fears nothing that any one can do, who lives securely in the presence of God, is a power we must not under-rate."

She spoke with enthusiasm—the enthusiasm which women seldom, if ever, display for principle on its bare merits. By the deepening colour in her eyes and sudden clearness in her cheeks, the Ambassador felt that he had reached a point where the emotions would have to be considered, even though they might not be counted on.

"I have not time to tell you all the nonsense Reckage said," he answered. "So far as my own judgment can serve for a guide, I believe that he would like to see Orange under the care and discipline of St. Ignatius." [260]

"He wishes him to become a Jesuit priest? How selfish!"

"Such is my impression. He wants so competent a colleague removed from the political sphere. If his words and actions are of a piece, he will certainly work hard to attain this object. He is saying everywhere, 'Orange is a born ecclesiastic. Orange is a mystic. Orange is under the influence of Newman. Orange begins to see that marriage is not for him.' Such remarks don't help outside the Church. Really, competition renders the nicest people detestable."

Lady Sara could not conceal her agitation. But she baffled her companion a little by saying—

"I suppose you want Orange to marry your inopportune Archduchess?"

"The lady in question is certainly inopportune. I have never called her an Archduchess. I leave such audacities to her enemies! But tell me what you think of *Mrs. Parflete*?"

"I have never seen her. Pensée Fitz Rewes insists that she is beautiful, cold, determined, and uncommon."

"Generally, there is nothing so fatal to a woman's success in the world as an early connection with a scoundrel. I have odd accounts of Mrs. Parflete from Madrid—the Marquis of Castrillon and an upstart called Bodava fought a duel about her in Baron Zeuill's gymnasium. A man called William Caffle, who attended to their wounds, has given me fullest particulars of the affair. I don't wish to injure the lady, but on account of eventualities which might arise, I am obliged to look a little about me." [261]

"I understand," said Sara.

"The great point is not to let Parflete take the lead in the settlement. His present course of action isn't quite decent or consistent. Will Orange do nothing? It is wise to make peace whilst there is some faint appearance of choice left on the subject, so there is no time to be wasted."

"What ought Orange to do?"

"Reckage declares that he will not appeal to Rome. There he is well-advised. But as he has already compromised Mrs. Parflete, surely his present scruples are entirely new and unlooked for? We must both despise him, if he should abandon her now."

"He has never compromised her," said Sara indignantly. "He has even been ridiculed for his honour. I had no idea, Excellence, that you were so wicked!"

"How else could I know all the news twenty-four hours before the rest of the world? This, however, is no laughing matter. Parflete may ask his wife to return to him. It may suit her purpose to agree."

"What! A woman who loves, or who has loved—Robert Orange? A few things in human nature are still impossible." [262]

Prince d'Alchingen shrugged his shoulders, and continued—

"Parflete has a good back-stairs knowledge of Alberian politics. We never deny this, but we always add that he was dismissed, in disgrace, from the Imperial Household."

"Is there much use in denying the fact that he married the Archduke's daughter?"

"We meet the case by saying that the Archduke in his youth may not have been exempt from manly follies. And Duboc was irresistible—she drove one mad!"

"Then why all this fuss?"

"To avoid more fuss—on a large scale."

"But I have always heard that Mrs. Parflete has no intention of giving trouble. They say she is an angel."

"You will find that she would far rather be an Archduchess! Orange may discover that his Beatrice is nearly related to Rahab!"

"Oh, I cannot think you are right."

"Then you should hear Zeuill and General Prim on the subject. The Marquis of Castrillon is in London. Our friend Parflete will soon be labouring with copious materials for a divorce."

"How can you assume such horrors?" said Sara.

"The imagination," said His Excellency, "is always more struck by likelihoods than the reason convinced by the examination of facts! My dear friend, let us survey the position. Orange does not seem to have the most distant idea of making Mrs. Parflete his—his *belle amie*. Well and good. But ought he, at his age, so handsome, so brilliant, so much a man, to renounce all other women for the sake of a little adventuress? Can nothing be done? If he could have some convincing proof of her treachery, would he not turn to others more beautiful, more worthy—"

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"To Lady Fitz Rewes," said Sara quickly.

"If you like," replied the Prince, in his gentlest voice.

For a second or two each of them looked away. Sara glanced toward her canaries in their cage. Prince d'Alchingen leant forward to inhale the perfume of some violets in a vase near him.

"Delicious!" he murmured, "delicious!"

"Mr. Disraeli," said Sara, still gazing at the birds, "has always wished for the marriage with Lady Fitz Rewes. Yet what can we do? I cannot see the end of it."

"The heroic are plotted against by evil spirits, comforted by good ones, but in no way constrained," observed the Ambassador; "let us then support Mr. Orange, and wait for his own decision. I doubt whether we could drive him to Lady Fitz Rewes."

"To whom else?" asked Sara, fastening some flowers in her belt. They were white camellias sent that morning from the infatuated, still hopeful Duke of Marshire. "To whom else—if not Pensée?" [264]

"I dare not answer such questions yet. Have patience and you shall see what you shall see. Much will hinge on the events of the next few days."

"I will not believe," she insisted, "that Robert Orange has been deceived by that woman."

"You may change your opinion. Come to Hadley Lodge next Saturday—I ask no more."

"Really, sir," said Sara, with a mocking smile, "you frighten me. Am I at last to fly through an intrigue on the wings of a conspiracy?"

The Prince smiled also, but he saw that the lady had risen to the occasion and would not prove false to her Asiatic blood.

"Mrs. Parflete and Castrillon are cut out for each other," said he, "but Orange has no business in that *galère*. He is reserved for a greater fate."

"What do you mean?" said Sara.

"All now depends on you."

"On me?"

"Plainly. Reckage wishes Orange to get out of his way and become a Religious. Can this be permitted?"

"It would be outrageous. It would be a crime."

"Ah, worse than that. It might prove a success. We don't want any more strong men in the Church just now."

Sara agreed. She, too, was opposed to the Church. And she was glad of the excuse this thought offered for the pains she would take to save Orange from the Vatican grasp. [265]

"Then we are allies," said His Excellency. "You will help me."

"Gladly, and what is more, as a duty. But how?"

"Keep the two men apart, and treat both of them—both—with kindness."

His Excellency then rose, kissed her hands once more, and took his departure. Sara, when the door was closed, paced the floor with swift and desperate steps, as though she were encircled by thoughts which, linked together, danced round her way so that whether she retreated or advanced, swayed to the right or to the left, they held her fast.

CHAPTER XIX

 [266]

Lord Garrow, under his daughter's command, had issued invitations for a dinner-party that same evening to a few friends, who, it was hoped, would support the Meeting which Reckage was endeavouring to organise as a protest against Dr. Temple's nomination. The guests included Reckage himself, Orange, Charles Aumerle, the Dowager Countess of Larch, Hartley Penborough, Lady Augusta Hammit, and the Bishop of Calbury's chaplain,—the Rev. Edwin Pole-Knox.

Sara, arrayed in white satin and opals, sat at the piano playing the *Faust* of Berlioz, and wondering whether she had really arranged her table to perfection, when the footman brought the following note—dashed off in pencil—from Lord Reckage:—

ALMOUTH HOUSE.

An extraordinary thing has happened. Agnes has run away with David Rennes. She seems quite broken and her letter is too touching, too sacred to show. As for him, it is difficult to say what he could give, or what I would accept, as an excuse. She, however, has my full forgiveness, and perhaps good may come of so much sorrow and duplicity. I must see you after the others have gone to-night. My plan is to leave early—probably with Orange and Aumerle, but I will return later. I need your counsel. B. [267]

Sara, who was always in league with audacity, clapped her hands at the tidings of Miss Carillon's bold move. She was not surprised, for, as we have seen, she had read the girl's character truly, and warned Orange that some event of the kind would happen. But the pleasure she took in this confirmation of her own prophetic gifts was alloyed by the fear that Reckage, now at liberty, would prove a masterful, jealous, and embarrassing lover. Nor were her forebodings on this score lessened when he arrived, evidently in a strange mood, a quarter of an hour before the appointed time. His eyes travelled over her face with a consuming scrutiny to which she was unaccustomed and for which she found herself unprepared. For a moment she experienced the disadvantages of a guilty conscience, and although she had, so far, merely considered various plans for using his devotion without peril to her own independence, she felt that the moment for deliberation was past, that the duel between them had begun.

"You have my note," he said, "and I would rather not talk about Agnes to-night. On that point I am in a stupor. I can't realise the disaster at all. I might seem unfeeling, whereas I am insensible, or unconscious, or mentally chloroformed—anything you like to call it." [268]

"I can see that you have received a great blow," answered Sara, looking down.

"I suppose so. And at present I am stunned. Wait a week, and I may be able to grasp the case—I won't say calmly, for I couldn't be calmer than I am at this very moment. But I will say, with understanding, with justice. Give me no credit yet for either. To be frank, I don't recognise myself in this crisis. As a rule, I have an impulse—more or less violent—to some extreme measure.... I saw d'Alchingen this afternoon," he added, abruptly.

He did not add that the Prince had given several striking reasons for the Lady Sara's interest in Robert Orange. His Excellency, in so acting, may not have been aware that he was pouring such confidences into the ear of a jealous man, but he wished to divert gossip from himself, and he was becoming afraid lest his intimacy with the brilliant, dangerous girl might give rise to criticism. "She talks and writes incessantly about Orange," he had said; "what a marriage it would be! I hope it may be brought about." This suggestion drove Reckage's thoughts toward a fatal survey of the past year. He discovered, as he believed, irresistible proofs of Sara's infatuation, and, what was worse, clear evidence of Robert's sly encouragement of that weakness. Why else had he borne the severance from Mrs. Parflete with such astonishing fortitude? How else did he keep up his spirits in the face of a grotesque, if unfortunate, adventure? The answer was plain enough. Sara's sympathy and the reasonable hopes necessarily attached to so much kindness had sustained him through the bitterness of all his trials. [269]

"Have you ever thought," said Reckage, with pretended carelessness, "that Orange's serenity just now is somewhat unnatural? Is it *all* religion?"

"I believe that neither of *us* can form any conception of his capacity for suffering, or the support he finds in his Belief."

"It points to fanaticism, no doubt. He is a Cardinal *in petto*. The Catholics want spirit everywhere, and Orange has got spirit. His vocation lies toward the Vatican. His morals are as good as his build—which is saying much. D'Alchingen was remarking how extraordinarily well set-up he is. He would have done well in the army. He cuts an effective figure."

"He is distinguished; would one call him handsome?"

"There's a nobility about him, of course. I am wondering whether he is really so clever as many make out. He is learned and thoughtful; he has plenty of pluck and he's the best fellow in the world. But——"

"I wish I knew him better," sighed the young lady; "I liked him and believed in him on the strength of your recommendation. That was an immense prejudice in his favour." [270]

She looked up with a sweet and trustful smile which would have satisfied a harder adversary than Reckage. He was not so hard, however, as he was egoistic, and it was not a question of softening his heart. Sara had the far more difficult task of soothing his tortured vanity.

"I don't know," he said, losing caution, "that I want you to take him up quite so strongly! No one could call him a coxcomb, yet he, not aware of the real cause of your interest, might be overflattered. He might, eventually, begin to hope——"

"What?" she asked, with burning cheeks.

"All sorts of things. He's a man, and you are beautiful. And I have heard him say a thousand times that so-called Platonics are possible for one of the two, but never for both. Doesn't this explain the many cases of unrequited love? You are vexed, I can see it. But I am not thinking of you. I am thinking of Robert."

"He is not so sentimental as you imagine."

"Isn't he? This affair with Mrs. Parflete was pure sentimentality from beginning to end—a poet's love. He would have another feeling for you—something much stronger. You are so human, Sara. I would far sooner kill you than write poetry to you. You are life—not literature. That little thing with shining hair and a porcelain face is for dreams. Of course, he will always love her—after a fashion. He might even compare you with her and find her your superior in every way—except as a woman. We may be at moments poets, at moments saints, but the greater part of the time, a man is a man. And you are no friend for a man. Pensée Fitz Rewes might answer well enough; she has had sorrow, she has two children, she has a gentle, maternal air. But you——" [271]

He threw back his head and laughed without mirth.

"You!" he repeated. "My God!"

"You are talking very foolishly, Beauclerk. Perhaps it is your odd way of making yourself agreeable. It doesn't please me a bit to be told that I am a siren. My mind is full of the Bond of Association and your Meeting at St. James's Hall. How shamefully Lord Cavernake has behaved, but dear Lord Gretingham has come out well. What a miserable set we have in the Lords just now!"

She was making these remarks as the clock struck the hour, and her father entered the room.

"Beauclerk came early, dear papa," said she, "because he had something to tell us. His engagement is broken off."

Lord Garrow looked the grief appropriate to the news, and disguised, as well as he could, his dismay at its probable development. He murmured, "Tut! tut!" a number of times, held up his hands, and nodded his head from side to side.

"I wish nothing said against poor Agnes," observed Reckage; "her mistakes are those of a generous, impetuous girl. Don't judge her hastily. All, I feel certain, has happened for the best." [272]

"Tut! tut!" repeated his lordship.

"I am devoted to dear Agnes," said Sara, "but I never, never thought that she was the wife for Beauclerk."

Then she stepped forward to greet Lady Augusta Hammit, who was at that moment announced. Lady Augusta was a tall woman about thirty-five years of age, with a handsome, sallow face, a superb neck, beautiful arms, hair the colour of ashes, pale lips, and large, gleaming white teeth. Unmarried, aristocratic, ordinarily well-off, and exceptionally pious according to her lights, she was a prominent figure in all work connected with the Moderate Party in the Church of England. In her opinion, foreigners might be permitted the idolatries of Rome; as for the English, Wesley was a lunatic; Pusey, a weak good creature; Newman was a traitor; Manning, a mistake. The one vital force on whom she depended for her spiritual illumination and her life's security was the Rev. Edwin Pole-Knox. "Pole-Knox," she said, "will save us yet." This good and industrious young man, a few years her junior, had been chaplain—mainly through Lady Augusta's devoted exertions—to three bishops. He did every credit to his patroness, but hints were already in the air on the subject of ingratitude. Some said he lacked ambition; others murmured dark conjectures [273]

about his heartlessness. It was left to the Lady Augusta's fellow-labourers in the sphere of beneficence to blurt out, with odious vulgarity, that he would never marry her in this world. She entered the room that evening in her haughtiest manner, for Pole-Knox was following close upon her heels, and she wished to justify the extreme deference which he showed her so properly in public, and perhaps with morbid conscientiousness in *tête-à-tête*.

"I don't know how I shall get through the winter," she observed, in reply to Lord Garrow's inquiries about her health. "I am working like a pack-horse." Here she caught Pole-Knox's name and bowed mechanically, without seeing him, in his direction. The entire afternoon they had been looking together over the accounts of a Home for Female Orphans, and poor Lady Augusta had been forced to see that whatever fire and enthusiasm her *protégé* could display in tracking down the orphans' dishonest butcher, his respect where she was concerned verged on frigidity.

Lady Larch was the next arrival, and as she was famous for her smile, she used it freely, not fatiguing herself by listening to remarks, or making them. In her youth she had been called bonnie; she was still pleasant to look upon. She talked very little, and perhaps on this account her few sayings were treasured, repeated throughout society, and much esteemed. "Surely it is a mistake to give men the notion that all good women are dull" was one of her classic utterances. Another ran, "Those who are happy do not trouble about the woes of the human race." Another, "The Dissenters belong essentially to a non-governing class—a vulgar class." These will serve to show the scope of her observation and the excellence of her intentions. In fact, she was often found dull. She was not especially disturbed about the woes of humanity, and her maternal grandfather had been a Presbyterian cotton-merchant. She bore Pole-Knox away to a far corner and begged to be told all the latest details of Miss Carillon's abominable conduct.

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"I do not exactly know," said she, "the state of things. The poor dear Bishop must be in a dreadful state."

Orange came in with Aumerle and Hartley Penborough. Lady Augusta, who was a kind, sincere woman, pressed his hand warmly, and showed with her eyes that she appreciated the difficulties of his position. He had aged, Sara thought, and he looked as though he suffered from sleeplessness; otherwise, in manner and in all ways, he was just as he had always been.

Sara looked at him, and, looking, she read the secret thoughts in his mind. Yes, she was to him, no doubt, the undisciplined, passionate girl who lived on admiration, excitement, and false romance. He owned her beauty; he excused her faults; he liked her. Of all this she was certain. Reckage's warning had encouraged her to believe that Orange's self-control was a hard achievement—by no means any matter of a disposition naturally cold. If it were merely to be a struggle of wills, her will would prove the stronger. She meant to have her way this time. Wasn't it the critical moment of his life? Every instinct had been roused—ambition, the love of adventure, the love of a woman. For a short while the means had been given him, humanly speaking, of gratifying these great passions. And then, at a stroke, he was once more poor and dependent, once more in a ridiculous position, and the woman he loved was further from his reach than ever. He still had the privilege of fighting and breaking his heart in the market-place. He could still enjoy some kind of a career. Yet the long, embittering struggle with poverty and disappointed affection could but appear to him now desolate indeed, barely worth the difficult prizes of success. Lady Sara was young, and she made the mistake, eternally peculiar to her sex, of placing love first, rather than last, among the forces in a strong nature. No powerful being ever yet either stood by the glory, or fell by the disasters, of a love-affair alone, uncomplicated by other issues. It does its work: it must touch, in many ways, the whole character; but it is, in the essence of things, a cause—not an effect. To Sara there was one only consuming interest in life—love. All her talents were directed to the gaining, understanding, and keeping of this wonderful human mystery. She wanted wild scenes and ungovernable emotions: she was beautiful enough to figure in such situations, and fascinating enough to indulge in such crises without offence to the artistic proprieties. But she had resolved that the hero of her existence must, at least, look his part. No one denied that Orange had a remarkable personality. Every one admitted that he was clever. These were the sternest estimates of his claim to social recognition. But she knew him to be a *de Hausée*. She thought him superbly handsome. She had Disraeli's opinion that he was a genius. Here was a case where love would not have to be blind. Love, in this case, could defy the scornful and the proud. At last she could say, "My fate!" and call the whole world to witness her surrender. "Whether he loves me, or whether he hates me," she thought, "I have chosen him." Sinætha, weaving spells by the moon, was not more determined or more irretrievably in love than Sara. The danger of such wild moods is as attractive to the very young as it is terrifying to the more mature. Perfectly conscious of her beauty, she felt able to defy, sue, and conquer at the same moment. Orange had never seen her to such brilliant advantage. The instant he entered the room and met her eyes, which shone with a most touching kind of timidity and a most flattering joy, he had to realise the need of strict discipline where constancy is a rule of existence. Sara's laugh, movements, way of talking, played a good deal on the heart, but even more upon the senses. Brigit's lovely face gained intensity only under the influence of sorrow. Then it became human. At other times it was merely exquisite. Now Sara's countenance had all the changing qualities of nature itself. She had, too, the instinctive arts of sympathy which are so much rarer than the actual gift. Far enough was Sara from the triumph which she was imagining; far enough was Orange from the least disloyalty; but he was fully alive to the danger of regarding her as a woman to be fought against. To fight in such cases is to admit fear of conquest.

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"Those opals are beautiful," said he, presently.

"I am glad you approve of—the opals."

"But you put them to a disadvantage."

"O! is that a compliment? The first you have ever paid me."

"Do you care about them?"

"From you, yes. I was reading in Saint-Simon's Memoirs yesterday that your ancestor—Charles de Hausée—was the first swordsman, the bravest soldier, the hardest rider, and the best judge of women in France. But let us be serious. Lady Larch is wearing her brightest smile!"

"Must we be very earnest this evening?"

"I am afraid so. You see, I have secured Pole-Knox. He has never been permitted to dine here before."

