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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LOVE'S USURIES \*\*\*

## *Love's Usuries*

BY

**LOUIS CRESWICKE**

*Author of "Magnetism and Mystery"*

London  
HENRY J. DRANE  
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SALISBURY SQUARE, FLEET STREET, E.C.

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TO

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**H. F. PREVOST BATTERSBY,**

IN APPRECIATION  
OF MUCH GOOD FELLOWSHIP.

---

Is happiness courted in vain?  
A will o' the wisp—nothing more?  
A bubble? a dream? a refrain?  
Is happiness courted in vain  
A certain begetter of pain—  
A fruit with an asp at the core?  
Is happiness courted in vain  
A will o' the wisp—Nothing more!

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## LOVES USURIES.

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### Love's Usuries.

"The star of love is a flower—a deathless token,  
That grows beside the gate of unseen things."

Among friends, parting for a lengthy spell has its disadvantages. They age in character and physique, and after the reconnoitre there is a pathetic consciousness of the grudging confessions which time has inscribed on the monumental palimpsest. My meeting with Bentham after a severance of years was bleak with this pathos. But he was gay as ever, and better dressed than he used to be in the old art school days, with a self-respecting adjustment of hat and necktie that had been unknown in Bohemia; for he was no longer a boy, but a man, and a noted one, and fortune had stroked him into sleekness. The gender of success must be feminine: she is so capricious. Hitherto her smiles have been for veterans grown hoary in doing; now she opens her arms for youngsters grown great merely by daring. Bentham, it must be owned, had dared uncommonly well, and success had pillowed his head in her lap while she twined the bay with her fingers. But lines round his mouth and fatigued cynicism on the eyelids betrayed the march of years, and, more, the thinker, who, like most thinkers, plumbs to exhaustion in a bottomless pit. For all that he was excellent company. On his walls hung innumerable trophies of foreign travel and unique specimens of his own art-bent and with these, by gesture or by anecdote, he gave an unconscious synopsis of the skipped pages in our friendship's volume.

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"This," he said, "is the original of 'Earth's Fair Daughters,' the canvas that brought me to the front; and here"—handing an album—"is the presentment of my benefactress."

"Benefactress?" I queried.

"Yes. I don't attempt to pad you with the social tarra-diddle that genius finds nuggets on the surface of the diggings. Fame was due to myself, and fortune to Mrs Brune—a dear old creature who bought my pictures with a persistence worthy a better cause. She died, leaving me her sole heir."

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"And hence these travels?"

"Yes. When I lost sight of you in Paris I hewed a new route to notice. I played at being successful, bought my own pictures through dealers—*incog.*, of course—at enormous prices. That tickled the ears of the Press."

"But how about commission?"

"Oh, the dealers earned it, and my money was well invested. I became talked about. The public knew nothing of my talent, and people love to talk of what they understand least."

"You belittle yourself, Bentham. You felt your work was sound—that you were bound to become great."

"True; otherwise I could not have stooped to play the charlatan. Without it my work might as well have been rotten for all the public could judge. Charlatanism is the only 'open sesame' to the world's cave, once you get inside you may be as honest as you please. All is fair in love or art or war, and there is a consolation in knowing that one's aim is Jesuitical, and not merely base. Had it not been for Mrs Brune—good soul—and the gambling instinct, I might be still, like you and Grey's 'gem of purest ray serene,' flashing my facets in the desert."

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From Mrs Brune's portrait he devolved on one or two others of persons distinguished in the art sphere, whose autographs, with cordial or extravagant expressions of devotion, scrambled octopus-wise over the card.

"And here," he said, handling an album bound in chicken skin, adorned with the grace of Watteau's rurality—"here are my Flower Martyrs."

"What does that mean?" asked I, knowing him for an eccentric of eccentrics.

"Don't you remember the quotation, 'Butchered to make a Roman holiday?' It struck me once I should like to make an index of the flower lives that had been sacrificed on the Altar of Selfishness."

"And this is the index?"

"No, not exactly. I soon tired of the experiment, for there was such wholesale murder it was impossible to keep pace with it. I then confined myself to the martyrs, the veritable martyrs broken on the rack of human emotion. Here are a few—with remarks and dates—they have each a little history of love or heroism or——" he shuffled for a term.

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"Lunacy," I offered.

"Yes, that is the best word. They convey little histories of lunacy—my own and others."

"May I inspect them?"

"You may," he conceded, throwing himself into an arm-chair and looking over his elbow at the open page. "First," he said, "some rose leaves." He coughed slightly, and stirred the fire with caution, as though it shaped some panorama he feared to disarrange. Then he began his story:—

"First some rose leaves shaken into the finger-glass of a great actress—you know Lalage?—on the night when all Paris was intoxicated by her. It was my supper, and she honoured me. Many men would gladly have been that rose—to lay down its life for a touch of her finger-tips: several have parted with all that life holds dear for less than that."

He struck a match and lit a cigarette, throwing the case to me, and then proceeded:—

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"The bowls were fragrant with attar, and those petals like fairy boats skimmed over the scented surface of the water. They seemed very red then, but they are faded enough now."

He again stared at the fire as though to assist his memory by its pictures.

"Lalage is a great artist, and like all great artists her contact brings completeness and a sense of fulfilment to everything—colour, purpose, expression. I had just heard her in the *role* of Chimene, in the wonderful scene when, not daring to avow her love for Rodrigue, she should have uttered '*Va-je ne te hais point*,' and where she merely stood with moving lips—powerless to articulate from the suppressed immensity of her passion. We, of the audience, by one consent seemed to shiver—to shudder as though a polar breeze had swept over the tropic night—so tragic, so real, so ardent, this unspeakable, this unspoken confession."

"And what of Mons. Redan?" I questioned.

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"The Count that turned actor? He played the part of Rodrigue, and he told me afterwards that there were times when a sob would choke him as he listened."

"And Redan loved her?"

"Loved? Oh, pale, anæmic, wan-complexioned word to run in leash with Redan. He loved her so much that he was willing to barter name, possessions, career for the warmth of her lips."

"And she?"

"And she——" he said, suddenly disturbing his fire panorama with a dash of the poker. "Well, she took them."

There was silence for a moment or two as I turned the page—silence that was accentuated by the falling ash, which dropped white and weightless like the thousand lives that sink daily to dust exhausted with hope deferred. Then he eyed the vegetable mass that faced me.

"A camellia," he explained, "crushed and brown. It was plucked from the dead breast of a woman. It was the solitary witness of the last act of a tragedy. The Prince K. was more than a kind patron—an almost friend to me. He valued my apprehension of art, and shadowed me from the hour I first began to paint little Gretchen carrying her father's cobbings to their owners. He bought the picture, and ceaselessly employed me to make sketches of her in some way or another—as a queen—as a boy—as a *danseuse*. He loved to see her in all disguises, for she had the true model's faculty for lending herself to, and developing every pose. Then came the question of marriage—it is inevitable when a man meets a girl with eyes like altar lights, clear and holy beacons of God. Marriage, between a prince of the blood and the child of a shoemaker!"

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Bentham gave vent to a low laugh, which was quite devoid of merriment. It is the trick of those who spend their lives in plumbing the unfathomable; it translates the meagreness and vacuity of their lore.

"Of course the family was outraged," he went on; "his mother appealed, grovelled on her knees, so it is said, and in the end he gave way. He agreed to part from his beloved. But he asked that she might sit for me, and would sometimes muse for hours over the latest travail of my brush. Then he became engaged to the Countess Dahlic—there is no accounting for the moral weakness

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of men under family pressure—and the wedding day was fixed. All this time he had kept his word. He had never spoken to or seen Gretchen, and she, poor child, was dying—yes, dying slowly—not as we die, but fading like twilight, imperceptibly, fainting like high purpose, blighted by the coarse breath of the million."

He knocked the end off his cigarette and stared for a while at the gas-smoked ceiling.

"Then—one day when the marriage was close at hand, when flags hung from the housetops and garlands across the streets, there was a stir in the house of the cobbler. Gretchen had been sitting to me as a Spanish maid in a mantilla, with a camellia in her hair and on her chest. Dressed so, she was found locked in the arms of the Prince. Both were dead—and the camellia was crushed to brown as you see. It came into my possession with the lace which belonged to me—an art property that is now too entangled with the human and with the divine ever to be used lightly again."

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"A sad story," I sighed, turning the leaf. "Poor child, so young and pretty and——"

"Good," he added. "It is astonishing to calculate the amount of virtue which lurks about unlabelled by the wedding ring."

---

"That," he said, turning over a fresh page, "was once a bunch of violets; it should have belonged to Jacquaine."

"Who was Jacquaine?"

"She was a romantic creature, full of music and passionate inspiration; but she had one fault, that of inventing ideals. Don't you find that most women come to grief over this pastime?"

He scarcely demanded a reply, but went on as though thinking aloud.

"She made a deity of her husband, who was a clever 'cellist, but merely a man. When he became dazzled with a vulgar, opulent, overblown person, Jacquaine would not view it as a temporary fascination. Her soul was not adapted to the analysis of triviality. She ran away from him. Husband-like, he was too proud or pig-headed—I won't venture to decide which—to chase her. Meanwhile, with the perversity of woman, she pined for him, and haunted every concert room to hear the voice of his art. By degrees the very intensity of her soul's longing seemed to creep into his hands and sob its despair through his fingers. His technical skill came forth through a halo, as though crowned with the fire of her thought which surrounded and encompassed it. Of course, the world saw but the amplification of his artistic faculty, and his fortune was made. Then a beautiful charmer metaphorically wiped away his tears, for he had yearned for his wife in the enigmatical fashion of weak creatures who prefer to morally gamble and deplore their losses rather than save. Jacquaine became poor as well as sorrowful; she pined for her husband's love, but whenever she would have craved it, other women courted him. Her talent waned as his expanded. At this juncture Broton, the millionaire, who had always admired her, gave a big supper to Bohemia, leaving her husband out. The entertainment was mightily enjoyable, for Broton's wine was sound and his guests witty. When the fun was fast and furious I happened to cross a drawing-room in search of brandy and seltzer. Not a soul was there, but on the verandah I spotted our host and Jacquaine. The earnestness of his expression and pose were a contrast to his usual stolidity and to her apparently callous mood. He was offering to her what showed like a bunch of violets enfolded in a note. For the moment I fancied she had given acceptance, but suddenly she sprang from the chair, threw the bouquet and paper on the floor, and ruthlessly ground her heel into them. Then she stalked away—he following and remonstrating."

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"What happened?"

"Well, in my zest for flower history I leapt forward to rescue this little bouquet and found that which I imagined to be a note was in fact a cheque for £8000."

"Signed by him?"

"Yes; made payable to bearer."

"What did you do?"

"What I knew she would have desired. I enclosed it in an envelope addressed to him and left it before daybreak at his own house."

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"Without a word?"

"Without a word."

"And this is the bouquet?"

"Yes. It is the only souvenir I have of one who was dear to me. Whether I loved because I pitied or pitied because I loved I cannot say. There are some riddles which no one can solve."

"You never tried?"

"No. She was a noble woman, and her husband, too, was a decent fellow, as far as men go. They

were admirably fitted by nature for each other, but matrimony dislocated them. That is another of the riddles that frustrate us."

To avert further comment Bentham folded the page and lounged deeper into his chair, as though overcome by fatigue.

Presently he resumed.

"That is a pansy. It was pressed in a book. It marked the place. We read the poem together, she and I, that creature of warm wax pulsating with childish naivetes and provoking contrariety. We read it together in the orange gardens of the hotel looking out over a green transparency of Mediterranean. I wonder if the scent of orange blossom, warmed by the breath of the sea, is an intoxicant, if it soaks in at the pores and quickens the veins to madness? Mine never seemed so palpitating with delirium as in those days with her by my side, and the free heavens and ocean for her setting. Yet she was ready to leave me without changing the indefinitude which always accompanied her words and actions, to leave me on the morrow—for I was anchored to a studio and some commissions to which I was pledged. But though she had a certain prosaic flippancy of speech which spelt discouragement, my heart refused a literal translation of her idiom. On the last day I determined to sound her, and subtly contrived to wrest her attention with this poem. We read it together. Her soft cheek neared mine with a downy magnetism, and vagrant fibrils of tawny hair danced with the wind against my ear. After the second verse I placed this pansy as a mile-stone to colour our travels on the open page. She assisted me to flatten the curling leaves, and my huge hand extinguished her tiny one. Then I whispered—oh, never mind what I whispered—it was a line of nature that the artistic reserve of the poet had omitted. She closed the book and covered her face with her hands to hide the trouble and the tears which puckered it. I made a nest for her in my arms, but she fluttered free out into the orange orchards and so to the house. All day I wandered about sore and sulky. At night I tried to see her, and was informed she was ill. On the morrow I was startled to find she had gone with her friends by the early train."

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"And did you not hear from her?"

"Yes, she left a letter behind; I should like to show it you—to see what you make of it."

He rose and from his bureau extracted a note; then he resumed his seat and tossed me the almost illegible scrawl:—

DEAR LIONEL,—All this time I have been too blessed—too supremely happy to face the truth. You do not know my real name nor my grievous history, and the more I love and honour you the harder becomes the revelation. I can endure it no more—so good-bye.

"And was that all?"

"Absolutely. I pressed the pansy in the poem, and vowed—such vows are cheap—never to trust a woman again. But, after all, what claim have we to view our love as a priceless gift when we invariably demand cent. per cent. in kind? I have argued this out with myself, and realise that I was her debtor, I was first an artist whom she had patronised and then—a man whom she had —"

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"Well?"

"I was going to say—ennobled. Don't you think there are some women who, by power of faith, transmute even clay-footed idols into gold?"

I shook my head and prepared to turn over the leaf, but he made as though to remove the book.

"That last one is a marguerite. It tells a very bald narrative—just a common instance of man's blockheadedness and Fate's topsy-turvydom."

Bentham threw aside his cigarette and closed his eyes. He was looking worn and old.

"I think I have told you all," he continued presently, "except about these petals. They were gathered from the ground as her fingers shredded them to discover whether I loved her *passionement* or *pas du tout*."

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"The same person?"

"No, another; she was what is called a coquette—an innocent girl baby, who played with men's hearts as children probe sawdust dolls—from a spirit of inquiry. For some silly wager she flirted with a man staying in the hotel, an uncouth provincial clown whom I ignored. But it maddened me. I started for the States to accept a commission that had been offered—that my love for her had held in the balance—and—and I never saw her alive again."

There was a long pause, during which the clock on the chimney ticked its forever—never—without remorse. Gradually the synopsis became more complete, for I could trace the outlines of the buried hours in Bentham's grey, impassive face. Then he went on as though soliloquising:—

"Now I return to it, England seems wider—its population smaller. It is as if we lived in a great silence like that in the rarified atmosphere of Swiss heights. Yet the streets are in a turmoil. Beaming girls and bedizened harridans flaunt in the Row, carriages roll, and polite and impolite jostle each other for gain or gaiety. There are great singers at the Opera, great pictures on the

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Line, great festivities everywhere. There is a *frou-frou* of silken skirts, with the scent and the laughter of happy women round and about me, from dawn till nightfall. Yet my soul shivers somewhere outside. Shivers"—he repeated, shrinking into his coat as though midsummer were March—"Why is it? I have lived and loved and—as you know—recovered, but now—oh, Louis, is there anything so mutely desolate as fresh spade prints on a grassless grave?"

---

## A Quaint Elopement

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"Ah! little sweetheart, the romance  
Of life, with all its change and chance,  
Is but a sealed book to thee."

It took Ralph Hilyard over twelve hours to journey from Southampton to St Malo on that momentous June night. The sea tossed and bounded and roared, but he kept his footing on deck, well satisfied with Nature's frenzied accompaniment to his own tempestuous thoughts. He was being borne to the historic town where She, from infancy to womanhood, had dwelt; he would meet those frank blue Breton eyes adjured for a year—eyes, whose innocence in one less well descended might have spelt ignorance—he would adore the graceful form, that, while clamouring of beauty, hinted all unconsciously of the *haute noblesse*, the ghost of which abides in St Malo to this moment, though the substance has long since passed away. He would risk all for the encounter, he told himself. Round the subject his mind had revolved for three hundred and sixty-four days; on the three hundred and sixty-fifth his thoughts had sprung to action—he had set sail.