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"Why not?"

"Because I once told Lady Augusta that he was a man for the shortest part of the afternoon—not for evenings, at all. She couldn't forgive this."

"Does she forgive it now?"

"Yes. She has reached the stage when one may criticise him."

"That means a complete cure, I suppose."

"Far from it—resignation to the worst that can be said of his character. There is no cure possible then."

"Have you had any conversation with Reckage?" he asked.

Sara coloured and put her fingers to her lips.

"Hush!" said she. "There's a deceptive quiet about him which puzzles me. But I don't think he is sorry to be rid of Agnes. A regiment of relatives drove him into the engagement. Now it has come to an end—let us thank God!"

"Your own conscience is easy, I take it?"

"You have no right to ask such a question—none at all."

"Some men, you know, can be laughed out of their loves," he continued.

"Timorous men—yes! Is Reckage timorous?"

"You turned that most adroitly."

"Thank you. Please sit between Lady Augusta and Aumerle at dinner."

The dinner passed most agreeably. As little as possible was said about the Meeting; each talked to his or her neighbour, and although the separate dialogues may have been profound, the general effect produced was one of restful flippancy. Pole-Knox remarked over his fish that England had little to fear—unless through the corruption of her religion, whereupon Penborough declared that religion in the country was a School, not a Church. To this Lady Augusta rejoined that Rome's strength depended merely on Canterbury's weakness.

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"Forcing a change is a very ticklish business," said Aumerle, studying the menu, and regretting that his digestion was not all it had been.

Lord Garrow deplored the fact that Mr. Gladstone had embarked on a very vulgar and very false policy.

"But its vulgarity," he sighed, "gives it a very easy reception."

"He expects everything except docility," said Penborough; "if the Opposition employ that means, they will embarrass all his calculations."

Reckage, meanwhile, was confiding to Sara—

"I turned the horse round, rammed my spurs in, and put him at the rails again!"

One statement, made by Penborough, caused a flutter.

"If Catherine of Arragon had been immoral and Mary Stuart virtuous, the whole course of European History would have been different. The Reformation, for instance, would have found no favour in England."

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"That's *very* advanced," murmured Lady Larch.

Sara, at dessert, tried to encourage a debate on the egoism of the Saints compared with the egoism of Montaigne.

"They were selfishly bent on pain and renunciation, he was selfishly bent on pleasure and indulgence. Isn't that the one difference between them, Mr. Orange?"

Orange refused to be drawn, but he promised to lend her the *Acta Sanctorum* of the Bollandists in sixty volumes in folio.

"After you have read them," said he, "I will tell you my ideas about Montaigne."

Many other remarks were probably more amusing; these, however, were the most characteristic.

When dinner was ended, Sara and the two ladies withdrew to the drawing-room, where they discussed with the utmost vehemence Orange's illegal marriage and Reckage's broken engagement.

The sum and substance of their investigations were as follows:—

Lady Larch wondered what the world was coming to.

Lady Augusta declared that no woman yet ever fathomed the heart of man.

Lady Sara maintained that it was a very good thing for both young men to have had such reverses before they finally settled down.

At this Lady Augusta forgot to sigh, and Lady Larch lost control of her smile.

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"How," exclaimed Augusta, "can they forget so soon? Can any settling down be in contemplation? Are no deep, sacred feelings left?"

Emmeline Larch, who was a widow, said she would never be hard on any one who tried to recover, for the sake of others, from a shattering bereavement.

"Dear Lady Larch!" exclaimed Sara.

The three women formed a picturesque group round the fireplace as the men entered. But the card-tables were already placed, and Sara lost no time in arranging a quartette for whist. Penborough had to leave for the *Times* office. Pole-Knox had to hurry back to Fulham. The young lady, who was known to detest all games, was thus able to choose Robert for her partner in a short conversation.

"Forgive me," said she, "but—have you anything to tell me about Mrs. Parflete?"

"Yes; she is now with Pensée."

"May I call upon her? May I know her? Would she see me?"

"With pleasure, I am sure."

"And you?" she asked.

"I don't see her," he said quietly; "I don't hear from her. I don't write to her. And—I don't talk about her. But I should like you to know her. She needs true friends—who understand."

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"Have you been to Prince d'Alchingen's, or has he approached you in any way?"

"I am to dine with him to-morrow."

"Has he said anything to you about the Marquis of Castrillon?"

"Not a word," replied Robert, in surprise: "why should he?"

"I believe there is mischief in the air. Be careful, won't you? Reckage is watching us. I think he would like some music. He is so *triste* this evening."

She moved away, and played delightfully on the guitar until the guests rose to leave. Then she found an opportunity to tell Lord Reckage not to come back again. She was tired, she said, and her papa would think it too odd.

"Then to-morrow morning," said he.

She named an hour.

CHAPTER XX

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Robert, on leaving the house, drove to Grosvenor Gate, where he had an appointment with Disraeli. The ex-Minister was sitting, in a flowered dressing-gown, by the library fire. The blinds were not drawn, for the night was bright and starry; the moonlight streamed into the room, mingling strangely with the soft glow of the green-shaded lamp. There was a large bundle of documents on the table by Disraeli's side, and a pile of Continental newspapers on the floor. One of the latter he was reading, and, by the slight curl of his mouth and the gleam in his fine eyes, Orange saw that he was working out, to his amusement, some train of thought which gave full jurisdiction to his knowledge of humanity.

"Bismarck," said he, "is the first German statesman who has not regarded newspapers as inconvenient lumber. He wishes the Press to advance his great ideas by assuming the place of the

Universities in training public opinion, and the place of the Church in controlling it. He might as well strive to make the horse into the lion, the mule into the unicorn, a parrot into the soaring eagle! Any man who is written up into a place can be written down out of it. Our friend will learn this too late—probably about the time that we, in England, are adopting, with enthusiasm, his present error. Ah, my dear Orange, watch the sky and you will learn the hearts of men. Observe the changing light, the clouds driven by the wind, the glimpses of pure blue, the sudden blackness, the startling brilliancy, and then—the monotonous grey. They seem too hard for me, at times. The clash between ideas and interests makes our inheritance a grim battlefield, and there are moments of mortification when one may feel tempted to sell it—not for a mess of pottage, but for the *promise* of a mess of pottage. Tempted, I said. There is always a course left, if you have the courage to face it. It may avail you; I cannot insure you even that. But if I were in your place, I would try.”

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“I could never do better, sir, than to follow your advice or your example.”

“Never betray, then, the least depression at disappointments or reverses, but seize the few joyful occasions of life for the indulgence of any accumulated melancholy and bitterness. By this simple rule you will escape the charge urged against all the ambitious, who are usually as intoxicated by success as they are cowardly in adversity. It delights me to see you in high spirits. Tell me the news, but first give me your opinion of this little paragraph which will appear in to-morrow's *Times*.”

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He took from his pocket-book a slip of paper on which was written the following in Mrs. Disraeli's hand:—

Mr. Orange, the new Member for Norbet Royal, is the son of a French nobleman of very ancient lineage. It was a condition of his adoption by the late Admiral Bertin that his own name should be dropped, and he has accordingly always borne that of the Orange family. The circumstances of his birth were communicated to the Queen before his naturalisation as a British subject, and his presentation, by Mr. Disraeli, at Court.

“Was that necessary?” asked Robert.

“A public man must speak out, and this expedient occurred to me as a slight pull in your favour. The two things in life which are really gratuitous are the grace of God and one's pedigree! The rest depends upon ourselves. Now you can't think how much I am interested in every little detail of your mental experiences. I believe you will be a Jesuit yet. I have never concealed my respect for the Jesuits. When Spain and France expelled the Society of Jesus, they persecuted their truest allies. A terrible price, too, they paid for that crime. You see, then, that I understand staunch Catholics. If I could rouse an Imperial feeling in England which would at all correspond with the feeling of Catholics for their Church! Sometimes I dream this may be possible. Pope, the satirist, remained, in spite of his wit, a loyal son of the Faith, while many dull worthies who shuddered at his epigrams were recanting daily either from fear or for some worldly advantage. In the same way, Robert, men who hate my novels because they contain a few truths, would sell England, if they could, to-morrow. I mentioned the fact about Pope to a gentleman who complains that you are by no means typical of your co-religionists in this country.”

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“The very expression ‘typical Catholic’ is a paradox,” replied Robert, who always accepted adverse criticism with good humour; “there is one Spirit, but it has many manifestations. From the apostles, saints and martyrs to the rank and file, we have to recognise the individuality of each soul. In fact, sir, is not that the very essence of the Church's teaching?”

“So I have always understood. And we have not heard the last of the ‘law of liberty’; although I observe to my chagrin that many modern Papists depart from those great principles which they should take every opportunity of claiming as their own. In the freezing snows of the world's solitude, a prudent man does not try to make himself happy, but he is less than a man if he allows others to make him wretched. The flesh has its discomfort: the spirit, however, has its illimitable conjectures. When all else fails me, I may still find solace in conjectures. Does it strike you that they may have, nevertheless, a danger also?”

“This is your own way of asking me whether I know my own mind! If you mean, Have I put all sentiment resolutely from my thoughts, Yes. If you mean, Have I determined to continue in my present line till I have a call to some other vocation, Yes.”

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His heart was troubled, full of vague combinations. The events of the day had seemed mechanical, foolish—a course of sorrowful attempting and self-reproach.

“Both of your affirmatives are satisfactory,” said Disraeli; “you are, I see, what the Americans call a ‘whole-hog man.’ Now let us consider ways and means. I saw Prince d'Alchingen this afternoon. He announces the increased distress and reformation of Parflete. We must therefore prepare for further villainy. Mrs. Parflete has confided to d'Alchingen her desire to go on the stage. He encourages this ambition, and she has accepted his invitation to Hadley Lodge, where she will recite in his private *salle de comédie*.”

Robert, though much taken by surprise, betrayed no sign of it.

“You cannot tell what she will do—until she does it,” he answered. “She may have great talents.”

“Well, one forgets that when Voltaire said, ‘*Il faut cultiver notre jardin*,’ he was quoting, with sardonic irony, Saint Teresa! You cannot be pleased at Mrs. Parflete's decision. The theatre in

England is a sport—not an art. In France it is an art, but,” he added drily, “it embraces more than one profession.”

“Whether a woman be a saint, a queen, or an actress—once before the public—she is exposed to severe discipline. And I don't fear for this one. She will take her revenge on life by laughing at it.” [288]

“I daresay. D'Alchingen calls her *un peu étourdi*. She has the audacity—she may have the fortune of despair. Confess—you have run a little wild about her.”

“I ran off the track, if you like,” said Orange, smiling.

“Women fascinate the hearts, but they do not affect the destinies of determined men,” returned Disraeli. “If you have not won anything by this affair, it would be hard to say what winning is. There is but one feeling and one opinion about the really courageous stand you have made.”

“I must gain confidence all the same in my own ability to keep my resolves when they are clear to me. I once prided myself in that ability as the one gem in my character.”

“You may laugh at yourself as much as you please. Beauty is as well worth admiring as anything on earth, and the world is better lost for love, than love for the world. At least, let us say so. I met Reckage at the Travellers' yesterday, and had some talk with him about his Association. I think it far better that Aumerle should not resign, as he could, and probably would, be very mischievous as a freelance. Reckage is all for shaking him off, but these things, in any circumstances, should never be forced.”

“I advised Reckage myself to sound each member of the Committee privately. Then, at the general meeting, he could form some just estimate of the difficulties in his way, and in their way.” [289]

“Reckage, though a mean fellow, might give you an opportunity to work a strong Sub-Committee,” suggested Disraeli. “One cannot calculate on the course of a man so variable and impulsive. He proposes to get rid of Aumerle, and make concessions to his set. It is an unhappy policy, and always unhappily applied, to imagine that men can be reconciled by partial concessions. I attribute much of Reckage's behaviour to his fear of society. Society itself, however, does not practise any of the virtues which it demands from the individual. It ridicules the highest motives, and degrades the most heroic achievements. It is fed with emotions and spectacles: it cries, laughs, and condemns without knowledge and without enthusiasm. Pitiably indeed is the politician who makes society his moral barometer.”

“I have urged him to be firm. Christianity was never yet at peace with its age. There is no other Faith whose first teacher was persecuted and crucified. Viewed solely as a point of administration, it is disastrous to cut religious thought according to the fashionable pattern of the hour. This has been the constant weakness of English Churchmen. They try to match eternity with the times.”

“My opinion is that Reckage must act with considerable caution, or he will find himself repudiated by every party. The English like a fellow to stand by his guns. I come now to your own business. Will you do me a favour? Before you reply let me define it. I have been asked to send some good speaker to Hanborough. The occasion is the opening of a Free Library. Remarks—of a laudatory nature—on the princely munificence of Hanborough's mayor, Hanborough's corporation, Hanborough's leading citizens, a eulogy of their public glories and private virtues—with a little thrown in about Shakespeare, Scott, and the Lord-Lieutenant of the county—would be adequately appreciated. The attendance will be large: the nobility, gentry, and clergy of the neighbourhood will flower about you on the platform; a banquet will follow in the evening, and in the morning blushing girls will hand you bouquets at the railway station. Can you refuse?” [290]

“Not easily, I admit,” said Robert, laughing; “but Reckage is rather low and unhappy just now about his broken engagement. Wouldn't such an adventure as this take him out of himself?”

“This is not an adventure—this is an opportunity,” said Disraeli; “it would be nursed into a stepping-stone. I know fifty men who are worrying themselves to death to get it.”

“You need not tell me that,” replied Robert, with gratitude. “It would be a great thing for me. But Reckage is always at his best in functions of the kind. Hanborough might make much of him, and then his Association would feel flattered by reflected honours.” [291]

“You invariably set your face against your own advantages, and I am afraid I shall not live to see you where you ought to be. However, Reckage shall have the invitation. Now, good-night. By the by, have you heard that Castrillon is now in the marriage-market? His mistress has given her consent, and the Prince has promised his blessing. Could things look more auspicious? Good-night.”

For the second time that evening Castrillon's name fell with a warning note on Robert's ear. Disraeli, he knew, would not have mentioned him out of sheer idleness. There was some danger threatening in that quarter, and it was impossible to dissociate this from Brigit. The Marquis of Castrillon had been with her in Madrid, and also at Baron Zeuill's palace after the escape from Loadilla.

“Where is Castrillon now?” asked Robert.

“I understand he is in London,” answered Disraeli; “at Claridge's Hotel. D'Alchingen and he are

on excellent terms."

"Good!" said Robert, tightening his lips. "You will find he has been invited to Hadley."

"I haven't a doubt of it."

"Then I must contrive to see him first."

Early the following morning Orange presented himself at the house of an old, very devout priest of his acquaintance.

"Father," said he, "this afternoon or to-morrow I may be in circumstances of danger."

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"What danger is this?" asked the priest.

"There is a man whom I may be compelled, in defence of my honour, to challenge to a duel."

"To approach the Sacrament in such a frame of mind," said the old man, "is not to prepare yourself for danger. For to come to confession with a determination of taking vengeance is to put an obstacle to the grace of the Sacrament. You must preserve your honour by some other way. Indeed, the honour you think to preserve by this is not real honour, but merely the estimation of bad men founded on bad principles."

"I know," said Orange, hotly; "it is impossible, however, to withdraw now."

"If you should be beaten," returned the other, who had been in the army himself as a youth, and could comprehend the worldly view of the situation, "if you should be beaten, what becomes of the honour you wish to defend? And if you should be killed in that state of soul in which you go to the duel, you will go straight to hell and everlasting shame."

"I implore you, Father, to pray for me, and to hear my confession, if you possibly can."

"Certainly, I cannot hear you," said the priest. "But this is what I will do. Wear this *Agnus Dei*, and perhaps God will have mercy on you for the sake of this, and afford you time for penance. Understand, however, I do not give it to you in order to encourage you in your bad purpose, but that you may wear it with all reverence and respect, and perhaps be moved to obedience."

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Robert thanked him, accepting the gift in a right spirit. His self-will, however, was aroused. He had determined to fight Castrillon, and fight he would.

CHAPTER XXI

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Sara awoke that same morning with a foreboding heart. She wrote a letter to Reckage postponing his call, and another to Pensée Fitz Rewes, asking her to be at home that afternoon. At half-past two the young lady drove up, in her brougham, to the widow's door in Curzon Street. The blinds were down, and the house gave every indication that its owner was not in London. Sara, however, was admitted, and Pensée received her in a little room, hung with lilac chintz and full of porcelain, at the back of the house. Pensée, wearing a loose blue robe, seemed over-excited and sad—with that sadness which seems to fall upon the soul as snow upon water. She was reclining on the sofa, reading a worn copy of Law's *Serious Call* which had belonged to the late Viscount, and bore many of his pencil-marks. This in itself was to Sara a sign of some unusual melancholy in her friend.

"Why," she said, kissing her soft, pale cheek, "why didn't you let me know that you had returned? I thought you were still in Paris."

"My dear," said Pensée, sitting up with a sudden movement and supporting herself on her two hands. "I am no longer my own mistress. I have become a puppet—a marionette: a kind of lady-in-waiting—a person to whom women talk when they have nothing to say, and to whom men talk when they have nothing to do."

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Sara chose a seat and studied the speaker with a new curiosity. She was charming; vexation gave humanity to her waxen features, and the flash in her eyes suggested hitherto unsuspected fires in her temperament, "She has more spirit than I gave her credit for," thought Sara, and she added, "Darling!" aloud.

"Darling, indeed!" said Pensée. "I can tell you I am tired of being a darling. There are limits.... I have no patience with Brigit, and Robert drives me to the conclusion that good men are fools—fools! I suppose he told you that I was in town again?"

"Yes."

"Well, he won't come and see me himself because *she* is here."

"That is merely a decision on principle. He longs to come."

"Quite so. But the girl does not deserve him."

Sara showed no astonishment; she maintained her thoughtful air, and replied with tranquillity—

"He thinks she is perfect."

"I find no vulgar faults in her, myself, although there seems no foolish thing left that she hasn't done. I am sure that every one will think her light, worldly, and frivolous. Let me say what I have been through. After the first terrible day and night at St. Malo, there was no more crying. There was not another tear. We went to Paris. She spent all her mornings at Notre Dame, all her afternoons with old Monsieur Lanitau of the Conservatoire, all her evenings at the theatre. She found many of her mother's old friends. In the theatrical world I find much loyalty toward those actually born in the profession. They treated her as though she were a young queen. Lanitau managed to get her privately before the Empress Eugénie. She sang for the Empress: the Empress cried and gave her an emerald ring."

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"Then she has talent."

"Genius, I believe," said Pensée, solemnly. "This makes her hateful and lovable at the same moment. She is determined to be an actress. She never speaks of Robert, and she shuts herself up in her room reciting Marivaux and Molière. The d'Alchingsens have invited her to Hadley next Saturday. They encourage her theatrical ideas. And why? They wish her to lose caste. She is an Archduchess, Sara, an Alberian Archduchess. What a living argument against unequal marriages!"

"Will she go to Hadley?"

"Yes—wholly against my advice. I don't trust Prince d'Alchingen."

"How I wish I could see her!"

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"She is in the library now. I will ask her to come down."

Pensée left the room, and Sara paced the floor till she returned.

"She is coming," said Pensée, "be nice to her—for Robert's sake!"

Sara nodded, and both women watched the door till the handle moved, and Mrs. Parflete entered.