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Her people, an austere mother—who loathed the name of the Republic and rigidly clamped her door against both the bourgeoisie and our British nation of shopkeepers—and her brother, Le Sieur de Quesne, a foolish and thoroughly useless fine gentleman, occupied "La Chaumais," their ancestral domain, near St Servan, on the river Rance. This domain was almost as hermetically sealed as a convent, and far more gloomy. It served to perfection as a prison for the peccant Leonie, when it was discovered that, during a fortnight's stay with an aunt in Paris, she had ventured to eye as a lover a portionless upstart, an artist who worked for mere bread in the Quartier Latin. Here, for twelve months, the poor delinquent was incarcerated. In this mouldy mansion she either knitted or stared vacantly out at the rank unkempt grass and the dilapidated fences, kept by poverty unrepaired, while her parent reiterated stories of the grand old days when the tapestried chairs, woefully faded, had been fresh and beauteous, and when the de Quesne nobles had flitted from the splendours of the Tuilleries to hold rural court within those blackened portals now so severe of aspect, so melancholy and silent with the pulselessness of stagnation.

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A sore punishment this for having confessed in her heart's *naivete* a passion for a hero of the brush, a vagrant in velveteen who painted pictures and—vulgarian!—sold them to any patronising passer-by. It was penalty dire enough for a *debutante* who had but sipped Paris, it waxed doubly dreadful to inquiring Eve within scent of the apple tree. There were tears at first, sobs of despair, then dumb contumacy, and latterly—when the spring weather returned again—kicks! But the pricks of family pride were sharp to lunge against, and many drops of heart's blood were spilt in the exercise. Restrictions only grew more rigid, and the poor little damsel, who had tricoteed sombrely in the ancestral dungeon during the winter, was, in summer, never permitted to roam without the vigilant companionship of the substantial retainer Valentine, a worthy who, from her elaborately starched *coiffe* to the heels of her *sabots*, was strongly imbued with a sense of conscientious vassalage to "Madame," as Leonie's mother in these degenerate days condescended to be styled.

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But love, which laughs at iron bars, makes also mock at the effrontery of blue blood. There came a day, not long after Ralph Hilyard's sudden arrival at St Malo, when, Valentine's expansive back being for a moment turned, a two-lined scribble on a shred of drawing paper was placed in Mademoiselle de Quesne's hands.

It said curtly, with concise eloquence:—

"I want you. I can live without you no longer."

The opportunity presented itself in this wise. Though cut off from all other pleasures of youth, Leonie was, at midsummer, for the short six weeks' season, allowed to bathe in the sea, attended by the faithful Valentine. She crossed daily to St Malo on the "*Pont Roulant*"—a quaint structure that, moved by chains and steam, plies the water on sand-embedded rails—and there joined in the aquatic gambols of the merry crowd. With the strange inconsistency of the narrow, her relatives, who had almost tabooed society, permitted her to indulge her taste for swimming, a sport in which she excelled. This laxity probably owed its origin to routine cultivated in the girl's childhood, and retained—as were all the observances of Madame's distinguished household—still intact and unchallenged.

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At St Malo, as the tide ebbd, all the delightfully *insouciant* and cheery French world congregated. The sands near the giant rock that marks the ideal resting-place of Chateaubriand were dotted with tents—a perfect army of mushrooms—which served as disrobing shelters for the bathers. From these emerged a brilliant throng of masqueraders of both sexes, who tripped to

the tide with varying degrees of elegant assurance. As Leonie's lithe figure, with its natty tunic and cherry waist-band, slipped from the tent (Valentine for the moment was arranging the shed raiment) a gamin with bare limbs and furled shrimping net lurched up against her. There was unusual audacity in the eye of the youngster, but the disrespect was forgiven when a missive, crunched in his plump palm, was transferred to hers.

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She clasped her hands, drew a long breath of rapturous surprise, and devoutly whispered:—

*"Que Dieu soit beni!"*

The Catholic and Breton temperament is so finely interwoven that even this sudden overstepping of family restrictions had to her its pious side. She could there and then, in effervescent thankfulness, have knelt to worship all the infinitesimal saintlings of whom her lover had never heard, but who, with her, were active pioneers to mercy. Besides this, love, which, when real, touches the religious string in every breast, had so long played an accompaniment to prayer and worship, that her first action was almost mechanically devotional. Her second, in contrast, was crudely mundane. Valentine, complacency beaming from her triple chins, loomed expansively in the doorway of the tent, so Leonie, slipping the billet in her mouth, sped for protection to the ocean, the only haven where she could be free from company and espionage.

She battled against the waves till she neared the protective raft in deep water where timorous bathers never ventured. Then she hoisted herself up, took the scrap of paper from its hiding place, and re-read it, crossing herself devoutly and crying with childish exultation:—

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"Oh sea, beloved sea, you have brought him to me at last! Never, never shall he depart but with Leonie!"

As she declaimed, a man's head appeared above the arch of the waves, and on the instant they recognised each other.

He sprang to the raft and deposited himself, radiant and dripping, by her side. They were too far at sea to be minutely observed. The roisterers on the beach could do no more than discern a couple of resting forms, a common sight in the bathing season.

"I arrived a week ago, and have been dodging you ever since," he explained.

*"Mon cheri,"* she only said. Love's babyhood learns speech with difficulty.

"I have searched here in the morning when the soldiers parade—I have loafed up and down the St Servan Street till I know all the good people's wardrobes that hang to air—I have sneaked about the forts, and been nearly 'run in' for a spy. I almost despaired of seeing you, but now, at last, we are together."

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His tone was dramatic with genuine ecstasy. Since their parting life's fruit for him seemed to have been pared and segmented with a steel knife—at this moment he felt as one who stands free to eat in a luscious raining orchard.

Leonie answered him never a word. She was speechless with stupefied satisfaction. She only laughed, looked down at her dainty sand shoes as she bobbed them in and out of the sparkling water, then, with a caressing glance at his drenched head, laughed again.

The English language sounded beautiful indeed, but her happiness found no sufficiently comprehensive outlet in that scarcely familiar tongue.

"Little one," he said, earnestly, "do you love me enough to be mine, to take me for now and always?"

She nodded only, but her beautiful blue eyes, borrowing intensity from the azure sky, seemed to answer and envelop him with an embrace of adoration.

"You must obey me; you must trust me much, very much," he explained, seriously, seeing the gaiety of her mood.

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"To obey—to trust? Of course! Is not all enclosed in love? Have I not said, 'I love you?'"

"Enough to leave everyone, to come——"

"How? Valentine?" she cried, with a sudden look of terror; "she waits——"

"To-day," he admitted, "but to-morrow? You will be here in the same place?" He leapt up and knelt imploringly on the dancing planks.

"Yes," she whispered.

"And from that hour you will give yourself to me?" he insisted.

"To you I gave myself a year ago," she said, with solemnity, her candid Breton eyes beaming like a bluer heaven upon him.

He moved uneasily.

"You will not regret?" he urged, in some anxiety.

"Shall I regret that there is a God? that when we love He speaks with us?"

He pressed her hands and kissed them. Her faith was vastly simple, yet vastly complete.

That night he wandered about the restricted area of St Malo long after the Curfew—La Noyette, as it is termed—had sounded and the private dwellings were closed. He was distraught with misgivings. Was he a latent blackguard? he asked himself, or had he yet the courage to withdraw, to leave this innocent girl buried in her dungeon, inconsolable and doubting his fidelity?

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No, he had not the courage. Fate held out its magnet—he must go whither it should lead. He was not an apostle—merely a man, an atom in the fortuitous system to be swept where destiny should decide. Need he, an artist, be more chivalrous—he put it baldly—more conventional and self-abnegating than other men? Must he, when the delicious moment of love's ripening had arrived, forbear to pluck, to eat? As he had loved this Breton girl a year ago he loved her, despite their severance, to-day. Nay, more, for in this year had he not flung himself headlong into the orgies of his Bohemian life to strangle recollection, and had he not been haunted by memory's unresting ghost, the more exquisite, the more endearing for its intangible, ineffaceable outlines? He recalled some verses of homage to the city he had encountered in an old St Malo record:—

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"Quiconque t'a connue aime ton souvenir  
Et vers toi, tot ou tard, desire revenir."