She was dressed in violet silk without ornaments or jewels of any description. Her face was slightly flushed, and the colour intensified the pale gold diadem of her blonde hair. The expression—sweet-tempered, yet a little arrogant—of her countenance and its long oval form bore a striking resemblance to the early portraits of Marie Antoinette. Her under-lip had also a slight outward bend, which seemed an encouragement when she smiled, and contemptuous when she frowned. Her figure—though too slight even for a girl of seventeen—was extraordinarily graceful, and, in spite of her height, she was so well proportioned that she did not appear too tall. Youth showed itself, however, in a certain childlikeness of demeanour—a mixture of timidity, confidence, embarrassment, and, if one looked in her face for any sign of the emotions she had experienced, or the scenes in which she had played no feeble part, one sought in vain. Gaiety covered the melancholy, almost sombre depths in her character. And it was the gaiety of her French mother—petulant, reckless, irresistible, giddy, uncertain. As a child, dressed up in ribbons and lace, with flowers in her hair, she had been the chief amusement and plaything of Madame Duboc—to be held on her lap, perched upon the piano, placed on high cushions in the carriage, and lifted on the table of the drawing-room, where she entertained a brilliant, if dissipated company, by her talk, her little songs, her laughter, her mimicry, and her dancing. She rarely danced now, yet all the seductive arts of perfect dancing seemed hers by right of birth. Each movement, each gesture had a peculiar charm, and her dark blue eyes, the more provocative for their lack of passion, were full of a half-mocking, half-tender vivacity. Sara, a beautiful young woman herself, surveyed this unconscious rival and recognised, with good sense, a fatal attractiveness which was stronger than time and far above beauty. It was the spell of a spirit and body planned for fascination and excelling in this indefinable power. Had she been born to ruin men? thought Sara. Had she been given a glamour and certain gifts merely to perplex, deceive, and destroy all those who came within the magic of her glance? History had its long, terrible catalogue of such women whose words are now forgotten, whose portraits leave us cold, yet whose very names still agitate the heart and fire the imagination. Was Brigit one of these?

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She had nothing of the deliberate coquette who, eager to please, keeps up an incessant battery of airs and graces. Her enchantments depended rather on the fact that she neither asked for admiration nor valued it. Free from vanity, and therefore indifferent to criticism, the bitternesses which destroy the peace of most women never entered her mind. The man she had chosen gave her no cause for jealousy, and, while she enjoyed men's society, she had been so accustomed to it from her earliest days that she had nothing to fear from the novelty of their friendship, or the danger of their compliments. Not prudish, not morbid, not envious, not sentimental, and not indolent, she was perhaps especially endowed for the tantalising career which the stage offers to the ambitious of both sexes. Acting came to her as music comes to the true musician. She never considered whether she would become a great actress or a rejected one: the art in itself was her delight, and she found more happiness in reciting Molière and Shakespeare alone in her own room than she ever received, even at the height of her fame, from her triumphs before the world. There was, no doubt, a great craving in her nature for innocent pleasures and excitement. She loved gay scenes, bright lights, beautiful clothes, lively music, witty conversation. She had been born for the brilliant Courts of the eighteenth century when life in each class was more highly concentrated than is possible now—when love was put to severer tests, hatred permitted a

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crueller play, politics asked a more intricate genius, and art controlled the kingdom of the Graces.

The three women as they faced each other presented a remarkable picture. Pensée, the eldest, who alone knew the lessons of physical pain, had a pathetic grace which made her seem, in comparison with the others—radiant with untried health,—some gentle, plaintive spirit from a sadder sphere. Her clinging blue robe appeared too heavy for the frail body; her fair curls and carefully arranged *chignon* were too modish for the ethereal yet anxious countenance; the massive wedding-ring seemed too coarse a bond for the almost transparent hand which trembled nervously on the cover of the *Serious Call*. Sara, in black velvet and sable, with ostrich plumes and golden beads, with flashing eyes and a gipsy's flush, with all the self-command of a woman trained for society, living for it and in it, with all the self-assurance of a woman in an unassailable position, handsome, rich, flattered, spoiled, domineering, and unscrupulous, with all the insolence of an egoism which no human force could humiliate and no human antagonist terrify, Sara seemed the one who was destined to succeed superbly in the war of life. Mrs. Parflete—whose courage, determination, and powers of endurance were concealed by a face which might have been made of lovely gauze—seemed less a being than a poetical creation: a portrait by Watteau or Fragonard stepped from its frame, animated by pure fancy, and moving, without sorrow and without labour, through a charmed existence.

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She made two steps forward when Sara advanced to meet her, holding out both hands and smiling with real kindness at the sight of a delightful apparition which looked too fragile to excite such a fierce emotion as jealousy.

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"I believe we are to meet at Hadley," said Sara. "I hear you are going to act."

"Yes," replied Brigit, with a slight note of irony in her musical voice. "I am going to act."

"How charming! And what will you play?"

"I play the Marquise in one of Marivaux's comedies."

"And who will play the Marquis?" asked Sara.

"There is no Marquis," answered Brigit, laughing a little. "But," she added, "there is a Chevalier and a Comte. One of Prince d'Alchingen's attachés will play the Comte. M. de Castrillon will play the part of the Chevalier."

"Castrillon!" exclaimed Sara, in amazement.

"The Marquis of Castrillon!" cried Pensée, turning livid; "pray, pray put it off till you have heard from Baron Zeuill. Dear Brigit! for my sake, for Robert's—"

"It is for your sake and Robert's that I have accepted the invitation to Hadley. I wish you would understand. I must show them all that I mean what I say."

"But Castrillon is a wicked wretch—a libertine."

"We have already acted together in this very piece at Madrid. Much depends on my playing well next Saturday. I am quite sure of his talent, and, in such a case, his private morals are not my affair. He is no worse than Prince d'Alchingen was, and most of his associates are."

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"You can't know what you are saying," answered Pensée. "You will be so miserable when you find you have been madly obstinate. It is very hard, in a country like England, for a young woman to set herself in opposition to certain prejudices."

"Are the Duke and Duchess of Fortinbras respectable?" asked Brigit.

"What a question!" said Pensée; "of course they are most exclusive."

"Then if they are quite willing that their daughter Clementine should marry Castrillon, surely he may play the Chevalier to my Marquise."

"I don't think, Pensée," put in Sara, "that Castrillon is exactly tabooed. In fact, one meets him everywhere in Paris, and, beyond a doubt, the Fortinbrases and the Huxaters and the Kentons made a great fuss over him last season. But do you *like* him?" she said, suddenly turning to Brigit.

The question was skilful.

"I don't take him seriously," answered Brigit; "he has the great science of *l'excellent ton dans le mauvais ton*. You would say—'he is vulgar in the right way.' I feel sure he never deceived women. They may have been foolish but they must have been frail before they met him! He can be ridiculous in five languages, but he cannot be sincere in one of them. As for his wickedness, one must have more than bad intentions; one must have the circumstances. I have nothing to fear from M. de Castrillon. He knows me perfectly well."

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"I am simply wretched about you," said Pensée; "of your future I dare not think. I try to be *sympathique*, and your difficulties come very home to me because I have had such great sorrows myself. But I have little hopes of doing any good while you are so self-willed."

"Dearest," exclaimed Brigit: "trust me!"

"My child, you are 'wiser in your own eyes than seven men that can render a reason.' I implore you to abandon this mad scheme; I implore you to abandon these wrong—these dangerous ideas of the stage. I know how much I am asking, and how little right I have to ask anything, but I think you ought to listen to me."

Brigit, with a sparkling glance at Sara, stroked Pensée's cheek, and pinched her small ear.

"*Mon cher coeur,*" said she, "I do not forget your goodness. And I needed it, for I have been so wretched and forsaken. My soul is weighed down with troubles, and grief, and anxiety: each day I expect some new misfortune: you are the one friend I may keep. But you would not know how to imagine the intrigues and falsehoods which surround me on every side. *O mon amie,* I must prove to them that I want nothing they can give me—that I possess nothing which they can take away." [304]

"I know what she means, Pensée," said Sara; "she has to show d'Alchingen that her interests are fixed on art—not politics. And, from her point of view, she is right. I must say so, although I don't wish to interfere. And so long as she knows M. de Castrillon, it is better taste to make her first appearance with him than with some strange actor engaged for the occasion. After all, Mario was well known as the Marchese di Candia before he adopted the operatic stage as a profession. As for gossip, how is anybody's tongue to be stopped?"

"I do not expect that people's tongues should be stopped," rejoined Pensée.

"What the world says of me I have learned to disregard very much," said Brigit: "if I vex my friends, I must nevertheless follow my vocation. It was good enough for my mother. I do not apologise for her existence, nor do I offer excuses for my own. She was an actress: I am an actress. She succeeded: I may not succeed. But if you fear for my faith and my character, it would be quite as easy to lose both in the highest society as in the vilest theatres! I foresee mistakes and difficulties. They must come. I shan't have a happy life, dearest Pensée: I don't look for happiness. Why then do you scold me?" [305]

"I am not scolding," said Lady Fitz Rewes: "I have never blamed you, never—in my heart. We shall get on better now that we have brought ourselves to speak out. How different it is when one judges for oneself or for another! I do believe in having the courage of one's convictions. But it was my duty to warn you—"

"This is all I wanted," exclaimed Brigit; "that we should understand each other and stand close by each other. I am not on the edge of a precipice—I am at the bottom of it already!" Her eyes had grown calm from the mere force of sadness. "You mustn't ask me to look back," she added: "you mustn't ask me to choose again. A simple, quiet life is out of the question now. I have to learn how to forget."

She moved to the door, kissed her hand to Pensée, and bowed prettily to Sara.

"I must get back to my work," she said, and so left them. The two women turned toward each other.

"There is no hope for Orange," observed Sara drily: "no man would ever forget her."

"He needn't forget her, but—"

"Yes, it would have to be sheer, absolute forgetfulness. I like her. I like all beautiful things—pictures, statues, bronzes, porcelains, and white marble visions! She is a white marble vision. And Orange will love her forever and ever and ever. And when she is dead, he will love her still more!" [306]

She threw back her head and laughed—till Pensée laughed also. Then they wished each other goodbye, and parted.

CHAPTER XXII

When Sara reached home, she was dismayed to hear that Lord Reckage had called during her absence and was waiting for her return. The prospect of an interview with him seemed so disagreeable that she walked first to the library, and sat there alone, for some moments, before she could summon the presence of mind which every sense warned her would be required for the ordeal. At last, with a pinched heart, she went up the great staircase, and found Reckage writing at her own table in the drawing-room. He turned quickly, and jumped to his feet at the rustle of her dress. He was looking unusually handsome, she thought, very animated, very dashing.

"You will forgive these clothes," said he, "but I have ordered Pluto round at four o'clock, and I am going for a long ride."

"What a strange idea!" she answered, taking off her gloves. "Where are you going?"

"To Hampstead Heath. I need the air and the exercise. I have to compose a speech."

"The speech for the Meeting?" [308]

His brow darkened, and he pushed back with his foot a log which was falling from the open grate.

"No, not that speech. Another. Disraeli has asked me to go in his stead to Hanborough. I don't like to attach over-importance to the invitation, but he must mean it as an encouragement. Evidently, he wishes to show that Aumerle and the rest are without any shadow of right in their attacks. I have been above five years working up this society, and if, at the end of that time, I am president only by dint of *family interest*, be assured the situation cannot be worth having. When I leave, it will go all to pieces."

"But you don't intend to leave, surely?"

"Indeed, I do."

"Have you hinted at resignation?"

"No, I sha'n't hint. Hints belong to the unconsidered patience of fools. I won't give them an inkling of my real tactics. Let them lollop along in their own wretched fashion to some final imbecility! I have other matters to think of, Sara. Doesn't Disraeli's action say, as delicately as possible, that I am wasting my time over small men? I have been altogether too easy of access. Simplicity and consideration are thrown away on the Snookses and the Pawkinses! With these gentry, one must be a vulgar, bragging snob, or they think one is not worth knowing."

"But you owe it to yourself and to Orange to hold the Meeting to-morrow?" she said, anxiously.

"There is a way out of it," he answered, avoiding her eyes. "We can talk of that presently." [309]

"Nothing interests me more."

"That is not true," he said, taking a chair near her; "there are many things which must interest both of us much, much more than that stupid Meeting."

"I prefer not to speak of them now, Beauclerk."

"I can't go on in this uncertainty. I am beginning to think I am a blundering fellow—where women are concerned. When we were together as children, I seem to remember, looking back, that I always did the wrong thing. And later—when you came out and I fancied myself a man of the world, it was the same. I don't know exactly what a girl is at eighteen, but I know that a fellow of twenty-five is an ass. He is probably well-meaning: he isn't hardened by ambition and he is pretty sentimental, as a rule. Yet he doesn't have fixed ideas. One day it dawned upon me that I was in love."

"Now don't say that."

"I repeat it. I am far from wishing to pose as a martyr, but whenever one is happy, all one's friends think that one is going to make some fatal mistake. I suppose no battle can be won without a battle. But life has always had a good deal of painfulness to me, and I hate opposition. It isn't lack of courage on my part—I can fight an enemy to the death. When it comes to quarrelling with relatives or those I care about—well, I own I can seldom see good reasons for keeping a stiff neck." [310]

"I am perfectly convinced of your spirit, Beauclerk; every circumstance serves to show it. There was never a time when you did the wrong thing—in my judgment."

"You are generous, but I dare not believe you there. Much that I did and all that I left unsaid must have puzzled you. I wouldn't speak now, Sara, if I didn't feel sure that in spite of my faults, my stupidity, my want of self-knowledge, you saw that I was destined to love you."

It was impossible to deny this fact. She had been well aware always of his affection, and the certainty had given a peculiar emotional value to every scene—no matter how commonplace—to every occasion, no matter how crowded, to every conversation, no matter how trivial—in which he figured or his name transpired. He and poor Marshire were the two men in the world who really loved her. Marshire was the more desperate because he was less intelligent and had fewer interests; Reckage loved her with all the force of a selfish, vain, and spoilt nature. Such a passion she knew was not especially noble and certainly not ideal. But it was strong, and it made him submissive.

"Sara," he said, "you have got to help me." He put his arm round her waist, and as she inclined her face ever so slightly toward his, he kissed her cheek.

"How can I help you?" she asked.

"Let us marry."

"I don't wish to marry any one just yet, Beauclerk," she said; "I like my liberty. I don't feel that I should make either a good wife, or a contented one, as I am now. I want to see more and think more before I give up my will to another." [311]

"I would not ask you to give up your will."

"We should be utterly miserable if I didn't."

"Believe me, it is the weak, effeminate creature who wishes to control women. Men of character respect women of character. These fellows who declare that they will be masters in their own house are masters nowhere else. I delight in your spirit. Orange and I have often agreed," he added, with a searching look, "that you are the most brilliant girl in England."

"Why do you quote Robert?" she said carelessly; "isn't your opinion enough for me?"

"Can you pretend that his opinion has no weight with you?"

She laughed, and stroked his arm.

"My dear, why should I pretend anything? To tell the truth, I am surprised that Orange has noticed me. I saw Mrs. Parflete to-day. I understand his infatuation."

"I have always told you that she was a very pretty woman. But why is it that, no matter where we start, we always come back to Orange? I am getting sick of him. I dislike being *affiché*, as it were, to some one else. This marriage of his pursues me. If I go into a club, if I dine, if I ride, if I walk—ten to one if I am not pelted with questions about Mrs. Parflete, or Robert's history, or his genius, or his future plans. I must drop him."

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"Drop him?" she exclaimed.

"Yes. It doesn't help me to appear so friendly with a Roman. I know he is very fine, but I have to consider my own position. They all say that it would be madness to take the chair now at his meeting."

"But it was *your* meeting, Beauclerk."

"In the first place, perhaps. I thought, too, it might be a good, independent move. Disraeli's invitation to Hanborough puts another complexion on affairs. It is the first formal recognition that he, as Leader, has ever given me. It is a reminder of my responsibilities. He is fond of Orange, I know, and he wouldn't hurt his feelings, or seem to put a spoke in his wheel, for all the world. But Dizzy is subtle. He likes to test one's *savoir vivre*."

"Shall you tell Orange that you intend to throw him over?"

"Not yet."

"Oh, you ought!"

"Why? I want the meeting to take place. It will be useful in its way—it may show us how public opinion is going."

Sara hid her contempt by rising from her chair and removing her hat. Reckage watched the play of her arms as she stood before the mirror, and he did not see, as she could, the reflection of his face—sensual, calculating, and, stormed as it was for the moment by the meanest feelings of self-interest, repellent.

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"How I hate him!" she thought; "how I despise him!"

Then she turned round, smiling—

"Hats make my head ache! So you think the meeting will be useful?"

"Emphatically. It did occur to me that I might drop a line to Robert—in fact, I was writing to him when you came in. Here's the letter, as you see, signed and sealed."

"Do send it."

"No," he answered, putting it back into his pocket; "one could only get him on the platform just now by making him believe that such an action would, in some way, help me. You don't know Robert."

"I daresay not, but I know that much."

"This being the case, why upset him at the eleventh hour?"

She made no reply, and before Reckage could speak again, the servant announced the arrival of his horse.

"I intend to ride like the devil, Sara," he said; "and I wish you could come with me. What rides we used to have—long ago! You were a lark little thing in those days, darling!"

He bent down and kissed her lips.

"You shall marry me—or no one," said he; "but you are cold: you are not very nice to me. I suppose it's your way. You wouldn't be yourself if you were like other women. You are not a woman, you're a witch. Must I go now?"

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Sara had opened the door.

"Yes, you know how Pluto hates to wait."

"That animal will be the death of me yet. Will you stand on the balcony and watch me till I am out of sight? Have pretty manners—for once."

"Very well."

She went on to the balcony, watched him mount, and ride away. He turned several times to gaze back at her picturesque figure, dim, but to him lovely in the gathering dusk.

Robert, after his interview with the priest, returned to his old lodgings in a top floor of Vigo Street—for he had left Almouth House, where Reckage's hospitality, kind as it was, suited neither his pride nor his mood. He was greatly in debt, and although his salary from Lord Wight and his literary earnings represented a sure income, it stood at what he called the "early hundreds." The tastes, habits, and pursuits of those with whom he spent his time were delightful, no doubt, but they were costly. A box at the play; the cricket-match party, little dinners, and a rubber of whist, or a quiet game of vingt-et-un; the lunches here, the suppers there; the country houses where, in the winter, one could dine and sleep and hunt the next day, and, in the autumn, shoot, and, in the summer, flirt; the attendance at race-meetings, balls, and weddings; journeys to the Continent, civilities everywhere,—in fact, the whole business of society—no matter how modestly done—demands money. Most young men are naturally fond of brilliant, light-hearted companions, plenty of amusement, and that indescribable treasure known as the *joie de vivre*. Orange was no exception to this rule, and there were many hours when he tasted the bitterness of poverty, and felt the harsh differences between the outward gifts bestowed by Fate. It was not that he cared for luxuries, but it seemed hard that a horse should have to be counted among them, and that it was necessary to work for twelve hours a day in order to live at all, even as a dependent, among those with whom he was, by right of birth and ability, the equal, and to whom he was, in many cases, the superior. How many promising careers and brave hearts have fallen short under the strain of a position so mortifying and apparently so unjust! In public life, whether one joins the Church, the Camp, the Senate, or the Arts, the trials of strength and courage are most severe even to those who, in material circumstances at any rate, are favourites of fortune. Neither influence nor riches avail much in the terrific struggles for supremacy, for recognition, for mere fair play itself. What must the conflict be then for those who, with slight purses and few allies, find themselves pitted against the powerful of the earth? Discouragement, in weak natures, soon turns to envy, and the spectacle of human unkindness has driven many a reflective, delicate soul to say that the companionship of his fellow-men is unlovely, not to be admired, and difficult, at times, not to hate. In disgust of the world—where one has been wounded, or where one has wounded others—(wounded vanity and remorse are alike bitter in their fruits), numbers, with a sort of despairing fatalism, retire from the campaign, cut themselves adrift from their people and their country, and, having failed in life, court death under strange skies in far-off lands. Robert, who looked rather for the triumph of ideas than the glory of individuals, was not easily dismayed. So long as the right was by some means accomplished, and good seeds brought forth a good harvest,—the burden and heat of the day, the changes of weather, the scantiness of the wage, the ingratitude and treachery of agents, the hardships, the toil—mattered little enough. Devoured by ambition in his early youth, he had never permitted himself the least doubtful means of attaining any object. He was not obliged, therefore, to affect an indifference to success in order to divert attention from his methods of arriving at it. No man, once bent upon a project, could be more resolute than Orange. None were more stern in self-repression and self-discipline. But in controlling, or subduing altogether, the softer possibilities in a character, there is always the danger lest uncharitableness, hardness of heart, or blind severity of judgment should take their place. Young people with strong natures can seldom find the middle course between extremes, and this one, in curbing a desire for power, will fairly crush his whole vigour, while that one, in revolt against the tyranny of love, will become the slave of pessimism. There were days, no doubt, and weeks when Orange found every counsel, a mockery, and every law, a paradox. The strife between the flesh and the spirit went on in his life as it does in all lives, but he was one who held, that, whatever the issue of it all might be, a man must be a man while he may—losing himself neither in the whirl of passion nor in the enervating worlds of reverie, but accepting the fulness of existence—its pains, vanities, pleasures, cares, sorrows,—with a fighter's courage and the fortitude of an immortal soul.