He had come back to the "Souvenir" and realised how the character of this *Ville d'elite* so "*douce et pieuse*," so grandly sombre, so exquisitely poetic and noble, was expressed and summed up in her, his queenly, gracious Leonie. He decided finally that, come what might, she should be won!

The next day he was seated on the raft full half an hour before she appeared. In the lap of the waves he espied a purple-suited nymph, enwound with a sash of Roman red, extending white arms that glistened like newly chiselled marble in the green spray. Her pretty lips laughed as she swam towards him, the sole atom in an immensity of chrysopease.

That day the usual crowd on the shore was thinned; a market and fair of some kind at St Servan had lured visitors and St Malouians to the other side of the Pont Roulant. The beach was comparatively deserted, and even the boatman who was deputed to row about the bathing course for purposes of rescue, was, with his craft, apparently off duty.

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"How well you swim," said her lover, admiringly, as he greeted the young girl and noted enviously the drippings from her disfiguring cap that were privileged to alight upon her dimpled cheeks. He was tempted to put an arm round the pretty panting figure, but resisted.

"It is my one *passee temps*. I have swam half to Cezambre and back," she exclaimed proudly, indicating, by a glance over her shoulder, an island that reared its rocks some two miles distant.

He flushed slightly.

"It is there that I want you to swim—now, when you have rested."

"Too far," she sighed; "we could never get back."

"We should never come back," he announced with determination.

"Valentine? She will think I drown."

"She would prefer to bury you at La Chaumais?"

Leonie laughed.

"Are you ready?" he said, arresting further objections and crushing a word of endearment that rose to his lips. To be successful he must be matter-of-fact. Everything now depended on promptness and a cool head. He pulled a knotted string and lifted from the water a cork belt.

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"You must run no risk of fatigue," he said, fitting it to her fragile form. "Now, let us start. Valentine will soon be on the *qui vive*."

Without demur she accepted his hand and leapt with him from the far side of the raft.

The sea stretched a sheet of silver under a sky of gauzy opal, shot with flame from the dozing sun; wind and tide were in their favour. Before long they had passed from the sight of the shore to the shade of the giant rock, whose railed summit, dedicated to Chateaubriand, seems to commune with and command the elements. Cezambre in the distance was as yet merely an apparent triangle of spikes jutting from mid ocean, but towards it they plied their way valiantly, two moving human dots, on the breast of the vast abyss. Once she laughed uproariously to relieve her happiness, but he checked her.

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"We must reserve our forces, my darling, every breath in us. Valentine will give the alarm directly. She will wait and wait, and then there will be a hue and cry. It will be a matter of life and death. Do you understand?"

In the earnestness of his face she read for the first time all that this adventurous swim would mean for them both.

"If they come," she panted, "you will not leave me, you will not give me back to them?"

His jaws clenched hard.



"Never!" he vowed. "We will go under first!"

He trod the water for a moment while he scanned the expanse behind them. "Go on," he begged of her; "I will catch you up: spare yourself as much as you can."

His precaution was needless; nothing was to be seen on the still surface of the sea, and, as the rock now screened the shore, it was impossible to guess what might be taking place there. Presently he gained on her.

"Safe so far," he said. "Don't speak; float a little."

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He caught the side of the life-belt she wore and swam out, drawing her in the direction of the island. Some sailing boats fluttered across the horizon, but their route lay in an opposite direction to that of the swimmers, who had now left the rocks and were well in the open. Gradually the St Malo coast grew more indistinct, and by degrees in front of them the spikes that had represented Cezambre developed into rocks. Then Leonie assembled her flagging forces and struck out with renewed zest. The sun was going down, and a cool breeze came up behind them and seemed to give them impetus and freshened courage. Before twilight they had safely piloted themselves to shore.

As they rose from the depths he flung his arms round her with a sense of ecstatic relief.

"Now, dearest, we must brave it out; go to the coastguard's hut, and"—he pointed to an oilskin satchel which he had worn across his shoulders—"buy him."

Leonie cast on her lover a glance of awe and pride and worship. He seemed to be God and fairy tale miraculously combined. She believed herself to be treading Elysium as they took their way to the humble stone cabin occupied by the coastguard and his son, the only inhabitants of the island. Her young brain reeled with the intoxication of freedom. How much rosier than any she had before seen were the sea-pinks that flowered their way; how surprisingly azure the common bluebells that nodded and waved and seemed, as they passed, to be ringing chimes to celebrate her happiness. And even the potatoes that grew in the little garden plot where this coastguard Crusoe toiled, had they not a world of wonder in their blossoms, in their golden eyes, which watched and watched and glowed, as she believed, before the triumphant coming of their Love?

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A rude hobbledohoy of the St Malo peasant class opened the hut door and stared. Then he said something in his opaque *patois* which only Leonie could elucidate. She had often imitated the vulgar of her race from sheer *plaisanterie*.

She replied in the same key, and, seeing that the youth comprehended, the artist prompted a duologue.

"He says," Leonie began by explaining, "the coastguard is ill, he cannot leave him to go ashore, and does not know what to do. He refuses to take us back in his boat."

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"He is under the delusion we want to go back? Good! Give him money and say we will stop here and attend his sick man."

This explanation ensured their entry. The boy was evidently relieved of a burden. The hut was composed merely of two rooms, in one of which a weather-beaten old man was evidently bedridden from pain. He looked askance at the two bathers, but at the same time his son put a coin into the sufferer's hand. The youth, with the acumen of his kind, understood the relative value of eloquence and action.

"Clothes—food," Leonie translated at her lover's request.

The boy shook his head. Then his eyes fell on the rough suit belonging to his father which was slung across the end of the bed.

"That might do for me," the artist cogitated, with wrinkled brow, "but for you?" He looked seriously at his sweetheart. The boy's eyes followed his glance and read it. The sick man turned in his bed, groaned, and wondered when these troublesome people were going away.

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Leonie rubbed a gentle hand on the invalid's shoulder; it was presumably the seat of the worst pain. He suffered rheumatism in its most acute form, so the coastguard explained between his throes. He was afraid to seek help from the land, lest his condition should be known and he be removed from his post. Their silence was implored with tears and prayers—he would give them food and shelter if they would keep his secret. They promised assuringly.

Meanwhile the lad had disappeared into the inner room—it suggested a combined kitchen and workshop—and came back dangling from his arm some fragmentary portions of his wardrobe, which he displayed with pride.

"If madame would condescend?" he hinted.

At the word "madame" Leonie blushed delightedly.

He led the way into the kitchen, and deposited the dry clothes on a chair.

Ralph remained by the sick man, rubbing the afflicted limb, and expressing himself in the vilest French he knew in hope to imitate the local jargon.

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He spoke sufficiently to crave bread and drink, and to learn that these were only obtained when

fetched from the land in the island boat. His son, the coastguard said, was seldom allowed to go ashore, lest he should commit himself and divulge the fact that illness kept his sire from duty. Fortunately the boat had been provisioned that morning, and there was food for several days.

During the conversation the artist adjusted the coastguard's overcoat and trousers, which latter were three inches too short for his lengthy British limbs.

Presently a transformed Leonie emerged from the inner chamber. "An ideal fisher boy," the painter thought, as his enraptured eye travelled up and down the coarse blue clothing. When it reached some loose locks of her shining hair he became puzzled. She, divining his thought, felt in the pocket of her newly-acquired coat, and drew forth a maze of gold, soft as fleece of raw silk fresh from the cocoon, and gave it him.

He began to scold at the sacrifice.

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"It is a web to entangle your love for always," she murmured, with cooing lips, which seemed, there and then, to suck the heart out of him.