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As he walked along toward Vigo Street in the cold, dark autumn morning, he felt more than able to hold his own against all adversaries. And this was not the insolence of conceit, but the just strength which comes from a vigorous conscience and perfect health. A soldier counts it no shame, but rather an honour, to die in battle, so Robert, surveying the chances before him, stood determined, in every event, to endure until the end, to fight until the end, to maintain his ground until the end. But if he had put sentiment from his path, it was not so easily weeded from his constitution, and while he was able to persuade himself that his renunciation of all passionate love—except as a bitter-sweet memory—was complete, he had to realise that the old grudge against Castrillon had grown into a formidable, unquenchable, over-mastering hatred. Where this strange obsession was concerned, no religious or other consideration availed in the least. Bit by bit, hour by hour, the feeling had grown, deriving vigour from every source, every allusion, and every experience. The books he read, the conversations he heard, the people he met—all seemed to illuminate and justify, in some mysterious way, his enmity against Castrillon. He may have believed that he was resigned to his ill-luck in love, but a sense that he had been defrauded haunted his thoughts always, and the longing to square his account with destiny was less a wish than a mute instinct. How great had been the temptation to defy all laws—human and Divine—where Brigit Parflete was in question, no one can know. In getting the better of it, the motive had not been, it must be confessed, the fear of punishment here or hereafter. This would not be a true history, nor a reasonable one, if it were not acknowledged that much of the victory in that situation had been due to the woman's youth and candid, sunny nature. No passion—far less a guilty one—he thought, could have had a place in that childlike heart. She was Pompilia—not

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Juliet, because, like the more ill-starred heroine, she had met sorrow before she met love, and the strong emotion which comes first in a young life makes the deep, the ineffaceable impression on its character. She had the strength to suffer undeserved woe, but the penalties of defiance and disobedience would surely kill her. The thought of any desperate step seemed impossible.

The question of love at that point in Orange's life had therefore been decided as much by conditions as it had by principles and conscience. But with the Castrillon difficulty, it was a question of hatred—not love. In hate, Orange was as little given to brooding as he was in other matters. He had never been able to forgive the duel at Loadilla which had occasioned so much scandal in Madrid, and brought Brigit's name into bad company. Robert, before his meeting with Mrs. Parflete, had fought several duels, and each of them about a different pretty face. Encounters of the kind form part of a youth's education on the Continent: such experiences are considered not romantic, not heroic, not striking, but merely usual and manly. It was impossible for one brought up in this view to feel that duelling—under certain provocation and fair conditions—was wrong. The custom was frequently abused, no doubt, yet the same could be said of all customs, and Orange, rightly or wrongly, held a conviction on the subject which no argument could affect. But, with a lover's unreasonableness, he had found the fight between Bodava and Castrillon an insult to the lady at stake. He suspected, too, that Castrillon had spoken lightly of her to General Prim, to Zeuill, perhaps to d'Alchingen. This was insufferable, and so, inasmuch as the mischief had been done, he would not and could not remain outside the combat. There seemed, also, a certain feeling at the Clubs where the Madrid scandal had become known, that Castrillon, on the whole, had proved a more dashing, and was probably the favoured, suitor. Orange, whose personal courage had been demonstrated too often to be called into doubt, had been criticised for an absence of moral, or rather immoral, courage with regard to Mrs. Parflete. Reckage's sly phrases about the ecclesiastical temperament; the sneers of some adventurous women on the subject of platonic affection; the good-natured brow-lifting of the wits and the worldly were not easy to bear for a man who was, by nature, impulsive, by nature, regardless of every sacrifice and all opinions while a strong purpose remained unfulfilled. Robert made up his mind that, come what might, whether his action was approved or blamed, or whether he won or lost, pick some quarrel he would, and see how Castrillon liked it, and thus settle the matter then and for always. Castrillon had received a military training; he was a most adroit swordsman and a notorious shot; he would not be one to make a quarrel difficult.

When Orange reached the house in Vigo Street, it was still early in the day. As he mounted the stairs, he noticed a fellow-lodger, still in his evening clothes, entering a room on the second floor. He did not see the man's face, but he was struck by something familiar in his build. This impression was not haunting, it passed almost immediately, and the young man settled down with resolution to his work. At one o'clock he went to Brookes's, had his lunch, met a few acquaintances who studied his face with curiosity, and a few colleagues who tried to persuade each other that he was a man who could play a deep game. He returned to his rooms and resumed work till about six o'clock, when his landlord informed him that a lady, who would not give her name, wished to see him. The lady was tall, handsomely dressed, darkly veiled. What, he thought, if it should be Brigit? What joy! What rashness! Robert went out into the hall to meet the strange visitor. She made a gesture signifying silence, and, on greeting her, he did not utter her name. It was Lady Sara.

She did not speak until she had entered the shabbily furnished sitting-room and closed the door.

"This is a mad thing on my part," she said; "a mad thing. I know it. Of course, I might have asked you to come to me, but I couldn't wait so long. And I don't trust letters. Some news can't be written. It is not about Mrs. Parflete," she added, hastily, "you need not fear that. It is about Beauclerk. He came to see me this afternoon. He is going to throw you over. He is going to fail you at the Meeting. You are to test public opinion while he sits under shelter—to profit by your experience. What do you think of that?"

"You are very good to come. But I hope you are mistaken all the same. He may throw me over. I am sure he will send me a word of warning."

"That was his first intention. He gave it up, because he knew you wouldn't act without him. And he wants you to act—for the reason I have given. Oh, I'm so ashamed, so humiliated to think that any friend of mine could be such a traitor."

She unpinned her veil, and seemed all the handsomer for her scornful expression and flashing eyes.

"You must be the first to retire," she continued. "I won't have you treated in this contemptuous way: I won't endure it. I want you to write to the Committee at once—at once—without a moment's loss of time. This is why I have come here myself. You seem to have something in you which they take for weakness. You will stand anything. Oh, I know why well enough. You like to be a martyr—which means saying nothing and suffering a good deal. But I call it a mistake. I call it irritating, misleading, actually wrong. If I were a man I would kill people."

"It is easy enough to kill."

"So they say. Be more unscrupulous, dear friend. Give your nature full play now and again. You can't make me believe that you are ever natural."

"Some can trust their natures. I don't trust mine."

"Don't you see how much more power you would have over men if you were more emotional, more spontaneous, more human? Who gives you credit for self-control? No one. They say you are self-contained—a very different idea. They say you are cold. Now, I don't care what I do. I follow every impulse. I must follow them. I had to come here this evening. I had to tell you about Reckage. The landlord was odious. I met two men on the staircase. One actually tried to peer into my face. I have never submitted to such indignities. Heaven knows what they are thinking now. I shall remember their vile laugh as long as I live. But I was determined to see you. And here I am. Apparently I have not done much good by coming. You hardly believe me. You think me an indiscreet woman."

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"I think you are splendid."

"I saw Mrs. Parflete to-day. She is beautiful. But she is indiscreet, too. All women worth considering are miracles of imprudence."

"Haven't I always said so?"

"Then how can you expect us to like you when you are so—so wise?"

"I don't expect you to like me."

She bit her lip and pretended to check a laugh.

"I suppose you enjoy this room?" she said, glancing round it till her eyes fell on a small crucifix which was nailed to the wall behind his chair; "it is so depressing. You are very perverse. And the odd thing is—"

"Well, what is the odd thing?"

"That you are attracted by Mrs. Parflete. Your style ought to be Saint Clare or Saint Elizabeth. But not at all. You prefer this exquisite, wayward, perfectly dressed, extremely young actress. You give your nature full play in your *taste*, at all events."

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"You can urge that much in my favour, then?"

"Yes, that much. Oh, she's pretty. But frivolous and light-hearted—as light-hearted as Titania. There! I have been wondering what I could call her. She is Titania in alabaster. Marble is too strong. At first, I thought it might be marble. I have changed my mind since. I suppose you know she will act in this comedy with Castrillon at the d'Alchingers?"

"So Disraeli has told me. Did you come to tell me that, also?"

She coloured, but met his angry glance without flinching. "Now," she thought, "he is going to show temper."

"I came to tell you that, also," she repeated. "Pensée is opposed to the whole scheme. Mrs. Parflete stamped her very beautiful foot, and said, 'I go.' Do you approve?"

"I am to meet Castrillon to-night at the Prince d'Alchingen's," he answered, evading her question.

"How you hate him!"

"What makes you think so?"

"I know your face. I never saw any love there for anybody, but just then there was a look of hate."

"You are quite right. I do hate him."

"You are actually trembling at the mention of his name. Then you have feelings, after all." She clapped her hands, and leaving her chair walked toward him.

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"Never hate me, will you?" she said, touching his arm. "Promise me that you will never hate me. Like me as much as you can."

At that instant, they heard a tap at the door, and the landlord, carrying a few letters on a salver, entered the room. Sara pulled down her veil—a foolish action, which she regretted a moment later. Orange thanked the man for the letters and threw them on the table. The landlord, with a studied air of discretion, which was the more insulting for its very slyness, went, half on tiptoe, out.

"Does he always bring your letters upstairs?" she asked.

"As a rule—no," said Orange.

"Then he came on purpose! He wanted to see me—what impudence! I am beginning to realise what one has to expect if one—if one takes an unconventional step."

Her voice failed, and tears began to roll down her cheeks. Then she covered her face with her hands.

"Every courageous—every disinterested act is unconventional," said Robert; "you are tired out—that's all."

"You see," she answered, with a note of harsh sadness in her voice, "I have had a strange day. The scene with Beauclerk was a great strain. I feel a kind of apprehensiveness and terror—yes,

terror, which I cannot describe. It may be my nerves, it may be fancy. But I am too conscious of being alive. Every minute seems vital. Every sound is acute. This day has been one long over-emphasis. Look at my hand: how it trembles! Beauclerk called me a witch. Certainly, I am more sensitive to impressions than most people.” [327]

“One of these letters is from Reckage. It is written on a sheet of your own note-paper.”

She dried her eyes, and looked at him with exultation, astonishment, and a certain incredulity.

“Then he must have listened to me. He posted it, after all, when he left the house. He is always impulsive. I remember now—that I saw him give something to the groom. Do read what he says.”

The letter, scrawled hastily on the pale lilac note-paper affected by Sara and bearing her monogram, ran as follows:—

“MY DEAR OLD FELLOW,—There are still some points of arrangement very material to consider with regard to this Meeting next week, and I hope it is not too late to go into them. The thing cannot be done away. But the circumstances have become, thank God, very different indeed. Mr. Disraeli has asked me to speak in his stead at Hanborough—an honour so wholly unexpected and undeserved that I am forced to see in it an especial mark of encouragement. I must admit at once that I feel greatly flattered. I am not now to be taught what opinion I am to entertain of those gentlemen whose narrow and selfish principles forced me to move against my inclination, my judgment, and my convictions. I am persuaded that any additional public action—no matter how indirect on my part—in the Nomination of Temple would have at this juncture, the worse effect. It would savour of self-advertisement—an idea which I abhor. It would seem an *over-doing*, as it were, of my own importance. You will readily agree, I know, that I ought to keep perfectly quiet before, and for some time after, my Hanborough appearance. Not having in any degree changed my view upon this subject of the Association, I don't feel that my present decision is inconsistent. I think it will strike everybody as a sensible—the only sensible—course to follow. [328]

“When can you dine? Or if you won't dine, let me see you when you can spare half an hour.

“Yours affectionately,”

“BEAUCLERK.”

Orange turned to Sara and said, when he had finished reading—

“I am glad he wrote.”

“You knew him better than I did. He is still a poor creature, for, what does it all come to?—a rambling, stupid lie. The letter is sheer rubbish—a complete misrepresentation of the facts. But I need not have come. This always happens when women interfere between men,” she added, bitterly; “you don't want us. There's a freemasonry among men. You excuse and justify and forgive each other always.”

“You persuaded him to post this.”

“That is true. He might have done so, however, without persuasion. In future, call me the busybody! I must go now. I have made you late for d'Alchingen's dinner. What a lesson to those about to make themselves useful! And how right you were not to get bitter! I take things too much to heart. I must pray for flippancy. Then, perhaps, I may find no fault with this world, or with you, or with anybody!” [329]

“I am bitter enough—don't doubt it.”

“No! no! let us assure each other that this is the best of all possible worlds—that Beauclerk shows cleverness and good sense, that no one tells lies, no one is treacherous, no one is unjust, malicious, or revengeful nowadays, that friends are friends, and enemies—merely divided in opinions! We must encourage ourselves in a cynical, good-natured toleration of all that is abject and detestable in mankind.”

“You are too impatient, Lady Sara. You want life concentrated, like a play, into a few acts lasting, say, three hours. Whereas, most lives have no dénouement—so far as lookers-on are concerned!”

“At last some one has been able to define me. I am ‘impatient.’ But you take refuge in that profound silence which is the philosophy of the strong; you don't struggle against the general feeling; you content yourself by going your own gait quietly. You have pride enough to be—nothing, and ambition enough to do—everything. Hark! what is that? They are calling out news in the street.”

“The current lie,” said Orange. “We don't want to hear it.” [330]

Sara walked to the window and threw it open.

“I caught a name,” she exclaimed. “It is something about Reckage ... Listen ... Reckage!”

Above the din of the traffic, a hoarse duet rose from the street—voice answering voice with a discordant reiteration of one phrase—“*Serious accident to Lord Reckage! Serious accident to Lord Reckage!*”

“My God, what are they saying? What are they saying? It is my imagination. It can't be true. I am fancying things. What are they saying?”

Orange had already left the room and was in the road. When he returned, he gave her the newspaper and did not attempt to speak. But he closed the window in order to shut out, if possible, the hideous cry.

"Where is it? I can't see! In which column?" said Sara.

He pointed to a corner on the third page, where she read in black, rough type:—

"Lord Reckage was thrown from his horse at Hyde Park Corner this afternoon. He was removed to Almouth House. His injuries are said to be of a very dangerous nature."

She crushed the paper in her hand, and the two stood looking at each other, stupefied by the blow.

"I am going to him," said Robert.

"And I must go home," whispered the girl. "He always said that Pluto would be the death of him."

They went down the stairs together without exchanging a word. Orange walked with her to St. James's Square. Neither could speak. On parting, she faltered,— [331]

"Let me know ... how he is...." [332]

CHAPTER XXIV

Lord Reckage had been carried through the hall of Almouth House, but not up the famous staircase of which he was so proud. He looked at it as they bore him to the library, and although he was still in a kind of stupor, the terrified servants could read in his eyes the certain knowledge that he would never behold the marble walls or the portraits of his ancestors again.

"Are you in pain, my lord? is your lordship in pain?" sobbed the housekeeper. His features were injured and his face was perfectly pallid—so much changed that he could not have been immediately recognised. Four doctors—one of them a passer-by at the time of the accident—had assembled. They found one shoulder was severely injured, and the right collar-bone broken. He complained of great pain in his side.

"Am I going to die, Sir Thomas?" said he.

"Why should you die?" replied the distinguished surgeon. "But you have had a nasty fall."

"Pluto shied at something," answered his lordship; "mind they don't shoot him. I won't have him shot."

Then, for a few moments, he lost consciousness.

When Orange arrived, the physicians were looking very grave, and telegrams had been despatched to all the young man's near relatives. [333]

"He has called for you several times," said Sir Thomas; "and," he added, dropping his voice, "is there any lady who could meet ... the family? I fancy I caught a lady's name more than once. Could it have been—"

"Sara," suggested Orange, to relieve his embarrassment.

"It certainly sounded like Sara."

"Then I will send Lord Garrow a note—she is Lord Garrow's daughter—a lifelong friend. Is there no hope?"

"He may have a pretty good night."

Robert bowed his head and asked no more. He sat by the dying man, whose sufferings, although they were a little alleviated by morphia, made him restless. He moaned even in his snatches of sleep, and spoke occasionally—always about the accident. Once he mentioned Agnes:

"Agnes will be sorry when she hears."

Toward daybreak he turned to Orange, and said quite simply—

"You are different from the rest. You have the priest's element in you; there is an incessant struggle and toil to cut one another's throat among us average men—all striving after success. You weren't built that way. God bless you." [334]

In the morning his father and the near relatives arrived. The women cried bitterly. The aged peer looked on in stony grief—drinking in his son's scarred face and glancing, with despair, from time to time, at the clock.

"It isn't going, is it?" he asked.

No, it had been checked; the tick disturbed his lordship, but there was an hour-glass on the table.

"How many hours do they think—?"

"Perhaps ten hours."

When the sand had run down at the conclusion of the first hour, no one reversed the instrument. But Lady Margaret Sempton, the Earl's sister, sent a whispered message to the Bishop of Hadley, who was waiting, much altered by sorrow and anxiety, in the ante-room. Reckage had asked to see him. He had always liked the good old man, and the rest withdrew during their short interview.

Meanwhile carriage after carriage drove up to the door; caller after caller appeared with cards, notes, and inquiries; name after name was inscribed in the visitors' book; telegrams came from the Royal family, from all parts of the country and the Continent.

"My poor boy. I didn't know he had so many friends," said his father. "God forgive me, I used to think he wasted his time on fads."

And odd people came also. Trainers, jockeys, and horse-dealers rubbed shoulders on the doorsteps with collectors of old furniture, missionaries, electioneering agents, ladies of the chorus, of the *corps de ballet*, shabby-genteel individuals of both sexes out of work, and the like; each had his degree of regret and an anecdote.

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"He was always very kind to me," said this one, that one, and the other.

Bradwyn, noting some of these unusual visitors, observed that Reckage had a knack of pleasing the lower classes and half-educated persons generally. He heard a Bible-reader say to the footman: "*Take ye heed, watch and pray; for ye know not when the time is!*" and he shuddered at this exhibition of bad taste. Lord Garrow had been unremitting in his personal inquiries, but Sara did not come till she received the following from Orange—

"He is conscious, and he asks to see you."

She reached the room as the Bishop of Hadley was coming out; tears were in his eyes and he did not notice the young lady who glided past him as lightly as a shadow. Poor Reckage recognised her step, however, and pulled the sheet half over his face lest she should be startled at its harsh disfigurements. She threw off her hat and veil and fell on her knees by the side of his bed.

"Speak to me, Beauclerk, speak to me; it is I—Sara."