He would fain have swept the coastguard and his son from the hut, but the exuberant *patois* of "madame," the more exuberant by reason of her characteristic disguise, broke out, demanding of the lad refreshment, and illustrating her request with significant pantomime. The childish joy of this noble Breton damsel as she devoured the rude meal in company with their quaint hosts delighted him, and the charming *abandon* with which she threw herself into the comedy of the situation brought heat to his already tingling blood.

Suddenly she grew grave.

"I was so hungry I forgot to ask a blessing," whereupon the buoyant little creature uprose from her seat and offered a prayer. The short Latin sentence was familiar to Ralph's ear; it was common to the whole Catholic Church; but now it had a parenthesis—a parenthesis during which her loving eyes looked first to his, then heavenward—a parenthesis of praise and thanksgiving *for him*.

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He bent his head to hide the flush that overspread his cheeks, and, for an instant, he buried his face in his hands.

When the meal was over, Leonie ran into the potato garden. She gathered some loose weeds of which he did not know the name, picking here and there carefully that all of them should be of the right sort.

"I could not go to sleep and leave the old man to his pains," she said. "Of these"—she pointed to the herbs—"the poor people make poultices when they suffer."

He took the bundles from her hands and kissed her fingers. "You shall sleep, dearest, and I will devote myself to the poor fellow. We have reason to be very grateful to him."

"Very well, doctor," she laughed. "You must be careful to stew the leaves very soft."

Then she walked in and commanded the boy to get grass in a bag for a pillow, declaring merrily that some fishing nets and canvas in the kitchen would make her a couch fit for a queen.

The poultices certainly soothed, though they did not cure, the sufferer. This fact Ralph painfully discovered during the long hours of the night. His limbs were weary, and though the floor at the foot of the coastguard's bed was hard, he yearned heartily for rest. But the poor invalid, by whose side the son snored obdurately, hourly implored relief. Faithful to his word, the nurse, uprose at intervals and put fresh leaves in the stewpan, warming them on a rustic stove till soft enough for use. This lasted till day dawn. Then the lad went forth a-shrimping, and Ralph decided to refresh himself with a plunge in the sea. Washing utensils, he had discovered, were unknown in Cezambre.

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He was speeding down the garden in bathing suit when he caught a glimpse of his purple dolphin riding the waves.

"I squeezed myself out of the window so as not to wake you," she spluttered, through the surf. "I thought, *mon cheri*, you would repose for ever."

"The old man is very thankful to you for your prescription." He avoided the confession of his night's unrest. "We must gather some more of those herbs to-day."

"Perhaps, but not till evening. You don't know that we must hide. There may come strangers for trips on boats from St Servan, and one is never sure."

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"Your people?"

"Oh no; they would do nothing so *roturier*—English and Americans——"

"They would not know us; you forget what a good gamin my noble lady makes."

"I did forget," she chuckled. "I will dig potatoes, and you may take the boy to the other side of the island. The strangers only go there to stare one moment at the rocks and cry 'Oh!'"

When at midday the trippers landed at Cezambre, they saw no one but an urchin bent double over a spade. His face was covered with mud, some of which was also spattered on the floss silk

of his hair.

A tourist addressed him, and received a reply in broad *patois* which he could not understand.

The youth was very voluble, despite the irresponsiveness of the audience; he waved his hand indicating the beauties of the island with an air of ownership. Now and then he punctuated his speech by rubbing his fustian arm across his nose in true plebeian fashion. The tourists were delighted, and, before departing, dropped a silver coin into his grimy but exquisitely shaped palm.

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When Ralph returned she met him, dancing and rubbing the mud from her cheeks.

"See," she said, tossing the coin in the air, "this is the first wedding present we have had. I will cut Cezambre upon it and wear it for ever. But first you will come with me."

She took his hand and led the way to a curious cave carved in the rocks, in the centre of which was a cross. The walls were frescoed with common shells, the offerings, she explained, of poor pilgrims who had been worshippers at this primitive shrine.

With unconscious grace she prostrated herself in prayer.

He watched her in silence, his artist eye greedily tracing the picturesque in every line of this innocent devotion, though his panting heart longed to intrude on the sanctity of her worship. Presently she lifted her hand to his and drew him to his knees by her side.

Softly, like the sonorous gong from some grand cathedral belfry, she commenced to recite or chant in Latin.

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"Speak with me," she whispered, repeating the melodious words with an accent of reverential appreciation.

He did as she bade. The fervour of her devotion communicated itself to him, he followed word for word to the end. The burthen, though not the absolute meaning of the sentences, inspired him—it was the ceremony of marriage they quoted, it was God's blessing they mutually invoked.

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When they had returned to the potato garden, and were plucking herbs for the poultices he had promised to renew during his midnight vigils, he suddenly remarked:—

"We must leave here for the English coast as soon as we can get a fishing smack to take us along."

"Leave here?" she uttered in dismay. "I would remain for ever."

He gave a short gasp, clutched her hands, and looked straight into the transparent blue depths of her eyes. Then he moved away a step or two and shook his head.

"It is inevitable; we must go to England—give ourselves over to law and parson."

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"Here it is better," she cooed; "you are king and I am priest." But he dissented.

"I never had much respect for Church or State. I appreciate them as one appreciates steel to sharpen one's blade against."

She did not understand. Only the simplest English formed her vocabulary, but she saw he disagreed with her.

"Here we are everything," she said; "we make laws straight from God for ourselves."

He shrugged his shoulders and sighed. "Those, I find, are the toughest laws of all! Come, darling, let us ask the boy yonder about the fishing boats."

They were informed that one might possibly pass on the following night. He borrowed from the youth a piece of hard chalk that acted in lieu of pencil, and begged Leonie to write with it on some rough paper which had served to wrap stores from the land.

"Tell your mother that we have decided, after three days on this island, to leave for Brighton, on the British coast, there to marry. A year ago we asked her blessing on our love, and she refused it; we pray that she will now be more lenient."

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"No good," murmured Leonie, translating, however, what he had dictated.

Below, he scribbled the address of an hotel in England, where a reply might meet them.

"She is sure," he said, folding the note, "to call me a blackguard, and as certain, I hope, to consent."

"My best and dearest," cried the girl in prospective contradiction of anything that might be pronounced against him.

Twenty-four hours later, when the fishing smack alluded to hove in sight, the missive was handed to the coastguard's son. He was ordered to take it inland on the morrow, and deliver it without fail, at "La Chaumais."

"But supposing my brother should not write? Supposing he should come?"

"That is what I hope. Le Sieur will support the dignity of the De Quesnes—he will engage with the law and leave us to engage with only love."

So the next evening they put out to sea through the gossamer scarves of moving twilight—the man in his coastguard kit gay to frivolity, the girl in fisher disguise, meditative, half tearful. She breathed not a word while her straining eyes could clutch the outline of the land from the embrace of night; but when all was wrapped in gloom she lifted her gaze to the star-spangled heavens, and murmured with folded hands, "*Cher Royaume de Cezambre, adieu!*"

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## Trooper Jones of the Light Brigade.

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"To get myself in courage—crush out fears;  
To strive with fate for something more than gold."

A year or two ago I received an envelope containing a lock of flame-red hair wrapped in a soiled linen rag. By this token I knew that old Sergeant Kemp—the name is a pseudonym, for reasons which will be seen—Sergeant Kemp, formerly of the Light Brigade, was dead. This knowledge unseals my lips, and permits me to divulge an extraordinary episode of the charge of Balaclava which was related to me by the veteran, and which, as far as I can judge, has entirely escaped the research of the romanticist and historian.

My original intention in going to see the old hero was to interview him and learn if he could throw any new light on the tragic and immemorial events of '54-5-6, through which, with the exception of a slight wound in the wrist, he had passed unscathed.

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I propitiated him with gifts of tobacco, and, having found the "open sesame" to the cave of his reminiscences, visited him often. My object was to filch, surreptitiously as it were, the treasures I coveted, before their valuable crudity could suffer the unconscious adulteration to which such goods are liable at the hands of the professional story-monger. But I found, when the strings of his tongue were unloosed, he had very little more to relate about the events of the campaign than is already recorded. In fact, like many an actor in the drama of life, he really knew less about the general *mise-en-scene* than I, who had only reviewed it through the lorgnon of Tennyson and other contemporary writers. Seeing, however, that a shade of disappointment was cast by the fogginess of his disclosures, the old fellow one day abruptly asked if I could keep a secret were he to tell it me. I vowed my complete trustworthiness, but at the same time remonstrated that confidences so hampered would be of absolutely no use to the work I had on hand. He rose laboriously from his chair—lumbago had almost crippled him—and produced from a tin box a soiled rag containing the curl of red hair which is now in my possession.