"I know you," he whispered; "you are the one I loved the best. But I haven't been true to anybody. I only wish to goodness I had another chance. I'd be different—I'd show 'em ... I never meant ..." he took her hand, her beautiful, tapering hand loaded with sapphires ... "like your eyes, old girl ... don't cry ... and I say, I posted that ... letter after all ... to please you. Are you ... pleased?"

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He spoke no more.

Action is the essence of political parties, and the members of the League had the ink barely dry on their telegrams of condolence before they despatched others, summoning a special meeting for the consideration of future steps. Orange, who was regarded as a man devoid of ambition, was unanimously elected a member of the Executive Committee; he was a good speaker, he could mind his own business, he never pulled wires, and it was his rule to step aside when others behind him showed any disposition to push toward the front. On the evening of the day on which Lord Reckage died, Aumerle and Ullweather called at Vigo Street as a preliminary move in their new plan of campaign. But Robert was not there. He sat all that night, a solitary watcher, in the chamber of death. His affection for his old pupil was something stronger than a brother's love. Whether he saw him as others saw him, or whether he was aware of certain pleasant traits in that uncertain character which escaped the common run of dull observers, his devotion had never wearied in all the years of their acquaintanceship.

The old housekeeper crept into the room when the bereaved family had retired, and she was on her way to bed.

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"You and me, sir, always got on with his lordship," she said, looking down, with Robert, at the still, marred face. "We understood him. He wasn't all for self—as many thought. But his heart wanted touching. If you could touch his heart, a kinder gentleman didn't live. And if it was my last breath, I'd call him the best of the lot—in spite of his tantrums, and his changeableness, and his haughty way sometimes. Mark my words, the glory of Almouth dies with him. Mr. Hercy will bring us down to rack and ruin. O, sir, I'm glad I'm old. I never want to see the sorrow that is sure to come to Almouth."

But Orange was not thinking about the house of Almouth, or its fate. His thoughts were with the soul of the young man who had enjoyed life so well, and made so many plans, and cherished so many worldly hopes—of the young man who had existed apparently to indulge his own will, spend money, kill time, and fulfil a few rather showy responsibilities. And yet what Robert remembered best was his laugh. He could hear it still.

Prince d'Alchingen had been much put out of conceit with himself by disappointment. The small dinner which he had carefully arranged for Orange and Castrillon took place, but Orange was not present. He had sent word from Almouth House that he could not leave Lord Reckage. His Excellency, therefore, was thoroughly annoyed, and Castrillon's persiflage fell heavily upon his ears. He tried to think that this nobleman's vivacity made him appear flippant, whereas he was, in reality, a Don Juan of the classic type—unscrupulous, calculating, and damnable. When he remarked that it was *grande folie de vouloir d'être sage avec une sagesse impossible*, the Prince's spirits rose—only to fall again, however, at a later pronouncement from the same lips to the effect that virtuous women always brought tears to his eyes.

"They tell me," said the Prince, weighing each syllable with great deliberation (they carried on their conversation principally in French and Spanish) "that Mrs. Parflete is an admirable actress."

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Castrillon kissed the tips of his fingers to the air, and ejaculated: "Adorable!"

"Does she resemble, in any way, I wonder, her good mother, Madame Duboc?"

No, she had her own style—although she was coquettish enough. And pretty? Delicious.

"This is better," thought his Excellency, "much better. And do you think," he asked, aloud, "that she cares at all for Orange?"

Castrillon smirked and put his hand, half instinctively, to his breast-pocket. D'Alchingen inferred, from this quick movement, that he carried a letter or two, or a keepsake, from the lady near the region of his heart.

"She may need the tonic of some Platonic love in order to bear the burden of a solitary life," said the Marquis; "but, all the same, I have no especial reason to think that M. de Hausée is her ideal."

"He is the ideal of several persons," said Alchingen; "I don't know what to make of him."

But at this point Castrillon displayed a maddening discretion. The Prince was glad when he took his departure, and he exhausted his stock of malice in wishing the young coxcomb to the devil. His Excellency was becoming more and more morose over his snuff and the last mail—which was longer and duller than usual—with a peculiarly sharp note from his Chief into the bargain—when Mudara was announced.

Mudara bowed to perfection, and then, going forward, presumed to put his hand on the Ambassador's arm.

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"Your Excellency," said he, "I have some important news. On the whole it is gratifying. It may make us cynical, but it is absurd to expect human nature to be Divine. Mrs. Parflete has been at Orange's lodgings this afternoon."

"You don't mean it?"

"Indeed, it is too true. When he moved to Vigo Street, I was fortunate enough to secure a room in the same house immediately under his."

"Good!"

"I was sitting at my table, with the door just ajar, when I heard, at six o'clock, a rustle of silk skirts on the stairs. I peeped out. I saw a tall lady, thickly veiled, following our landlord, Dunton, across the landing. She caught sight of me, and started violently."

"Was it Mrs. Parflete?"

"I could *swear*" he answered slowly, "that it was Mrs. Parflete.... She reached Orange's door; Dunton tapped; Orange came out; the lady and he exchanged glances; they entered the room together, and he closed the door. Three-quarters of an hour later they came down the stairs and left the house."

"You followed them?"

"Alas! I couldn't. I was not alone. Parflete himself was with me. I dared not trust him out of my sight. He, following his custom, grew faint at the sight of Madame——"

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"Then he, too, recognised her? This is excellent."

"He recognised her height and her figure. Besides, whom else could it have been—if not Mrs. Parflete? M. de Hausée has no sister, and we know his character. The caprice of fortune has honoured him with many faults, but gallantry is not among them. I have that from those who knew him when he was too young to disguise his true nature. He would not have been an *abbé malgré lui*, and he has, on the contrary, the most ecclesiastical soul I know. Rest assured, your Excellency, that this *canaille* of a woman is determined to be his ruin, for she is a baptized serpent,—one of those creatures more dangerous to men than the devil himself."

The Ambassador smiled agreeably, put his tongue in his cheek, and nodded his head with a

movement which might have passed equally well for a sympathetic reproof or sorrowful acquiescence.

"What will Parflete do?" he asked.

Mudara threw up his dark, sinewy, and powerful hands in genuine despair.

"He is the vice of the situation," he exclaimed; "at the very mention of divorce his teeth chatter, he gets a spasm of the heart, and he begins to gabble like a sick monk about his soul and his conscience. Believe me, we are dealing with a madman. How can any end be attained in his present state of irresolution?"

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"Happily it is not my business either to arrange or propose the means."

The sly glance of the Prince encountered the sly glance of the Agent.

"That is well understood, your Excellency," said Mudara, with the inimitable accent of respect. "Let good be done and let evil be avoided, is the sum total of the Government's desires. But whenever I can see clearly, I shall know how to act. When right and truth are plain, time and experience are the best allies. We have at least sufficient evidence to institute divorce proceedings. If Parflete will not file a petition——"

"You can do nothing. Unless you can be perfectly sure that he will follow some reasonable course, he ought to be saved from himself."

"Yes, he ought to be saved from himself. Something in my nature makes me follow a certain kind of man as hounds track game. What is now to be done is to meet force with force."

"An armed diplomacy is good," said d'Alchingen.

"And also a scheme of alternatives," replied Mudara.

"I confess I very much prefer working through Castrillon, if possible, than de Hausée. Disraeli has implicit faith in this de Hausée. It seems taken for granted that he is ascetic and intellectual. He is altogether in the clouds, whereas Castrillon is wholly in touch with—with humanity."

"But de Hausée, like the Cardinal de Retz, fought duels when he was a student. If I cannot work upon Parflete's jealousy, we must see what can be done in that direction with de Hausée. We hear much of the soul's awakening! Wait for the body's awakening now—it must come. Mrs. Parflete is a *Samaritaine*; we have to prove it somehow. Even though one invented stories about her, one would probably find that they were, approximately, true."

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"Keep me informed," said the Prince, making a little bow, which signified that the audience was at an end.

Mudara, according to his own Confession, left the Embassy and proceeded at once to the small private hotel near Covent Garden where Parflete had taken up his abode.

Parflete's rooms, (*we read*) were en suite. He had bought a few rather beautiful prints and a number of exquisitely bound books. These last, with bowls and vases of flowers, were scattered over the various tables. The scent of the flowers mingled with the strange fumes of some Oriental incense. He had draped pieces of flame-coloured silk over the windows. Everything looked *bizarre*, and the atmosphere was sultry. When I entered he was not pleased to see me—in fact, he showed a disposition to sulk. I laboured to convince him that he would forfeit the respect of all honourable men unless he showed some just resentment at his wife's conduct.

"No one respects me as it is," he answered; "nobody cares what I do one way or the other so long as I avoid the police. And as the police and I have nothing at all in common, I am not likely to give offence to my good friends in the Alberian Government."

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I warned him that such sneers were unjustifiable, and I reminded him, with severity, of the Government's extraordinary forbearance.

He fixed his eyes unpleasantly upon me, and his fingers trembled as he played with the frogs of his lilac-velvet smoking-jacket.

"I wish," said he, "that you would mind your own business. I have done everything to protect the appearance of your good faith all through this affair. Now leave me alone. Besides, I can't be sure that the lady we saw to-day was Her Imperial Highness."

My exasperation at his tone of defiance was all but uncontrollable.

"You know," said I, "that we had no doubt of her identity."

"We didn't see her face nor the colour of her hair. In any case, I refuse to humiliate her. Kindly remember that she is my wife, and drop a conversation which I find insulting."

Hot words then passed between us. In my anger I may have uttered several truths which hit him too hard. Suddenly he sprang at me as though he were a wild cat. His eyes rolled, his face was convulsed beyond recognition. Men I have never feared; he seemed, however, not a man but some demoniac risen from hell. In self-defence I struck him with the small poniard which I have carried all my life. He staggered back, and the blood-letting seemed to relieve his temper.

"Go!" said he; "go while you can. I don't think the wound is mortal, but I don't wish any man hanged for murdering me."

It was in my will to strike him again. I was beside myself with contempt at what I took to be a fresh revelation of his cowardice.

I replied coolly enough,—“I would not murder you. Have no alarm on that score. But I can defend myself, I hope.” [345]

By this time he had reached the door and thrown it open. A waiter was passing at the time.

“Sir,” said Parflete, “I have the honour to wish you good-day.”

The waiter heard this remark distinctly, and saw me bow as I parted from the wretched creature.

Parflete's appearance was ghastly, but I attributed this pallor to fright and not to pain, for I believed from my heart that the wound was no more than a slight prick. I left the hotel, took a cab to my lodgings, and after reading a light Spanish novel in order to change the current of my thoughts, I passed an excellent night, sleeping at least seven hours.

CHAPTER XXVI

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Lord Garrow, after much cautious consideration, had decided that Lady Sara could not absent herself from the d'Alchingsens' party without exciting unfavourable comment, and so prejudicing her future relationship with the Duke of Marshire. His lordship, in his secret heart, was by no means sorry for Reckage's untimely death. An orthodox faith in a better, happier world assisted his conscience over the many difficulties which afflict a strong sense of good manners. Good manners demanded some show of grief at the young man's melancholy end; but, as his lordship pointed out to his weeping daughter, higher reflections ought to triumph over the vulgar instincts of sorrow, and an etiquette almost heathenish. “Let us be thankful,” said he, “that poor Beauclerk was spared some lingering malady and the shattering disappointments of a public career. He would not wish us to mourn. And indeed, any undue mourning on your part might give a very false impression in society. You must go to the d'Alchingsens'.”

Hadley Lodge was built in the reign of George I. In design it resembles a little the Vice-Regal Lodge in Dublin; two wings, containing innumerable small rooms, are connected by corridors leading to the entrance hall. The chief rooms are in the centre, to which Prince d'Alchingen himself added a miniature theatre, copied from the one at Trianon. When Sara arrived, the Prince and Princess were taking tea in the gallery—an apartment so furnished with screens, sofas, writing-tables, divans, and arm-chairs that it had become the lounge, as it were, of the house. Less formal than the saloon, brighter than the library, and more airy than the boudoir, the Princess spent the greater part of her day in a favourite corner where she could command a view from four windows, enjoy the fire, see the best pictures, and hear the piano pleasantly if any guest chose to play upon it. In person she was tall and rather gaunt, with high cheek-bones, and very dark hollows under her eyes. She had the air of a mourning empress, and seriousness was so natural to her countenance, that, although she could not smile, and had never been known to laugh, she was not depressing nor was she, accurately speaking, melancholy. The style of beauty—for she had beauty—was haggard, of the kind now familiar to all English people from the paintings of Sir Edward Burne-Jones. In 1869, however, this type was still highly uncommon and little appreciated. Journals and letters of the period contain references to “that fright, Princess d'Alchingen,” or “that poor creature who always looks so ill,” or “that woman who makes one think of a corpse.” Sara admired the Princess, and surprised all the fashionable artists of that day by insisting on her paintableness. [347]

“How good of you to come, dear Sara!” she murmured, presenting her sallow cheek to the young girl with a touch of regal graciousness at once designed and impulsive; “I should have been lost without you. Anselm has invited a large party, and, as you know, I cannot talk to these dear people. I find them too clever, and they find me too stupid. The world is not willing to give me credit for that which I have done.” [348]

“And what is that, dearest?” asked the Prince.

“I married you!” she answered, with a quick flash of humour under her gravity. It was like the occasional sparkle in granite. “You may smile at the notion of my living on the reputation of what I might yet do,” she continued, resuming her languor.

“Let us talk of pleasant things only, *chère amie*,” said the Prince, turning to Sara; “mind you, not a word about graves and epitaphs. Mrs. Parflete has arrived. Castrillon has arrived. You need not trouble about the others. They are not—they cannot be—worth your while. But do watch Castrillon. I find that the greatest compliment he can pay to any woman is to sneer at her expense. He never permits himself the slightest epigram against those who have erred in kindness toward him. One witty but frail lady once implored him to miss no opportunity of abusing her in public. ‘Otherwise,’ said she, ‘they will know all.’ Isn't that a good story?” [349]

“Anselm!” sighed the Princess.

"I wonder who that lady was?" said Sara.

"I dare not guess," said the Prince.

Sara had recovered from the emotion called forth by Reckage's tragic fate, and she was living now in one of those taciturn reveries which had become more and more habitual with her since the last interview with d'Alchingen. Every force in her passionate, undisciplined soul was concentrated in a wild love for Orange, and every thought of her mind was fixed on the determination to win his affection in return. There were only two real powers in the world, she told herself; these were moral force and money. Money could not affect Robert. But he was susceptible to moral force. She resolved to display such an intrepid spirit, such strength of will, such devotion that Brigit would seem a mere doll in comparison.

"What do you think," she said, turning to the Princess, "of Mrs. Parflete? Your opinion is worth everything. Orange is infatuated with her. His criticism is therefore useless. The Prince disapproves of her parentage. He is therefore prejudiced. I wish to be charitable. I, therefore, say what I hardly think. Pensée Fitz Rewes is an innocent little fool. She judges all women by herself. You, Princess, are an angel of the world. Your verdict, quickly."

The Princess paused before she attempted any reply. Then she fixed her deep, grey eyes on Sarah's excited face. [350]

"I like her," she said, slowly.

"Is that all?"

"I think she is immature for her age, and therefore reckless. She knows everything about sorrow, and very little—at present—about happiness. So she doesn't seem quite human. She shows that indulgence toward others which is perhaps the last degree of contempt for the follies of humanity. Those who take their neighbours seriously are almost invariably severe. Mrs. Parflete, on the contrary, is all good-nature and excuses. I believe she has genius, and I am sure she will have an amazing career."

The Princess, who had always insisted on a studious rather than an active part in life, was consequently unlike the majority of her sex, who, in the bustle of social engagements, talk without ceasing, letting words take the place of ideas, and phrases serve for sentiments. All that she uttered showed a habit of thought opposed to the common method of drawing-room conversation; she rarely said the expected thing, and never, a welcome one. Sara, therefore, was disappointed at this favourable judgment of Mrs. Parflete. The jealousy which she had been able to control by hoping, in the depths of her heart, that the young actress would prove too light a creature to bind for long any masculine, stirring spirit, now saw some justification for vehemence.

"And what do you think of Robert Orange?" she asked, breathing quickly. [351]

The Princess folded her hands, fixed her eyes again on the young girl, and answered in her usual even tones—

"He is a sentimentalist turned man of action. When this miracle can be accomplished, you may expect a very decided, even implacable, character—because it is much more difficult to crush one's poetry than to crush one's passions. The passions are more or less physical, they depend on many material conditions or accidents; but poetry, ideals, romance and the like belong to the spirit. I find a great campaign is being waged everywhere against the soul. It is a universal movement—the only things considered now are the pocket and the brain and the liver."

"Delightful!" said Sara, trying to speak calmly; "and will Orange become a liver-devotee?"

"You don't understand self-discipline, *chérie*," answered the Princess; "that seems a sealed mystery to most people except the Catholics and the Buddhists. Protestants never speak of it, never think of it. Their education is all for self-concealment. If I read M. de Hausée rightly, he will become no colourless, emasculated being, but certainly a man with a silent heart. When he has a grievance he will take it to God—never to his friends."

Prince d'Alchingen stifled a yawn and offered Sara a cigarette, which she refused, although she had acquired the habit of smoking during her visits to Russia. [352]

"If you will both swear," said he, "to keep a secret, I can tell you one."

The old and the young lady flushed alike with delight at the prospect of hearing some strange news.

"It will come well," he continued, "after my wife's prophetic remarks. Mrs. Parflete went alone to Orange's lodgings on Wednesday last at six o'clock."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed the Princess.

Sara, feeling the Prince's dissecting glance burning into her countenance, grew white and red by turns.

"What a temperament! what jealousy!" thought d'Alchingen.

"How do you know all this?" she asked, thrusting her hands, which were trembling, into her

ermine muff.

"I know it for a fact. The question now is—How will Parflete endure such conduct? Her bigamy may have been innocent, or at least, an unavoidable accident. But the afternoon call—well, if he can swallow that, his meekness runs a risk of being called cowardice, and his magnanimity will bear an unpleasant resemblance to dishonour."

"Yet surely—surely——" stammered Sara.

In a second she grasped the mistake which had been made, and all its possible disastrous consequences to herself. Loss of reputation, the finger of scorn, and for what? Nothing, or at the worst, an indiscretion. Scandal, had there been a romantic cause, and loss of reputation, had there been a great passion to make it more memorable as a sacrifice than a disgrace, would have seemed to her defiant mind something glorious. But here was a mere unbeautiful story—sordid, if misunderstood, and a little silly, if satisfactorily explained. And it could not be satisfactorily explained. Sara knew life too well to encourage herself by supposing that the real truth about her foolish visit to Orange's lodgings could ever be told or believed. Orange himself would never betray her she knew. But what if she had been seen or recognised? The landlord, the men on the staircase—had they followed her home, or been able to pierce through her thick veil? She tried to collect her thoughts, to appear extremely interested—that was all. The effort, however, was beyond her strength. She showed her agitation, and, while it was fortunately attributed by the d'Alchingsens to a wrong reason, they were close observers of every change in her face, nor did they miss the notes of alarm and nervousness in her voice.

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"It will probably mean a divorce, the social ruin of Orange, and the successful *début* of Madame as a comedian of the first rank," said the Ambassador.

"Does Orange know that she was seen that day?" asked Sara.

"Not yet. He will know soon enough, never fear."

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"Are you sure—quite sure that it was Mrs. Parflete?" suggested the Princess.

"It must have been she," replied the Prince.

"It must have been she," repeated Sara, mechanically.

The lie seemed to come before she had time to think of it; it tripped off her tongue as though some will, other than her own, controlled her speech. But now that the untruth was spoken she determined to abide by it, so she repeated:—

"It must have been Mrs. Parflete."

"And suppose," said the Princess, "that she is able to prove that she spent the whole of Wednesday with Lady Fitz Rewes? No one could doubt the evidence of Lady Fitz Rewes."

D'Alchingen shrugged his shoulders.

"In that event—which is unlikely," he said; "M. de Hausée will have a bad half-hour with Mrs. Parflete. The idyll will be spoilt for ever, and our pretty tale for angels about a Saint and a little Bohemian will sink to its proper level. It always takes three to make a really edifying Platonic history. The third in this case is the lady who called at Vigo Street. *Dans le combat, il faut marcher sans s'attendrir!*"

"Who would live?" murmured the Princess, pressing a martyr's relic which she always wore on a chain round her neck.

"Suppose," continued d'Alchingen, enjoying his own cynicism, "that we have a quartette in this instance. Madame has her Castrillon, M. de Hausée has his veiled lady. Each is a pious fraud to the other. Imagine the double current of their thoughts, the deceit, the hypocrisy, the colossal lie behind them both which makes the inspiring truth a fact! It is an anecdote to be told in the Boccaccio manner—gracefully, with humour, with much indulgence ... otherwise, it might be the sort of story they tell in hell."

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"I am happy to say that I have no imagination," said the Princess; "and now I shall take Sara—who must be tired—to her room."

She rose from her seat, and, drawing Sara's arm through hers, walked from the gallery, through the hall, and up the staircase, talking, the while, of a new Romney which the Prince had recently purchased.

Sara was now in her own room, but not alone, for her maid was unpacking, and the gown, petticoat, shoes, gloves, and flowers designed for that evening were being spread out upon the bed. The girl was in no humour to enjoy the finery which she had chosen with so much delight. She turned her back upon it all, and, pulling up the blind, gazed moodily out of the window till her maid's preparations were at an end. Romantic trees and a landscape, almost artificial in its prettiness, surrounded Hadley. The sun was setting in a fire, burnishing with enamel tints the long green hills which ranged as a natural fortification across the horizon, shutting out a whole country of flat fields beyond. The moon, in its first quarter, shone out above a distant steeple where the eastern sky, already blue and opalesque, promised the dawn of another day in reparation for the one then dying in scarlet splendour. But to those who are unhappy, to-morrow is a word without significance. Sara stretched out her arms instinctively toward the coming night.

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She wanted darkness and she wanted sleep—not the stars of the morning, not the joy of noon. What should she do? Her mad love for Orange had reached a desperate point—a point where she realised all too clearly and with bitterness, that, so far from being a source of strength, it was a curse, a malady, a humiliation—driving her into that insatiable desire of solitude where the companionship of dreadful imaginations and gloomy thoughts can rend the soul at their pleasure. As men are sometimes lured toward dangerous perils on land, or mountains, or by sea, and from thence to deeds, discoveries, and crimes unforeseen and unpremeditated, so she seemed borne along into a whirlpool of feelings which chilled the better impulses of her nature and accentuated, with acid and fire, every elementary instinct. Animal powers and spiritual tendencies alike were concentrated into one absorbing passion which reasoned only in delirium, incoherently, without issue. She was wretched in Orange's company because every moment so spent showed her that his heart was fixed far indeed from her. But the wretchedness suffered that way was stifled in the torments she endured when she wondered, miserably, in loneliness, what he was thinking, doing, saying; where he was, with whom he was, and how he was. The despair of unrequited love was thrice intensified by jealousy. "Why did he like that little adventuress, that white china Rahab?" she asked herself again and again. "It is just because she has bewitched him. It is not real love—it isn't any kind of love. She cannot care for him as I do. It isn't in her. O why, why does he fight so hard against me?"

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Beautiful women seldom believe that their charms can be resisted without a fierce struggle. It was, in fact, a tranquil consciousness of beauty which gave audacity to Sara's words, and put the ordinary question of pride out of the question. Was it not rather a case of the goddess putting on humanity, of the queen condescending to a subject. *La reine s'amuse* was the unuttered, constant motto on her heart of hearts. The blood of Asiatic princes ran in her veins, and a sovereign contempt for manners, as opposed to passions and self-will, ruled her fierce spirit. But what should she do? A moment's reflection had shown her that Brigit could have no difficulty in proving that she was not the mysterious lady who visited Orange's lodgings. Having weighed all the disadvantages, Sara now directed her attention to the advantages she could snatch out of the dilemma. At last she hit on a bold plan. She rang a bell and a housemaid answered the summons.

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"Is Mrs. Parflete in her bedroom?" asked Lady Sara; "and where is her bedroom?"

"Her bedroom is next to yours, my lady. She is in there now."

"Thank you."

Sara walked along the corridor till she reached an oak door on which was a card bearing the name she sought. She tapped, and heard Brigit herself reply—

"Come in."

The young actress was lying, in a black silk dressing-gown, on the sofa. Her hair fell loosely to her shoulders, and she had evidently been fast asleep, for her cheeks were less pale than usual, her eyes were bright, and the happiness of some pleasant dream still lingered in their expression.

"Lady Sara—how good of you to come!" she exclaimed; "I have been trying to rest. I want to play well this evening."

"You will play beautifully, of course," said Sara, submitting, even in her jealousy, to the charm and grace of her unconscious rival. "I have come on a difficult errand," she added, abruptly; "you may not understand, but I hope—I believe—you will."

She became so pale as she uttered these words that Brigit leant forward with a gesture of reassurance. In spite of her fragility she was, from the habit of self-control, a stronger spirit.

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"You may be sure that I shall understand," she said.

"Forgive me, then, but some enemy has circulated a report that you went to Mr. Orange's rooms in Vigo Street last Wednesday."

A deep flush swept over Brigit's face.

"I was not there," she said.

"I know," said Sara. "I know you were not there. They made a mistake. It was I they saw—not you—it was I."

Brigit dropped her eyes but made no other movement. She seemed to grow rigid, and the hand which had been playing with the fringe of her girdle remained fixed in its arrested action.

"You? It was you? How — you?"

"I had to see him. So I went to him. Now he can easily deny that you were there. But he won't betray me. People must think what they please. But I am telling you—because you, at least, ought to know the truth."

"And yet it is not my business!"

"What do you mean? Not your business?"

"How can it be my business to ask what lady went to—to his lodgings?"

"But you would have wondered——"

"Yes, I should have wondered. I could not have helped that."

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"Mr. Orange and I have been friends, as you know, for some time. He knew me years ago before he—he met you. I was quite a little girl. I remember I used to hold his hand when I walked in the gardens by his side."

"He has often spoken of you."

"But all this does not help us now. If it were ever known that I—I was the one, the other day,—I should be ruined."

"You may be sure that no one shall know."

"I am not so selfish as I seem. I don't forget that this story will injure him—injure him terribly. They will think him a kind of Joseph Surface—a hypocrite. People expect him to be different from everybody else. A piece of gossip which they would have laughed at and taken as a matter of course from poor Beauclerk or Charles Aumerle—they would resent bitterly in Robert. The thing that grieves me, that torments me, is the fear lest this act of mine may injure him."

"It won't injure him," said Brigit. "Have no fear at all. And if you went to see him, as you say, you must have had the best of reasons for doing so. You may rely, I am sure, on his keeping your name a secret. You were kind to tell me—for he certainly would not have told me—without your consent. We never see each other now, and we never write to each other."

Her voice trembled for the first time.

"How does he look?" she asked, after a sharp struggle between her pride and a desire to hear more. [361]

"He looks ill and worn. He over-works."

"He will suffer at Lord Reckage's death."

"But he hides his feelings. He is always reticent."

"O, to see him and talk with him—that would be such a joy for me."

"You must be very sad, often," said Sara, coldly.

"Yes, often," answered Brigit. "And I was so happy during the short time we were together that now it seems no part of my life—no part of it. I say this because I wish you to know that nothing can make us love each other less—that all this misery and separation—which may last as long as we live—has made no difference and can make no difference to us. And if I never see him again, or speak to him again, he will always be certain that I am his—unalterably, for ever his."

"You are little more than a child. You have a great career before you—who can say what may happen in the future? Women without careers change their minds—their tastes. These things are out of one's own control, and in your case—"

"My mind may change, but my soul cannot. I may dance, I may amuse myself, I may have friends. Make no mistake. I can tell you all that is in me. I find life beautiful. The theatre enchants me. I could work there all day. I have no illusions about it—the paint, the machinery, the box-office, the advertisements—the vulgarity are familiar enough to me. But I find a box-office, and machinery, and vulgarity everywhere, though they are called by other names." [362]

Sara coloured and looked away.

"I am getting stronger now," continued Brigit. "I can lift up my head and see the world as it is. I like it—yes, with all its griefs and its horrors—I like it. When one is ill or sentimental one hates it, because it wasn't made for the sick, and it was not created us a playground for lovers. One may love—yes, but one must work. I intend to love and work at the same time."

"Many find that these two occupations clash! There is a time in love—just as there is a period in life—when it seems enough in itself. It is independent of circumstances and persons. O, but that time soon passes! As you learn more, you look for more. And work is no cure for dissatisfaction. If you can live through it you will just be a machine with one refrain—'I know nothing! I have nothing! I am nothing!'"

The two young girls did not look at each other. Brigit could recognise an agitation of the soul in the imperceptible sadness of the voice, and she guessed poor Sara's secret.

"Yes," she said quietly. "I must suffer all that. How can you be sure that I have not suffered it already? At any rate, I hope this confidence will increase your kindness toward me." [363]

"I have no kindness toward you—none at all," said Sara. "I have no kindness toward any living creature. I should like to die and come to an end. I wasn't born to put up with make-shifts. Other women may be resigned to that paltry way of existing. If they can't have what they want, they will take what they don't want; they will take what they hate, and grin—yes, they will grin and bear it. And after a little while, because they become gradually drunk with suffering, they begin to think they are noble. They are not noble. They are fools, fools, fools!"

"I shan't accept make-shifts," answered Brigit. "I intend to keep all my ideals, but they are all unfinished at present. I have just the outlines and beginnings of them—nothing else."

"I am not talking about ideals. I am speaking of realities. I don't want to be happy, but I do wish to be one of four things: either perfectly alive, or perfectly, utterly dead; either a pure spirit, or a faultless animal. This dead-and-alive, body-and-soul mixture which passes for a well-disciplined human being is loathsome to me. It is a tissue of lies and hypocrisies."

"Perhaps I should have that feeling, too, if I had no faith in God. He assumed humanity—not despising it."

"You know I do not believe that splendid story—so it doesn't help me. I compare life as I feel it with life as it is, and the inequality fills me with disgust. The example of Christ is too sublime. He was human only in His sufferings. He bore our burdens and He shared our agonies. He was deceived, despised, rejected: the first torture and the firstfruits of His Passion was the treachery of a disciple. When I am sorrowful and wretched, He seems Real to me and vivid. But when I am well and wildly happy, He seems far away and unreal—an invisible God, watching mortals with a certain contempt. Now the Pagans had a Divinity for every mood, so they never felt depressed or lowered in their own self-esteem. We have a God for two moods only,—great sorrow, and great exaltation. For the rest we have to beat our breasts and call ourselves miserable sinners. All the good people I know enjoy spiritual peace only—without any fear of remorse—when they are tired out or moaning with physical pain. I don't say this to shock you; I should like to have a religion if I could be convinced of it without fasting, without long illnesses, and without abandoning all hope of earthly, common joys. Most Christians take a middle way, I know; they prattle about their immortal souls, and behave as though they had nothing but bodies. I can't take part in such a gross farce."

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Brigit sighed deeply, and did not reply at once.

"It is all very hard, I know," she answered; "but from the lowest abyss one can still see the sky overhead. People's hearts are touched by the spectacle of sin or the spectacle of suffering. Our Lord could not sin, therefore He reached our sympathies by His Death and Sorrows. Of course, if this life here were all, and this world were the only one, and we were animals with less beauty than many of the inanimate things in nature, and as much intelligence at best as the bees and birds and ants—then the Pagan way might be quite admirable. But this isn't the case, and so—and so——"

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Sara laughed.

"We are a grotesque compromise between gods and creatures," she said; "those of us who find this out get a little impatient with the false position. You are less sentimental than I am. You take what I call the hard view. It is too frigid for me. But I am making you late. All good luck to-night!"

She waved her hand, and, returning to her own room, realised that she had missed the object of her conversation. The attempt to excite Brigit's jealousy had failed.

Nothing is so infectious as despair. Brigit sat quivering under the echo of Sara's last words: "You take what I call the hard view." Was it, then, such an easy matter to bury love in perpetual silence, to let nature yield to fate, to stifle every human craving? The mention of Robert's name and the news that he looked ill and careworn had stirred all the unshed tears in her heart; she could not think, she could not move, she could but realise that she had no right to be with him. And sorrow seemed her province. There, surely, she and he might meet, join hands, and speak once more face to face. She had not written to him since that parting at Miraflores. But she would write now. This was her letter—

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MY DEAREST LIFE—You are my dearest and you are my life—so let me say it now, even if I never say it again. I could be glad (if any gladness were left in me) at your grief for Lord Reckage's death, because it gives me an excuse for breaking my word and writing to you. This is selfish, but nobody knows how much I have suffered, or how much I suffer daily, hourly. I try to believe that it would have been worse if we had never owned our love, never met again after our first meeting. Darling, I can't be sure. Sometimes I wish I had been born quite numb. I dare not complain, and yet it is impossible to feel contented. Always, always there is a dreadful pain in my heart. Every moment is occupied, for when I am not working, I sleep, and when I wake, I work. I would rather spend one perfect day with you and die, than live on without you. This is the truth. If I had any choice that would be my choice. But I know you want me to be courageous, and I myself want you to see that a woman's love can be as strong as a man's. Women are supposed to make men weak—they are supposed to be chains and hindrances. This shan't be said of me. You wouldn't say it: you wouldn't think it: yet in history I find that while a few have been saved by women, more have been ruined by them. And where the women have saved the men they loved, it has been done by great renunciations and sacrifices—not at all by selfishness and joys. When I can remember this (I forget it too easily), I can almost persuade myself that I don't long to see you, to hear your voice, to be with you again on the boat—going on and on toward Miraflores. But I never persuade myself of this entirely—never, never. I do long to see you, Robert: I do want to be with you. I envy the servant in your lodgings, and the friends you meet. And I—who love you so dearly—may not go near you. I am going to act to-night—as if I were not acting all day, every day! I haven't said one word about you. But you couldn't be so wretched as I am, because *you* have yourself, *you* know what you are doing, saying, and thinking. Now if I could cease altogether and become, say, your hand or your foot, no one would expect you to renounce me. I might be useful, and it would certainly be no scandal if I accompanied you everywhere! I won't say any more.

BRIGIT.

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She addressed an envelope and sealed the letter within it. Then, with tears streaming down her cheeks, she read her part for the comedy that evening. When Esther entered with her dressing-gown, she held up her hands in dismay.

"O Madame," said she, "I thought you were going to play an amusing piece!"

"It will be very amusing," said Brigit, "but this is the way to rehearse it."

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CHAPTER XXVII

The Marquis of Castrillon, meanwhile, was pirouetting sublimely before the long mirror in his dressing-room, while his valet, a sour-faced individual, looked on in great but gloomy interest. The Marquis was superbly dressed in a Louis Seize costume—an exact reproduction of the one worn by that monarch on his wedding-day—and he presented a very fine figure. In features, expression, colouring, and manner it would have been difficult to find, or imagine, a more fascinating puppet. An unsurpassable actor of noble parts, he seemed created to play the hero in deeds, the poet in thoughts, the lover on all occasions. Confident of his attractions, he appeared quite free from vanity: each fresh attitude became him better than the last: no light could do less than show the classic beauty of his head and body. When he laughed, one could admire his magnificent teeth; when he looked grave, one could enjoy the splendid serenity of his brow and the passion in his deep brown eyes. It was said that his legs alone would have made the plainest man a dangerous rival, that his well-cut mouth would have made a monster irresistible.

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"So you don't think," said he, as he executed a final bow and kicked off his shoes because a buckle stuck into his instep—"so you don't think, Isidore, that Her Imperial Highness loves me?"

"I know she doesn't," replied his man. "I am not going to say that I see more than I see."

"It may be that she cannot love," said the Marquis, "and I don't think less of her on that account. These sentimental girls become very monotonous and sickening. The women whom men love the longest are prim, stand-off women. Have you noticed that, Isidore?"

"No, I haven't noticed that. I haven't noticed much love lasting long for any kind of person."

"There's something in your stupidity which refreshes me. I have a strong notion to marry Her Imperial Highness. I could make her happy."

"Not you."

"I tell you I could. She has the oddest effect upon me. No other woman has ever affected me in such a way. I feel when I am with her as though we were well matched. If I were a King, I would make her my Queen. I might love others, but I should always say, 'Remember the Queen. The Queen must be remembered, and honoured, and obeyed in all things.' Sometimes I see myself—with her—at a kind of Versailles: every one standing up as we enter: Her Majesty very pale and tall and wonderful in a blue velvet robe and pearls, I would adore her with a passion as constant as it was respectful. I should ask in return *une amitié la plus tendre*. Isidore, she is an angel. The sweetness of her soul is in her face—in the very sound of her voice. I am a little too material to be so sublime in my sentiments as M. de Hausée, but I could be unusually faithful to that charming, beautiful creature. Isn't there a crease under my left arm? Hold the glass for me."

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Isidore held the glass while Castrillon, with knit brows, studied the back view of his coat.

"The coat is perfect," said Isidore; "you have no heart or you would never find fault with such a back."

"Would you call me heartless?"

"I couldn't call you anything else," replied the valet, bluntly.

"Then why have you been with me, cat-fish, ever since I was born?"

The Marquis had a stock of names for his servant, none of which he employed unless he felt in a good humour. Owl-pig, hog-mouse, ape-dog, rat-weasel, and cat-fish were the highest expressions of his amiability toward the man who had been his ill-tempered, dishonest, impudent, and treacherous attendant all the years of his life.

"You know, mule-viper," he continued, "that no one else would keep you for five minutes. You are a liar, a thief, and a traitor. Yet I endure you. I agree that I must be either heartless or an idiot to put up with such a rogue."

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Isidore grew livid, muttered blasphemies under his breath, and put pink cotton-wool in the toes of his master's dancing-shoes. Castrillon then kicked him into the adjoining room and resumed his gymnastic exercises. At the end of half an hour, the man re-entered carrying a note fastidiously between his left thumb and forefinger.

"Is that for me?" asked the Marquis, who was in the act of turning a double somersault with much agility.

"It is for Monsieur."

"Then read it aloud while I stand on my head."

Isidore tore it open and began to read as follows:—

"Do not misjudge me—"

"Stop!" exclaimed Castrillon, falling upon his feet at once; "that is from a woman. Why didn't you say so?"

"It is from Madame Parflete," replied Isidore.

"Impossible!" said Castrillon, snatching it from his hand; "impossible!"

He read the letter, flushed to the roots of his hair, and kicked Isidore for the second time.

"You beast!" said he; "where did you get this? It is her writing, but she never wrote it—never on God's earth! Where did you get it?"

"It was given to me by one of her servants."

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"Why the devil do you tell me such lies?" exclaimed the young man in a fury; "it's some d—d practical joke in the most infernal bad taste, and, by God! I have a mind to shoot you."

Castrillon was not given to the utterance of vain threats, and his anger was so great that the wretched Isidore, shaking, whining, and cursing, edged round the room with his back to the wall and his eyes fixed on his master.

"Stand still, will you?" continued the Marquis; "I want to hear a little more. How much were you paid for giving me this twaddle? Answer me that."

"Two guineas!"

"Two? I'll bet you had twenty. Stand still, I tell you, or I'll kick you again. Do you expect me to believe that Mrs. Parflete's servant gave you twenty guineas?"

"No, I don't," answered Isidore. "I don't expect you to believe anything. But if that isn't Madame Parflete's writing, whose writing is it?"