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"This 'air," he explained in mumbling tones, "was cut off the 'ead of Trooper Jones of ours—in times of war one 'asn't much truck with the barber," he parenthesised. "We called 'im 'Carrots,' as bein' most convenient and discriptive like. And that there bit of shirt belonged to my pal Jenkins, as good a chap as ever wore shako. It's the 'istory of 'em both as I've 'alf a mind to tell you, but you must be mum as old bones about it—at all events till this 'ere bloke's a-carried out feet foremost."

"And then?" I said, with unbecoming eagerness.

"Then you can jest do what ye darn please; the 'ole three of us 'll be orf dooty together."

So he related to me in a fragmentary manner, halting now and again and blowing clouds from his pipe as if to assist his ruminations, the strange history of Trooper Jones, almost word for word as I have set it down. He began:—

"It was in May that we got orders to embark.... I can remember turning out at four in the mornin' to march to the dockyard, and 'ow the green lanes was all a-sproutin' and a-shinin', and 'ow the sky was that pink and streaky, for all the world like a prime rasher. But that's neither 'ere nor there.... We 'ad been billeted in the villages nigh Portsmouth for several days, and my comrade, James Jenkins, and I 'ad been quartered at an inn kept by Jones' father and 'is sister—a strappin' girl, and as like her brother as one bullet's like another. They was twins, them two—with top-knots the colour o' carrots, mouths as wide as oyster-shells, allus grinnin', and a power of freckles that made their faces as yellor as speckled eggs. But Jenny Jones was a stunner, she was; she served at the bar, and gave the boys as good as they gave—'ot sauce for the cheeky and a clout o' the 'ead if need be when mi lady's blood was up. Woman-like, she was that contrary, wi' a tongue as sharp as a razor for some o' us, and all butter and honey and eyes like a sucking-calf whenever Jenkins so much as showed 'is nose. And 'e, 'e was that sweet on 'er as though she'd been a Wenus cast in sugar."

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The old fellow blew a mighty whiff from his pipe, a whiff that was akin to a sigh, and for a few moments he became apparently fogged by the retrospective haze that surrounded him. He seemed disinclined to relate more, but as I remained silent he presently resumed:—

"I won't tell you of all the 'arrowin' sights of that there mornin', the women—mothers and wives and sweethearts—a-snivellin' and a-sobbin', the men lookin' all awry, as though they'd swallowed

a chemist shop and couldn't get the taste out o' their mouths. All this wi' shoutin' of orders, and noise of the 'orses bein' slung up the ship's side and let down the main 'atchway into the 'old, and the playin' of the band, and the cheerin' of the crowd in the dockyard, and the crews in the 'arbour, and the youngsters on the *Victory*—old fellers they must be now—a-roarin' fit to split 'emselves from the yards and riggin' so long as we 'ad ears to 'ear.

"I, bein' som'at of a bachelor by instink, 'ad no gal to wish me God-speed; but Jenkins, poor chap, was in the same boat. Jenny Jones 'ad not put 'erself about to see 'im nor 'er brother orf, and as they stood alongside one another looking that solemn and glum, I couldn't 'elp thinkin' o' the 'eartlessness of wenches in general and that there in pertikilar.

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"But soon I thought no more on the subjek', for there was other things to mind. There was dinner, and givin' out of sea kit and gettin' our ration of grog—three parts water it was to one o' rum then, but it grew to 'alf a gill and a gill a day later on."

"About Jenkins?" I reminded, seeing that his brain reeled with the reminiscence of bygone potations.

"Oh, I didn't see 'im at that time. We went below to the stable; our beasts was stood wi' heels to the ship's sides and their sorry 'eads a-facin' of each other. They was awful bad, and mighty funky of the lurchin's of the ship. I found Jones down there—'e was a-bathin' of 'is 'orse's nose with water and vinegar, and a-cheerin' of 'im up to eat, which he wouldn't do for all the coaxin'. 'Carrots' spent all 'is spare time at that there game, givin' short answers and cursin' freely now and agin. But 'e did 'is work right enough—cleaned stalls, polished and burnished 'is saddle and accoutrements like the best of us—though whenever I looked at 'im there was some'at shifty in his eye and an odd turn o' the 'ead, as though 'e'd been a-sneakin' rum, or a-doin' somethin' as was contrary to regilations. And one day he turns on me savage like:—

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"'What the — are you lookin' at me for? Can't you mind your own bloomin' business,' sez 'e. So I ups and sez what came to me all of a flash:—

"'Yer no more Ben Jones than I be, and what's more——'

"Before I gets out another word 'e grips 'old of my hands and looks as though 'e was a-goin' down on 'is bended knees afore me.

"'For Gord's sake, Bill, don't blow on me. I've been a-dodgin' of you so careful, and you was the only one I was a-feared on. I've allus been civil to 'e, Bill—I'll give 'e my rations of grog, Bill—I'll do anythin' for ye so long as yer leaves me alone.'

"All this came a-rushin' from 'is mouth like a water-shoot in summer that 'as been froze for 'arf the year. Then I slaps my knee and bursts into a roar.

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"'Good Gord, Jenny,' sez I, 'this 'ere is a go! It's a desp'rate game you're a-playin' of.'

"'D'ye think,' she sez, 'I'd play it if I weren't desp'rate, too? 'Ere was Jim and I just married, and I not on the "strength" and 'e a-goin' sails set for the grave. Oh! I seed it, sure as I stands 'ere, and I sez to mysel', wot's the fun of bein' twin with Ben if can't go like 'im, an' fight shoulder to shoulder with my Jim? Wot's the good of this 'ere life without 'im, a-fillin' and a-swillin' and nothin' more?—for that's all's left for wummin when their 'earts is cut in two.'

"I put up my 'and, for there was someone a-comin', and we went on a-cleanin' of the stalls; but d'rectly I was able I stalked Trooper Jones and got the rest o' the 'istory out o' 'im. Course, I asks after Ben, our real 'Carrots.' And she larfs with 'er mouth a-gape and 'er white strong teeth a-shinin'.

"'Ben?' she sez, 'O, 'e was that sick 'e couldn't say me nay; he was jist rolled up in bed like a worm, and fit to stay there a week or two. Nothing pisonous, mind you; but all's fair in love or war, and this 'ere game is both. So I got 'is kit and jist marched along at daybreak wi' the lot of you. You should 'a' seed Jim's face when 'e recognises me. He didn't guess whether 'e was glad nor glum, so he cussed like a good 'un, and that did dooty either way.'

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"Young Jenny larfed till the tears came a-rollin' down 'er uniform.

"'Yer brother's in for a nasty business,'" sez I.

"'Not a bit of it. I've settled it. 'E'll dye 'is carrots and imigrate. Father'll see to 'im; 'e never 'ad the constitootion as was given to compensate me for being a——'

"'Hold,' sez I, 'the timbers 'ave ears. I am a-goin' to forget as there's any amphibus animals 'ereabouts; there's only troopers and 'osses as I knows of.'

"'Gord bless you, Bill! None of the other chaps 'ave twigged, and I've scarce throwed a word at Jim since we got afloat. But I looked at 'im and 'e at me, and folks with one 'eart between 'em don't need for words.'"

Here the narrator put a square thumb over the brim of his pipe and pressed the weed almost tenderly.

"In time," he went on, "I got quite proud o' young Jones, 'e was as smart a dragoon as any, an 'orsemaster every inch of 'im. Why, the way 'ed whisper into the ear of them beasts would make 'em meek were they contrary ever so....