"That is just what I mean to find out," replied Castrillon, "and that is why I won't shoot you till it suits my convenience."

Isidore, who had a venomous attachment to the Marquis, burst into tears. For many generations their respective ancestors had stood in the relation, each to the other, of tyrant and dependent. Isidore's father had robbed, cheated, deceived, and adored Castrillon's father; the fathers of these two reprobates had observed the same measure of whippings and treacheries, and so it had been always from the first registered beginnings of the noble and the slavish house. But an Isidore had never been known to leave a Castrillon's service. The hereditary, easy-going forbearance, on the one hand, which found killing less tedious than a crude dismissal, and the hereditary guilty conscience, on the other, which had to recognise the justice of punishment, kept the connection rudely loyal.

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"I detest you," said Castrillon; "I hate the sight of you."

Isidore blubbered aloud, and accepted the information as a turn for the better in the tide of his master's wrath.

"Who gave you that letter?"

"Well, if you must know, it was Signor Mudara."

"Mudara? Then Mudara wrote it. I'll wring his neck."

"I'll wring his neck, too—if he has tried any of his games on me," sobbed Isidore. "But it may not be a game. You are always so hasty."

Castrillon read the letter through once more.

"I can't believe that she wrote it," he said. "I'll swear she didn't."

"And why?"

"Because the style is not in keeping with her character, blockhead! She does not ask me—or any one else—to visit her at two o'clock in the morning."

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A revolting smile made the valet's loose-hanging, sullen lips quiver with emotion.

"No, that is not Madame's style. She is too clever. But does that affect the opportunity!"

"What opportunity?"

"You have the letter. It is for Madame herself to deny the handwriting—not you. Why should you, of all people, think it a joke? Why not act upon it? Why not ask her what it means?"

"At two in the morning? I have no wish to compromise Madame—not the least. She is too rich to compromise. She is the sort of lady one marries. Tell Mudara, with my compliments, he must understand gentlemen before he can play successful tricks upon them."

"I will take my oath that I am not sure it is a trick," answered Isidore.

Castrillon studied the letter for a third time.

"Here and there," he said, "it has the ring of her voice, and the words are the words she uses."

"With such a justification in my pocket, I know what I should do," mumbled Isidore.

"So do I. But you are the scum of the earth, and what you would, or wouldn't do, could only interest the hangman."

The Marquis locked the note in his dressing-case, and handed his keys, with his usual simplicity, to Isidore.

"I do not propose to tire myself with this nonsense before the play," said he. "Get my raw eggs and milk." [375]

At nine o'clock that evening, a brilliant company were gathered in the Salle de Comédie. Most of the Foreign Ambassadors, and about fifty illustrious personages of great social importance, were present. Prince d'Alchingen had resolved that the daughter of Henriette Duboc should have every opportunity of making a successful *début* in England. He had sprinkled most judiciously among his guests a few accredited experts in various departments of knowledge, and these he hoped would lead appreciation into the right channel by explaining, at fit intervals, just why Mrs. Parflete was beautiful and just where her art had its especial distinction. The play itself—*La Seconde Surprise de l'Amour*—by Pierre de Marivaux, was quite unknown to the audience. Brigit and Castrillon had appeared in it at Madrid, and descriptions of their success were whispered through the room. The story of her birth, her unhappy marriage, her adventures in Spain, and her relations with De Hausée had quickened curiosity to the highest pitch. Was she really so young? was she really so pretty? was she going on the public stage, or would she remain an accomplished, semi-royal amateur? No one referred openly to the late Archduke Charles, but the facts that Madame Duboc had been his Canonical wife, that Mrs. Parflete was the one child of their union, kept the whole aristocratic assembly thrilled with the sense of taking part in something as distinguished as a Court function, as exciting as a Court scandal, and as bewildering as a Court conspiracy. A string orchestra—conducted by Strauss himself—played French melodies of the eighteenth century. Would there be any dancing? would she sing? Henriette Duboc had been compared, as a dancer, to La Guimard, said Sir Piers Harding to the Duchess of Lossett. And who was La Guimard? asked the Duchess. And was Mrs. Parflete at all like her mother? And did she bear the extraordinary resemblance, *of which so much had been made*, to Marie Antoinette? Sir Piers felt bound to own that the likeness was remarkable. And this de Hausée—what of him? Had Sir Piers seen the odd announcement, about his name and antecedents, in the *Times*? The Duchess didn't know what to think. It was all so very odd, but most interesting, of course. Was M. de Hausée, by any chance, in the audience? No. Well, perhaps it was better taste on his part to keep away. The bell rang. All eyes turned toward the blue satin curtains; they moved: the lights were lowered; the violins played a languorous air: with a rustle—not unlike that caused by the movement of wings—the curtains were drawn back and disclosed an empty garden. Then, following the stage direction, the Marquise entered "*tristement sur la scène*." The entrance was made quietly, and, for a breathless second, no one realised that the heroine of the evening had at last appeared. Her Grace of Lossett began to fear she felt a little disappointed when, in the nick of time, a great poet, who sat near her, murmured, "Divine." [376]

But at this point we may quote from the *Memoirs* of Lady Julia Babington:—

Mrs. Parflete's personal appearance caused an immediate furore. Many disagreed about her claims to perfect beauty, but these hostile feelings did not last longer than five minutes. She was an extremely pretty woman; rather tall for her slight proportions, but elegant to a surprising degree. The extraordinary charm of her acting, her voice, her countenance, and her accent were delightful. It would have been impossible to display more grace, simplicity, and ingenuousness than she did: she gave several touches of pathos in a manner to make one cry, and to quite enchant all who had taste enough and mind to appreciate her inimitable talent.

And again in the Letters of Charlotte, Lady Pardwicke, we read:—

If Mrs. Parflete can be called handsome, it is certainly a figure de fantasie. She has a clear complexion, is young, tall; her manners are doucereuses, for, besides being a beauty, she has pretensions, I understand, to bel-esprit. The majority of those present were undeniably captivated by her peculiar fascination.

Augustus Barfield has the following remarks in his famous Journal:—

There were no two opinions about the success of the débutante. We had been led to expect a good deal, but fortunately every description proved inaccurate, so, while she utterly failed to realise any single preconceived idea, she had the great advantage of appearing as some one wholly new. Rumour had prepared me equally for a St. Elizabeth, a Mademoiselle Mars, a Marie-Antoinette, a Récamier, or a Sophie Arnould. She resembled none of these ladies—being far more tragic in her nature than the rather sensual Queen of France, and she is [378]

clearly an uncommon individual in her own right. The women will squabble about her looks; the men will have views about her figure: all must agree that her fortune on the stage is assured. A more pleasing performance I never saw. Love, innocence, tenderness, grief, joy, petulance, uncertainty, modesty, despair—every feminine attribute, in fact, showed to admiration in her expressive features. Voice, bewitching. Gestures, exquisite. All, in fact, was truly enjoyable. I would not have missed the evening on any account.

Orange, it is true, had not joined the general company. But Prince d'Alchingen for reasons of his own, however, had offered the young man a seat in the one small box which had a gilded *grille* before it and was so made that it seemed part of the massive decoration.

"You cannot be seen," said the Prince; "I won't tell her that you are present; and I give you my word of honour that I won't tell anybody—not even my wife."

The temptation was irresistible. Robert accepted the invitation, and as he watched the play, it seemed to him that he had never known Brigit till that evening. He had seen her in dreams—yes; and talked to her in dreams, yes; but now at last she lived—a real creature. Lost in the part, she was able to throw aside the self-restraint which had given her always a cold, almost sexless quality. Her face betrayed a hundred changing emotions: the youth, strength, and passion so severely repressed in her own life came out, though still controlled, with full and perfect harmony in her art. It was one of those consummate revelations of temperament which, in silent or inactive lives, never come till the last hours before death—when in one look or one utterance all the time lost and all the long-concealed feelings take their reparation from existence. But with those who may express their true characters through the medium of some creative faculty, the illuminated moment comes at a psychic crisis—not to enforce the irony of death but to demonstrate and intensify the richness of humanity. The knowledge which depends upon suffering, and, in a way, springs from it, is good, yet it must always be incomplete. Happiness has its light also, and in order to get the right explanation of any soul, or to understand the eternal meaning of any situation, one must have had at least a few glad hours, felt the ecstasy of thoughtless joy, drifted a little while with the rushing, unhindered tide. As Robert, behind the *grille*, watched the animated, beautiful girl who seemed to typify the very springtime of the world, he felt he had peered too long at love and life through bars. He would have to break them, get on the other side, and join in the dazzling action. How unreal and far-away seemed all grief, remorse, or anxiety from that brilliant scene! Brigit was laughing, singing, dancing—fulfilling, surely enough, her real vocation. What! at seventeen, was she to sit pale, silent, tearful, and alone? At his age, was he to look on—with a dead heart and unseeing eyes, murmuring words of tame submission to a contemptuous Fate? His whole nature rose up in revolt, and the self he had once abdicated rushed back to him, howling out taunts which were not the less bitter because they were false. Not pausing to wonder whether the present were a profanation of the past, or the past an insipid forecast of the present, he was conscious only that a change—perhaps a terrible change—had taken place in his mind—a change so sudden and so violent that it had paralysed every power of analysis and reflection. Imaginative love—made up of renunciation and spirituality, gave way to the fierce desire to live, to silence the intolerable wisdom of the conscience, and learn folly for a space. He was madly jealous of Castrillon, who gazed into Brigit's eyes and uttered his lines with the most touching air of passionate devotion. She seemed to respond, and, in fact, their joint performance had that delicate, irresistible abandon—apparently unconscious and unpremeditated—which is only possible between two players who are not in love with each other. Where there is actual feeling, there is always a certain awkwardness and want of conviction (partly caused by the inadequacy of the diagram in comparison with the reality), and the charm, so far as art is concerned, is wholly lost. An acted love was the only love possible between Brigit and Castrillon; hence its sincerity on the stage, where, as a merely assumed thing, it harmonised perfectly with its artificial surroundings—the canvas landscape, the painted trees, the mechanical birds, and the sunlight produced by tricks of gauze and gas. But Orange did not stop to consider this. It was enough and too much to see his "sad spirit of the elfin race" completely transformed. Was this the child-like, immature being of their strange visit to Miraflores? That whole episode seemed a kind of phantasy—a Midsummer Night's music—nothing more, perhaps something less. The very title of the play—*The Second Surprise of Love*—carried a mocking significance. Sometimes the soul speaks first, sometimes the senses first influence a life, but the turn, soon or late, must inevitably come for each, and the man or woman, sick of materialism, who begins to suspect that the unseen world and its beauty is an inheritance more lasting and more to be desired than all the vindictive joys of this prison-house, has no such bitterness as the idealist who finds himself brought into thrilling touch with the physical loveliness, the actual enchantment, the undeniable delight of certain things in life. The questions, "What have I missed? What have I lost? What birthright have I renounced?" are bound to make themselves heard. They beat upon the heart like hail upon the sand—and fall buried in the scars they cause. Things of the flesh may and do become dead sea fruit; but things of the spirit often become stale and meaningless also. What is more weary than a tired mind? What joys and labours are more exhausting than those of the intellect, and the intellect only? Does an idle week in summer ever beget more lassitude or such disgust of life as a month—alone with books—in a library? Dissatisfaction and satiety, melancholy and fatigue show as plainly in the pages of à Kempis as they do in Schopenhauer, as they do in Lucretius, as they do in St. Bernard, as they do in Montaigne, in Marcus Aurelius, in Dante, in St. Teresa. They are, indeed, the ever-recurrent cries in human feeling, the ever-recurrent phases in human thought. Uninterrupted contentment was never yet found in any calling or state; the saints were haggard with combats; sleep, the most reposeful state we know, has its fearful sorrows, hideous terrors, pursuing uncertainties. Robert's spirit, stimulated by jealousy, played round these reflections, common enough at all

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times, but, as all common things, overwhelming at the first moment of their complete realisation. The original frame of his mind joined a defiance of formal precedent and an intense openness to every fine pleasure of sense with an impatience of all that makes for secrecy and an abhorrence of the substitutes which are sometimes basely, sometimes madly, accepted in default of true objects. He could not desire the star and find solace in the glow-worm—pursue Isolde and lag by the way with Moll Flanders. It was true that he had resolved to put stars and Isolde alike from his life. It was true that he had bound himself to certain fair ambitions beyond the determinations of calculation and experience. It was true that he had resolved to sacrifice this world to the next. He knew the claims which the world to come has upon us. But did he know the world he was renouncing? How that doubt opened the way to further doubts! Was he a fool for his pains? Was an enfeebling and afflicting of the natural man so necessary to the exaltation of the soul? Was the soul in itself so weak that it could only rest decently in a sick body? Could it only wish for something greater than this earth can give by being artificially saddened?

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Such questions have their answers, but they do not occur very readily to young men hopelessly in love and half out of their wits with jealousy. He might have taken refuge in prayer, but at that moment he did not want to pray. He wanted to think about himself, to be himself throughout the entire reach of his consciousness, to lose himself in the tempest of emotion which seemed to drive out, beat, and shatter every hindrance to its furious sweep. A smouldering fire is for a while got under, and yet by suppression is but thrown in, to spread more widely and deeply than before. So his fatal affection, perhaps pitilessly fought down in the first instance—asserted its power—its power for evil. Not to love was not to live. He was dead while he lived. He could not find peace in an invisible world of which he did not see any more even a shadow round about him. *Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it?* He did not believe that. What miserable scruples to torment, blind, and pollute the soul! Pascal has written that there are thousands who sin without regret, who sin with gladness, who feel no warning and no interior desire not to sin. They doubted, hated, loved, acted, felt, and thought just as they pleased. Perhaps they were not happy, but if they received the punishment of wrongdoing, the wrong at least was committed out of fetters and joyously. It is not until men find themselves assailed by a strong wish that they perceive how very still and very small, all but inaudible, the still, small voice can be. A moment comes when one ceases to think—one wills, and if one is able and the will is sufficiently determined, the purpose is carried into effect. Temptations to steal, to lie, to deceive, to gamble, to excess in drink and the like cannot approach a certain order of mind. But the craving for knowledge and a fuller life—either in a spiritual or the human way—is implanted ineradicably in every soul, and while it may rest inert and seem nullified in a kind of apathy, the craving is there—to be aroused surely enough at some dangerous hour. And of all the dangerous hours in life, the hour of disappointed love is the most critical. Calm spectators of mortal folly who have been satisfactorily married for twenty years and more, who have sons to provide for and daughters to establish, cherish a disdain of love-stories and boast that they have no patience with morbidity. Love—which put them into being and keeps the earth in existence—seems to all such a silly malady peculiar to the sentimental in early youth. So they put the First Cause—in one of its many manifestations—in the waste-paper basket, asking each other what will become of Charles if he cannot find a rich wife, and poor Alice, if she cannot entrap a suitable husband. But there are others who look on life with some hope of understanding it truly, in part, at any rate, and these know, perhaps by experience, perhaps by sympathy, that whereas bodily disturbances may pass away leaving little or no effect upon the general health, all mental tumults are perpetual in their consequences: they never die out entirely, and they live, sometimes with appalling energy, sometimes with gnawing listlessness, to the end of an existence. Robert, in the judgment of his intellect and his senses, had found his ideal. Brigit did not belong to “the despised day of small things”; she was the woman of his imagination—the well-beloved, and having gained her, was he to say—Farewell? It seemed so. Meanwhile, the graceful, swaying dialogue rippled between the players on the stage; the smiling audience, hushed with interest, gazed at the delightful beings before them; the exquisite Marquise had uttered her two last speeches—

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“Je ne croyois pas l'amitié si dangereuse.”

and—

“Je ne me mêle plus de rien!”

Lubin brought the performance to an end by the final utterance—

“Allons de la joie!”

The curtain fell—to rise again a dozen times. Orange did not hear the door of the box being opened. Prince d'Alchingen came in and put a hand on the young man's shoulder.

“Would you like to see her?” he whispered. “I can arrange it. No one need know.”

But the training of a lifetime and constant habits of thought were stronger still than any mood.

“No,” said Robert, shortly, “I won't see her. I must get back to London at once.”

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CHAPTER XXVIII

The Prince looked at him in astonishment.

"You can't get to London to-night," said he; "there are no trains."

"I can walk."

"It is thirty-five miles."

"I am accustomed to long walks."

"At any rate you will have some supper first—in my little breakfast-room. Don't refuse, because I want you to meet Castrillon."

"Castrillon! I should like to meet Castrillon."

"Then I will tell him. You and he can take supper together. He doesn't want to join the big party. He has the artist's detestation of the chattering mob. How well he plays! And what a triumph for—Madame!"

"A great triumph."

"This corridor leads to my tiny cupboard—the merest cupboard! Follow me." They went through several doors and up several small staircases till they reached a small apartment furnished in old blue damask, heavily fringed with tarnished gold and silver decorations.

"A few souvenirs of my hereditary castle in Alberia," explained the Prince; "they relieve my sense of exile." [388]

He walked across the floor and tapped on what appeared to be a portion of the wall.

"We are here," said he.

The secret door was opened, and Castrillon, still wearing his costume as the Chevalier, joined them. If one may believe Prince d'Alchingen's account of this unfortunate meeting, the young men greeted each other with composure. D'Alchingen declares that he studied Orange to the depths of his soul, and he does him the justice to say that he did not make a movement or utter a word which denoted the least emotion. There was not any sort of alteration in his countenance, and he led the conversation with a tranquillity and a gaiety really enchanting. When the supper was served, His Excellency had no hesitation in leaving the rivals together—so convinced was he that they would remain on good terms.

"M. de Castrillon," said Orange, when the Prince had gone, "I cannot sit down at supper with you. We have to settle an old score."

Castrillon bowed:

"I am here to learn your wishes. I have heard from several sources that you wished to see me. If you have anything to say, pray say it quickly, because—I have an appointment with Mrs. Parflete." [389]

"Will you do me the favour to leave that lady's name out of the discussion?"

"I see no reason why I should do you favours, M. de Hausée. But I am quite ready to atone for my indifference by any course of action which could satisfy the most scrupulous delicacy."

"There is but one course of action open to us."

"I shall be happy to have the honour of meeting you on your own terms. But," he added, contemptuously, "we are both wasting our time over a worthless woman. She was seen leaving your lodgings on Wednesday last. I have just heard this. And I received, before the play began this evening, a letter from her fixing a *rendez-vous* for two o'clock. If you doubt me I can show you the letter. I am as much disappointed as you are. She has fooled us both. Before God I could have sworn she was a religious and modest woman."

His chagrin was so genuine that it was impossible to doubt his good faith.

"It is a lie," said Orange; "she was never at my lodgings."

"I don't call *you* a liar, M. de Hausée, but I can prove my words, whereas it might be difficult to prove yours. I can show you the letter."

"She never wrote it."

Castrillon sat on the edge of the table, and poured out some wine.

"That is what I said," he replied, "when I read it. So long as we are going to fight, let it be because we hate each other, and not because we have both been deceived by the same prude." [390]

"In other words," said Orange, quietly, "you wish to drive a good bargain, knowing that whether you utter one insult or twenty, I can but fight you once."

"A *l'outrance*, however," answered Castrillon, dipping a biscuit into the glass.

"Yes, *à l'outrance*."

"This being the case, let me tell you a few of my ideas. You find life very hard. I find it altogether

amusing. I don't love a woman the less when I cease to honour her. I don't honour a man the less when I detest him. If you should kill me, M. de Hausée, it will be the most respectable occurrence in my immortality. But if I should kill you, it will be the vile conclusion of an exemplary career."

"Your conversation is most entertaining, Monsieur. I am, unhappily, in no mood to listen to it. May I ask you to meet me to-morrow with your second at three o'clock at Calais? We can then go on to Dunkerque and settle this difference."

"I am perfectly agreeable."

They arranged a few more details and parted. The interview, which took place in French, is not easily reproduced in English. Orange wrote one account of the scene, and Castrillon confided another to Prince d'Alchingen, and the above is probably as nearly as possible a faithful description of what actually passed.

Robert left Hadley Lodge, and plunged through the darkness toward London. He reached Vigo Street about seven o'clock in the morning. It was Sunday, and the streets were silent. He let himself into the house with a latch-key, and groped his way up the creaking unlit staircase. On entering his room, the draught between the open window and the door set all his papers whirling from his writing-table, and, by a strange accident, dislodged his crucifix from its nail. It fell to the ground, and when he picked it up, the small Figure was broken. This accident seemed an ill omen, but he put it from his thoughts, and scrawled a hasty letter to Charles Aumerle, asking him to be his second. This he delivered himself at Aumerle's chambers in St. James's Place, saying that he would call for an answer at nine. But Aumerle, ever fond of adventures, was at Vigo Street at half-past eight. [391]

"If you are bent upon it," said he, "I will do everything in my power to see it through. I think you are quite right. Every one will say the same."

The two left for Calais by the first boat that morning. Castrillon, and Isidore, and a young Frenchman, M. de Lamoignon, were on board also. At Calais the two seconds conferred, and the duel was arranged to take place in a field near Dunkerque on the following morning. On the following morning, the four men met. The combatants were placed at fifteen paces from each other. They fired simultaneously and Castrillon fell—mortally wounded.

CHAPTER XXIX

Brigit returned on Monday to Pensée at Curzon Street. It was the anniversary of Lord Fitz Rewes's death. The two women went to Catesby, where they visited his grave together, prayed together, and, in the quiet evening, sat by the library fire. [392]

"This is a great contrast for you after all the excitement on Saturday night," said Pensée. "You are full of surprises, Brigit. Few young girls, having made such a brilliant success, would care to spend their time with poor, dull women like me. They would naturally wish to enjoy the triumph."

Brigit's eyes filled with tears.

"I know what you mean, *cher coeur*," she answered, "but there are no triumphs for any artist. We suffer and we work—sometimes we are able to please. But we suffer and work because we must; whereas we please by the merest accident."

"That is true, no doubt. One might as well speak of a successful saint as a successful artist. Every saint is not canonized, and every artist is not praised. But surely appreciation is a help." [393]

"Yes, dearest; and I am grateful for it. And it gives encouragement to one's friends!"

"Let us suppose that they had not cared for your acting, dear child. What then?"

"I should have known that it was my vocation just the same. Don't believe that I shan't have my full share of doubts and struggles. This little first step makes me the more anxious about my next."

The older woman looked at her, and sighed deeply.

"You are too young to know life so well! I am sure you have suffered more severely than any of us—who say more and cry more. Your face has changed a good deal in the last day or two. In one way, it isn't so pretty as it was."

"No one can look quite so plain as I can look, Pensée," she answered, laughing.

"Let me finish what I had in my mind! You are not so pretty—not so much like a picture. But when I see you now, I don't think about your features at all. I watch your expressions—they suggest the whole world to me—all the things I have thought and felt. Rachel's face is like that. I am sure now that you were meant to be an actress. I have been very stupid. How I wish I understood you better, and could be more of a friend. I don't understand Robert entirely. Do you?"

"Yes, I understand him."

"I wonder how you came to love each other. I suppose it happened for the best. But it seems such a pity"—she paused and then repeated the words—"it seems such a pity that all doesn't come right—in the old-fashioned way."

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"It has come right, dear," said Brigit; "perfectly right."

"You try to think so."

"I know it. His father sinned, and my father sinned. We were born for unhappiness. Unhappiness and misgivings are in our very blood."

"But how unjust!"

"No, dearest, on the contrary, it is strict justice. The laws of the universe are immutable. You might as well ask that fire should only burn sometimes—that it may be water, or air, or earth to suit sentimental occasions."

"I don't like to see you so sensible—it's—it's *unlikely*."

Brigit smiled at the word—a favourite one with Pensée when persons and events differed from the serene, unreasoned fiction which she called her experience.

"How can you call anything unlikely?" asked the girl. "I ought never to have been born at all, and Life has made no provision for me. She is boisterous and homely—like a housekeeper at an inn. She doesn't know me, and she has prepared no room for me. But I may rest on the staircase—that's under shelter at least."

"What whimsical ideas, darling!"

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"Ah, to feel as I feel, you must have had my parents. You mustn't suppose that I woke up one morning and saw the reason for all my troubles. The reason did not come as though it were the sun shining into the room. Oh, no! I found no answer for a long, long time. But I feel it now. My father could not take me into his world, and my mother's world—I could not take. They wished to know that I was protected, so they found some one who knew the story, and knew both worlds. I was grateful, because I didn't understand. And when I understood I was still grateful, but I couldn't accept the terms. My marriage was not so terrible as many marriages. Yet it was terrible enough. Don't let us talk of it, Pensée. It is hopeless to quarrel with logic. Science is calm—as calm as the hills."

"And Robert?" said the older woman. "What about Robert?"

"His father was a Dominican. The Church will have her own again. Be quite sure of that!"

*"Thy justice is like the great mountains.
Thy judgments are a great deep."*

In God's way, all will come right. Every debt must be paid."

Although they had arranged to journey back to London the following day, the woods and gardens looked so fair, the peace of that house was so great, that they lingered there till Wednesday. Brigit was unusually silent. She sat for hours at the library window looking across the Channel toward France, her countenance drawn and white, all its loveliness departed.

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Once she spoke—

"I know that Robert is in sorrow."

"Are you anxious? Shall I write?" asked Pensée, secretly troubled also.

"No, I am not anxious. There is sorrow, but I am not anxious."

Her room adjoined Pensée's, and, in the night, Pensée, sleepless, heard her walking to and fro, with even steps, till sunrise. When they met in the morning, Brigit seemed to have aged by ten years. Her youth returned, but the character of her face had altered for ever. She was never called pretty again. It was said that she varied and depended wholly on her moods. She could make herself anything, but nature had given her little more than a pair of eyes, a nose, and a mouth—indifferent good. Lady Fitz Rewes was appalled at the transformation. Remembering stories of the last dreadful touches of consumption, she feared for the girl's health. "She will die before long," she thought. But death can occur more than once in one life. The passing away of every strong emotion means a burial and a grave, a change, and a resurrection. The tearful, dusty, fiery, airy process must be endured seventy times seven and more, and more again—from everlasting to everlasting. And the cause is nothing, the motives are nothing, the great, great affliction and the child's little woe pass alike through the Process—for the Process belongs to the eternal law, whereas the rest is of the heart's capacity.

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The way to the city—through the beautiful south of England, beautiful at all seasons of the year and sad also at all seasons—brought something which resembled calm to both their minds. Dwellings closely packed together destroy, or disturb, the finer vision of the grandeur, sternness, and depth of life. At Catesby, the solitude and the waves exercised their power over the spirit, diverting it from trivial speculations to awe and wonder. There, where the unseen could move freely and the invisible manifest itself on the perpetual rocks, the towering trees, the still green fields, and the vast acres of the sea, one could hear the dreaming prophet proclaim the burden of

the Lord; and the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the mill-stones and the light of the candle mattered not. But the kingdom of all the worlds—the worlds and habitations not made with hands—rose up as the real theatre of man's destiny and the fit measure of his achievements. It is that sense of the eternity of consequences—and that sense only—which can satisfy the human heart. Time is too short, this planet is too small, and this mortal body is too weak for the surging thoughts, the unintelligible desires of the soul. Nothing less than infinity can hallow emotions: their passingness—which seems the rule in the fever and turmoil of city life—is not their abatement but their degradation. Change they must, but perish utterly they may not.

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The women travellers, as the lights of the capital grew more numerous, and the roar of the traffic louder and more constant, drew back within themselves, assuming, unconsciously, the outward bearing—fatigued, sceptical, and self-distrustful—of the town-bred. When they reached Curzon Street, the two heaps of letters, the telegrams and cards on the hall-table symbolised crudely enough the practical side of daily affairs. One name—an unknown one—among the many engraved on the white scraps caught Brigit's attention at once:

The Rev. J. M. Foster.

"That gentleman is a priest, Madam," said the butler; "he will call again this evening. I told him that we expected you and her Ladyship about seven."

For some reason she felt alarmed. All that day and the night before she had been agitated by an inexplicable dread of strange tidings. She went to her room, but, without removing her travelling cloak or her hat, she sat down on the edge of her bed, waiting for some summons. Presently it came. Father Foster was in the library with Lady Fitz Rewes. Would Mrs. Parflete see him? She went down, and Pensée stood watching for her at the open door.

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"My poor child!" she said, with a sob in her voice, as she drew Brigit into the room. "My poor child," she repeated, "Father Foster has come to tell us that—that Mr. Parflete died last night."

The priest stepped forward with the decision, and also the stern kindness, of those accustomed to break hard messages.

"He was injured in a quarrel, and died from the effect of the wound. He declined to give any particulars of the affair, and I fear we must call it a mystery. He asked me to say that his last words to you were these: *Amate da cui male aveste*—Love those from whom ye have had evil."

He looked at her compassionately as he spoke, wondering, no doubt, how great the evil had been.

"Can I go to him?" asked Brigit; "where is he?"

"Where he died—in his room at the hotel."

"I will go with you," said Pensée. She held Brigit's hand, and exchanged a long glance with Father Foster.

"Did you say," she asked, "that he left any letters or papers?"

"He destroyed all his papers, but he has left one letter addressed to you. He wished me to say, in the presence of Mrs. Parflete, that this had reference to some false report about her visiting Mr. Orange's lodgings. Mr. Parflete saw the lady who went to Vigo Street, and he did not know who she was. One thing, however, he did know: he had never seen her before."

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Brigit inclined her head, but remained motionless, where she first halted when she entered the room.

"Did he die in pain?" she asked.

"I am afraid he suffered greatly."

"Was his mind at peace?"

"I believe so—from my heart."

"He had less to fear from God than man."

"The justice of God is severe," said the priest, "but He can never make mistakes. The hardest cruelties in this life are the mistakes which we commit in judging others—perhaps in judging ourselves."

"The carriage is at the door," whispered Pensée, touching Brigit's arm. "Shall we go?"

Nothing was said during the drive to the hotel near Covent Garden. Brigit sat with closed eyes and folded hands while Lady Fitz Rewes, lost in thought, stared out of the window. At last the horses stopped.

"This is the place," said Father Foster.

A large gas-lamp hung over the entrance, and two Swiss waiters, with forced solemnity, ushered the party through the hall and up the staircase. They tapped at a door, listened, from force of habit, for an answer which never came, and then turned the handle. Parflete's bed had been moved to the centre of the room. There was a table covered with a white cloth, on which four

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candles burnt. By the window there was a chair littered with illustrated newspapers.

"The nurse has just gone down to his supper," explained one of the waiters, "but *le mort est bien convenable*."

The dead man had been dressed in a rose-silk shirt embroidered with forget-me-nots. Upon his crossed arms lay a small ivory crucifix. In place of his wig he wore a black velvet skull-cap. The face was yellow: the features seemed set in a defiant, ironical smile. Hardship, terror, remorse, and physical agony had left their terrible scars upon his countenance.

Brigit, overcome at the sight of these awful changes, fell weeping on Pensée's shoulder.

"Thank God!" she whispered, "he has no more to fear from men."

When she grew calmer, she knelt down by the body, and told them that she would watch there that night.

"Madness!" exclaimed Lady Fitz Rewes.

"No, no! I wish to do it."

The priest stated a few objections, but she remained firm in her resolve.

"He was my father's friend," she said, quietly.

They both noticed that she never once referred to Parflete as her husband.

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"If you stay, Brigit, I too will stay," said Pensée.

"That, dearest, you must decide for yourself. In any case, I cannot leave him. Tell the nurse not to come back. And let me be alone here for a little while."

Lady Fitz Rewes and Father Foster went downstairs to the coffee-room, and made a pretence of eating dinner. The two talked about the deplorable marriage, the Orange affair, Brigit's talents. Of course, she was very young. But Rachel—the great Rachel—made her first triumph at seventeen.

"One doesn't like to say it," observed Pensée, "but this death seems providential. If she marries Orange, she will give up the stage. Poor child! At last it really looks as though she might be happy—like other people."

"Like other people," repeated the priest, mechanically.

"I must send word to my housekeeper that I intend to remain here all night. And I should like our letters—I had no time to look at them."

A messenger was despatched, and they resumed their former conversation.

"I am afraid," said Pensée, "that poor Mr. Parflete was dreadfully wicked."

The priest sighed, and made some remarks about the dead man's intellectual brilliancy:

"He had great learning."

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"Tell me, Father, with all your experience, do you understand life?" asked Pensée, abruptly.

"Let me take refuge in a quotation—

*Justice divine
Mends not her slowest pace for pray'rs or cries.'*

I can understand that at least," answered the priest.

"How odd that you should speak of justice. Brigit was talking in the same strain only yesterday. It's a gloomy strain—for a young girl."

"I don't think so. One shouldn't sentimentalise. Life goes on, it doesn't halt: it's a constant development. I haven't much patience with——"

He stopped short.

"Pray finish the sentence."

"Well, I haven't much patience with those who want to linger, and look back, and cheat time. One must get along."

Pensée felt annoyed, and began to talk coldly about the housing of the poor, and winters which she had spent in Florence.

"Here are your letters," exclaimed her companion suddenly.

She turned them over with languid interest, murmuring unconsciously to herself the names of her correspondents.

"From dear Ethel. Why is she in Edinburgh? I hope her father isn't ill again. Alice. Uncle. Mrs. Lanark. Mary Butler. Prince d'Alchingen. That tiresome Miss Bates. Mr. Seward." She paused

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and flushed deeply. "Robert."

Then she turned to Father Foster with shining eyes.

"This letter," said she, "is from Mr. Orange. Don't you admire his handwriting?"

"A beautiful hand, certainly."

"I wonder what he has to say, and why he is abroad. Isn't that a foreign stamp?"

"The post-mark is Paris."

"So it is. Will you excuse me if I read it."

She broke the seal, and read the contents, while every vestige of colour left her face.

"I can't make it out," she said; "there must be another letter for Brigit. Will you look?"

He untied the packet, and recognised presently Orange's handwriting on an envelope.

"You seem rather displeased," said Pensée; "you think this is all very strange. It—it isn't a common case."

"No case is common."

"Well, you must help me to decide whether I ought to give her this letter at once. I can't take so much responsibility."

"Neither can I. She is a perfectly free woman now, at any rate."

He did not approve of the situation, and he made no attempt to conceal his feelings. His face became set. Pensée thought she detected a certain reprimand in the very tone of his voice.

"It isn't a common case," she repeated again. "He says he is on his way to Rome—to the Jesuits—for a long Retreat, if they will take him. If he knew—what has happened—he might change his mind." [405]

"What! you would have him turn back?"

"Oh, don't be so hard."

"I am not hard," he added more gently. "But would this woman, if she really loved him, wish him to turn back? And, if there is anything in him, could he ever be happy in any stopping short of the fullest renunciation—once resolved on that renunciation?"

"Ah, don't put it that way to her. She has had so much trouble already. Your Church seems so selfish. Forgive me, but I do resent these celibate views. They are unnatural."

"I shan't interfere. Take her the letter by all means. She must decide for herself."

Pensée rose from the table, and went up the stairs to the room where Brigit still knelt by Parflete's dead body.

"Dearest," said Lady Fitz Rewes, "I think you ought to read this letter. I have had one also. Robert thinks of taking a great step, and perhaps——"

Her glance met Brigit's.

"No," said Brigit, under her breath: "no."

Then, with trembling hands, she read the letter once, twice, three times.

"Say something," said Pensée, touching her. "Say something, Brigit." [406]

She smiled and held the letter to the candle flame. It caught fire and burnt away quickly while she held it.

"Mind your hand—it will catch your hand."

"I don't feel it," said Brigit. She bore the scar of that burn always.

"Say something," implored Pensée.

"He is on his way to Rome. He asks me not to write to him. Castrillon is dying. They fought a duel."

"But of course you will write—now. You must write."

"Hasn't my love done harm enough already? I will never see him again. I shall never write to him again."

"You can't mean that. You can't realise what you are saying. People will like him all the better for fighting Castrillon."

"Oh, it isn't the duel, Pensée. He sees his way clearly. He has always tried not to see it. I, too, have tried not to see it. But all that is at an end now."

"And he will renounce his career."

"Everything! Everything!"

Pensée threw up her hands, and left the room. Father Foster was standing under a gas-jet at the end of the corridor reading his office. He looked at Lady Fitz Rewes.

"She won't stand in his way?" he asked quietly.

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"She won't stand in his way," she answered. "I hope you realise what that means—to her."

"I hope I can realise what it means to both of them," said he.

CHAPTER XXX

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In 1879, a distinguished author who was engaged in writing a history of the Catholic Movement in England, begged Mr. Disraeli, then Earl of Beaconsfield, for some particulars, not generally known, of Robert Orange's life.

He replied as follows:—

HUGHENDEN MANOR, *Nov. 28, 1879.*

MY DEAR F.,—You ask me for an estimate of Monsignor Orange. Questions are always easy. Let me offer you facts in return. The Castrillon duel was a nine days' wonder—much discussed and soon forgotten. Castrillon left a letter with his second, M. de Lamoignon, to the effect that he had offered Orange "intolerable insults" which "no man of honour" could have suffered. Mrs. Parflete's name did not transpire, but Prince d'Alchingen and others gave speculation no industry on the matter. We were at no loss to know the real cause of the quarrel. Orange applied for the Chiltern Hundreds and went into strict retreat for six months. During that time he saw no friends, wrote no letters, read none. I remember his conduct was severely criticised, because the death of Parflete opened out other possibilities of action. He was not a man, however, whom one could order to be this, that, or the other; still less could one reproach him for not being this, that, or the other. It was his faith to believe that salvation rests on the negation and renunciation of personality. He pushed this to the complete suppression of his Will, tenderly considered. I need not detain you on the familiar dogmas of Christianity with regard to the reign of nature and the reign of grace. Your view may be expressed thus:—

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"Puis-qu'il aime à périr, je consens qu'il périsse,

and you will think that Orange said of Mrs. Parflete, as Polyucte of his wife:—

*"Je ne regarde Pauline
Que comme un obstacle à mon bien."*

This would be an injustice. Orange was, to me, a deeply interesting character. I saw little of him after he entered the priesthood, but his writings, his sermons, and the actual work he accomplished proved conclusively enough that he was right in following—and we were wrong in opposing—his true vocation. The Church received her own again. Rome did not smile at him at first. A de Hausée, however, never yet tapped long at any gate. The family—which had been stirred to fury by his father's trespass—welcomed the son as a prodigal manqué. His aunt, the Princess Varese, left him half of her large fortune. He lived himself in great seclusion and simplicity, and died, as you are aware, of over-work last year. The one friend he corresponded with and occasionally saw was Lady Fitz Rewes. Sara de Treverell did not marry the Duke of Marshire, but three years before Orange's death she took the veil, and is now a Carmelite nun. Many people were amazed at this, but I was not. Mrs. Parflete, Orange never saw again after the night of her performance at Prince d'Alchingen's. Her career continues. From time to time a rumour reaches me that she is about to marry a nobleman, an author, her manager, or an American millionaire. Quite a mistake. She, too, is a visionary, and, I should say, respectable. If you have not seen her act, seize the first opportunity. If you think of writing more than the merest sketch of Orange's strange career, may I suggest the following motto from the *Purgatorio*?—

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"Cast down the seed of weeping and attend."

Yours very sincerely, my dear F.,
BEACONSFIELD.

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