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"It took us over fifty days a-journeyin' past Malta and Constantinople and the Black Sea. I was landed fust with one or two others to report oursel's to Gen'ral the Earl of Lucan, who was a-commandin' of the Cavalry Division. Jones and Jenkins and the rest of our fellers came over fully accoutred in 'orse-boats, each at the 'ead of 'is charger. We soon 'ad work enough, I can tell you, a tent pitchin' and gettin' rations and makin' oursel's understood. The town was choke full o' ruffians, Turks, Jews, Armenians, Greeks, all a-jawing in diff'rent tongues and a quarrellin' like magpies over a bit of offal. 'Ere Jones was full o' spirits, a-larfin' and a-swearin' with the best of us. 'E 'ad a way about 'im as licked the sourest grumbler into shape. And the gals, such as they was, fancied 'is jovial mug and made eyes at 'im. It was a rum sight to watch the poor things a-wastin' ammunishun on one of their own sex. I mind me of a wivandeer of the Chasseurs D'Afrique, a smart young lass in red trousers and a dark tunic, with 'er plumed 'at all cockeye on 'er head, and 'er legs astride the saddle—she was quite took up with Jones. And afterwards the Bulgarian gals was nuts on 'im, too. Jones would give us real pantomimes a-s snatchin' o' kisses from one or another of 'em when they came to fill their wessels at the well.

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"'E was good at work or play was 'Carrots.' Right well 'e came out of it when we 'ad to turn our 'ands to odd jobs, such as mowin' and reapin' and cookin', cos 'is fingers weren't thumbs like ours war. And at skirmishin' and outpost drill, and a-chargin' in line and by squadrons, he was real smart too; 'e took to them manœuvres as a duck takes to water, with niver a growl nor a grumble, 'owever 'ard the work.

"But a bad day it was for 'im when the cholera broke up our camp at Devno; it takes the strong 'uns fust, and then swoops down promiscus-like. Poor Jenkins got bad just as we was a-tired of buryin' an' 'earin' nothin' but the 'Dead March,' which made the sick all of a tremble to know which would be the next to be took. 'E was down with it the wery day as we got orders to start for the Crimea. We was to march the next mornin' for Varna, and most of the night was spent in packin' up.

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"Jones, 'e comes to me like one stark mad, beatin' of 'is breast and a-cursin' at the back o' 'is teeth.

"'Jim's that bad,' says 'e, 'they don' know as whether there's any 'ope for 'im.'

"'They're preparin' of arabas to carry the sick,' sez I, to console 'im.

"'Gord, Gord,' 'e sez, 'that's jest it. All the sick as might get well will go, and the others—they'll be left be'ind afore the breath's out of 'em. I 'eard someone a-sayin' there was no use in movin' of 'em as was as good as dead.'

"And sure enough next mornin' I larnt that Jones was right. Revelly sounded at three, and by six every man was on parade. Arabas, drawn by bufferloes, was packed wi' sick, the dyin' was left in 'ospital with orderleys and a sawbones to keep 'em company. They must ha' 'eard us marchin', marchin' away—them poor, animated corpses, with jest the regulation number o' gasps between 'em and eternity—but most on us was too busy to think on abstrac' things at sich a time."

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"How about Jenkins?" I asked, seein' that my friend's mind had gone wool-gathering over the whole panorama of the war.

"Oh, 'e was safe enough; 'e took a turn for the better at the last moment, and they moved 'im into the arabas along with the rest, but Jones looked 'iself badly enough. 'E comes to me the nex' night and brings this 'ere lock of 'air in 'is 'and.

"'If I'm took,' sez 'e, 'give it to Jim and tell 'im to wear it on 'is 'eart for the love of "Carrots" as was.'

"I put the 'air in my 'aversack careless-like, and gave 'im a drink o' rum neat, which was better nor talk. It kippers the cholera out o' one fine.

"'The likes of you and me is always spared,' sez I, a-larfin'; 'rubbish ain't marketable aloft.'

"And spared 'e was, and would 'ave been to this day, along with this 'ere lumber, but for 'is cussed fool'ardiness....

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"Things was lively for a bit afore and after the victory o' the Alma, the pertikilars of which I have reported to you. I scarce clapped eyes on Jones or Jenkins, but they was engaged in skirmishin' along with the rest of us.

"On the day that Captain Nolan came a-gallop in with that there momentous paper, Jones sez to me, 'There's somethin' up,' and we saw Lord Lucan and Lord Cardigan a-lookin' at them guns. The enemy had ranged 'em across the walley about a mile and a-'arf orf, with a field batt'ry on the 'ill on our left front, and another between the redoubts and the walley on our right. Captain Nolan was a-pointin', and the generals was a-confabulatin'. Then we was told to mount and move orf at a trot. The first thing that 'appens was poor Captain Nolan a-gettin' shot almost afore we broke into a gallop. 'E was struck by a bit o' shell, and d'rectly after the guns began a-playin' on us all, and the air was 'eavy with groans and curses and screams of men and 'orses a-fallin' to right and left like nine-pins. Jenkins and Jones was with me on the right of the line, Jenkins as blue as a corpse, and Jones flushed and savage-like, avoidin' as best 'e could the 'orses without riders as still kept pace with us, and the press of men and beasts a-jostlin' to close to the centre. We couldn't see where we was a-goin' cos o' the power 'o smoke, nor 'ear 'cos o' the boomin' and bustin' and bumpin' round the 'ill-side. Then bang I goes. A shell 'ad caught my poor 'orse in the

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shoulder, and over 'e rolls and I under 'im, fortunately covered from the explodin' pieces as would 'ave settled me 'ad they 'ave reached me. Jest as I was beginnin' to wonder whether I was really breathin', over my 'ead comes the second line a-gallop in' for all they was worth. 'Twas a near squeak that, and I was mighty 'mazed to find that never a 'oof 'ad come nigh so much as a finger o' me. At last I got clear of my poor beast—'e was only a dead 'ulk, all 'is fore quarters bein' blown away—and tried to stand. It was precious difficult, an' as I was limpin' in an 'op-and-go fashun, I chanced on Jenkins who 'ad likewise been bowled over, an' was lyin' under 'is 'orse in a pool o' blood. Jones was a-kneelin' by 'is side with 'is left arm clean ripped up. I suspects a splinter from the same shell as caught Jenkins 'ad struck 'im.

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"'Elp me to draw 'im out,' sez 'Carrots,' with never a quiver o' the eye.

"I lent a 'and, and Jones with 'is only arm was a-strugglin' to move 'im, but we soon saw we was only causin' of the poor chap unnecessary aginy.

"'It's all up wi' me,' sez Jenkins in a failin' voice. 'Clear out sharp, they're a-firm' from the flank o' the batt'ry at them as is dismounted.'

"'Take care of Jenny,' sez 'e with 'is last breath, and wrings my 'and.

"Then Jones begins a-kneelin' alongside of 'im a-callin' 'im by every sweet name as could be thought on. Oh! it was a pitiful sight to see a big dragoon a-huggin' of another, a-kissin' of 'is lips and 'is 'ands, and 'im stone dead, a-smilin' up at the sky.

"This 'ere 'appened in a minite like, for d'rectly afterwards I sees Jones leap up and catch a 'orse wot 'ad lost 'is rider and mount 'im. 'E just looks once at 'is poor comrade, and out at the 'ills and the guns a-vomitin' smoke. Then 'e starts off—not a-ridin' like woman, nor man, nor 'ero, but a-gallop in' like the wery Devil 'isself, straight into the jaws of 'ell."

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There was a pause, during which the old trooper knocked out the ashes of his pipe against the arm of his chair.

"That was the last wot I sees of 'Carrots,'" he said, with a dry smile.

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## The "Celibate" Club (Dialogue).

[Pg 70]

### *Characters.*

MISS HAGAR HUNCH, *President*; MISS DORA DARLISH, *Secretary*; MRS EGERTON and MRS CLARE GRAHAM, *Visitors*; and the "CELIBATES," eight in number.

### SCENE I.—THE CLUB ROOM.

MISS HUNCH. Oh, Mrs Egerton, you are just in time. We are now to take the oath binding ourselves to refuse all offers of marriage.

MRS EGERTON. Perhaps I had better retire; as wife, and mother of a family, I—

MISS HUNCH. Certainly not; we welcome any witness, and, after all, we owe much to married women, since everyone of them is a Curtius who, by a leap into the chasm of publicity, may save a doomed multitude!

MRS CLARE GRAHAM (*laughing*). Gracious! I did not know I could leap anywhere. Pray tell me how it is done.

MISS HUNCH (*glaring through her spectacles*). The subject is too serious for trifling. Marriage is calculated to pen the free instincts of the feminine community. You know our motto, *Aut viam inveniam aut faciam?*

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MRS EGERTON. I see it all over the room, but that doesn't tell me what it means.

MISS HUNCH. It means we will find a road out of our bondage—or make one!

MRS CLARE GRAHAM (*giggling*). Sail from Scylla into Charybdis, eh? You see I allow the tragedy of both destinations.

MISS HUNCH (*sarcastically*). A kind concession, but a frivolous. Still, we prefer the risk of the unknown to the horror of the known.

MRS GRAHAM to MRS EGERTON (*aside*). What on earth does she mean? How many times has she been married?

MRS EGERTON (*aside*). Hush. You mustn't offend the prejudices of the club. Ah, how do you do, Miss Darlish?

DORA DARLISH (*joining them*). Charming rooms, aren't they? So glad to see you here, Clare.

Mrs CLARE GRAHAM. Thank you, but I feel rather like a fish out of water. It takes a long time to cultivate amphibiousness—

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DORA. Oh, we're not amphibious—we mean to keep high and dry—

Mrs CLARE GRAHAM. I thought you didn't forswear love and romance and all that kind of thing, but—

DORA. Nor do we. We look on love as the divine revelation of life—

Mrs CLARE GRAHAM. Oh! And then?

DORA. When love has ceased to be love, we—

Mrs CLARE GRAHAM. Scramble to the bank to sun yourselves till ready for another dive? I must tell Charlie—

DORA. Don't. You will put wrong constructions on things. Of course we would merely preserve the right to scramble out in self-defence—

Mrs CLARE GRAHAM (*laughing*). I thought so! How about amphibians? You ought to re-christen the club!

Miss HUNCH (*speaking above the buzz of conversation*). Let us join hands and make oath that, however pressed to marry, we will refuse.

(*The "CELIBATES" join hands.*)

Mrs CLARE GRAHAM (*clutching DORA's dress and whispering*). Dora, don't be a fool. You know Charlie is devoted to you—

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Miss HUNCH (*severely*). Let me beg silence while the oath is taken.

CHORUS OF THE "CELIBATES" (*with clasped hands*). We solemnly swear that, however pressed to marry, we will refuse.

Mrs CLARE GRAHAM (*pulling DORA to her side*). Dora, I'm disgusted with you. Only yesterday you gave my brother a book with an inscription.

DORA. Well?

Mrs CLARE GRAHAM. I read it—there was something about "Pure romance of love, Idyllic and ideal as could be, All policy and prudence far above."

DORA. I'm not ashamed of it. Why shouldn't our love be idyllic and ideal? Why should wedlock of soul mean padlock of individual?

Mrs CLARE GRAHAM (*angrily*). Why, indeed? But don't talk against policy and prudence. Your theory seems the quintessence of both!

## SCENE II.—MRS GRAHAM'S DRAWING-ROOM.

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(*CHARLIE CHEYNE and his sister Mrs CLARE GRAHAM are seated.*)

Mrs CLARE GRAHAM. Now I have told you the whole story surely you don't intend to proceed with your absurd courtship?

CHARLIE. I mean to marry Dora, if that's what you're driving at.

Mrs CLARE GRAHAM. It's impossible! However much she wanted to accept she would be bound—as a matter of honour—to refuse.

CHARLIE (*stroking his chin contemplatively*). After all, marriage is merely a matter of form, and if it pleases Dora—

Mrs CLARE GRAHAM (*warmly*). To please Dora you'll let Jane's boy inherit the estates?

CHARLIE. Still, Dora loves me, and she will do anything I ask.

Mrs CLARE GRAHAM (*rising irately to leave the room*). I tell you she won't! Women with convictions are obstinate as Cork pigs.

(*Enter DORA in a Parisian bonnet.*)

CHARLIE. Oh, Dora, here you are! We've been expecting you for hours.

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DORA. I'm afraid I've disturbed the conversation; I see Clare is ruffled.

Mrs CLARE GRAHAM (*abruptly*). No, I was going out. Good-bye. (*She goes out.*)

DORA. She is in a huff with me about something. Why?

CHARLIE (*hesitatingly*). No—that is—she was angry with me.



DORA. About?

CHARLIE. Oh, because you and I agree with each other so well on all subjects, marriage included.

DORA (*pressing his hand*). My beloved!

CHARLIE. I said it was a rotten institution—or something of the kind.

DORA (*charmingly*). An effete conventionality—

CHARLIE (*putting his arm round her waist*). Only suited to reckless people who risk the disappointments of the future for the effervescence of the present.

DORA. What did she say?

CHARLIE. She began to talk about my sister's boy inheriting the property, as though we cared.

DORA. Will he?

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CHARLIE. Of course. It's entailed. But he's a fine lad, and we, who will be all in all to each other, need not grudge it him.

DORA (*thoughtfully*). I suppose not.

CHARLIE. I believe that is the source of Jane's affection for me. She knows how safe I am in the matter of marriage.

DORA. Then you have never contemplated it?

CHARLIE (*emphatically*). Never!

DORA (*horrified*). And you made love to me without any idea of proposing?

CHARLIE. You forget: you explained your creed at the outset.

DORA (*paling*). Then you deliberately availed yourself of the opportunity—

CHARLIE (*drawing his moustache over the corners of his lips*). Of adoring a girl whose theories corresponded with my own? Yes.

DORA (*with tears in her eyes*). Oh! You mean you would not have loved me if your courtship had involved marriage?

CHARLIE. I can't say. We both abhor to be handicapped by legalities, don't we? We both enjoy the same rights of independence—

DORA (*rising angrily*). Then, if loving me had necessitated the surrender of your liberty you could not have done it? [Pg 77]

CHARLIE (*earnestly*). Could you?

DORA (*sobbing*). Could I? I would have loved you always.

CHARLIE (*taking her in his arms*). I would have loved you in the same way.

DORA. Not if I had wanted to marry you?

CHARLIE. I won't say. You never put me to the test.

DORA (*excitedly*). But if I should? Oh, Charlie—tell me, would you—won't you—marry me?

(Mrs GRAHAM *enters, and, finding them in each others arms, prepares to leave.*)

CHARLIE. Clare! We want your congratulations. Dora has proposed to me, and I am to name the happy day.

Mrs CLARE GRAHAM. What! And how about her oath?

DORA (*blushing*). Oh, I only vowed that, however pressed to marry, I would refuse. But I was not pressed; was I, Charlie?

CHARLIE (*sedately*). Certainly not.

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## In the Cradle of the Deep.

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"But the sweet child heart you may always keep,  
For then the stars will be yours and the deep,  
The boundless deep. Good night."

It had been a long engagement, commenced by him between the ages of knickerbocker and tobacco, and encouraged by her as a development of the Prince Bountiful and Cinderella romances of the schoolroom. A charming contract, drawn up without sign and seal and cemented

after the manner of barbaric hordes by heterogeneous offerings precious to the engaging parties, such as guinea-pigs, bird's eggs, looted apples, and, later on, prizes in vellum, deposited with blushing triumph into the concavity of a Dolly Varden pinafore. Parents wagged their heads and forbade, but the veto was conditional; the wisdom of the serpent was allied to a certain downiness of the dove, for hints at expectations in the future of the impecunious suitor necessitated an attitude both Janus-faced and revolving. Their perspicacity was duly rewarded, for later on the vacuous pockets of the young subaltern—he had gone to thicken the "thin red line"—became plethoric with inherited revenues of a deceased uncle on the mother's side, a personage for whom malt had been the Brahma of idolatry, who had laid up for himself a tidy treasure despite the corruptions of rust and moth.

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No sooner were the legacy dues arranged than Victor Dorrien, in a letter beautifully ebullient if ungrammatical, demanded permission to import his chosen one to share a temporary exile in India where, for the nonce, he was tied by technical obligations. He vowed that celibacy was dull, and soldiering monotonous; and, moreover, that, without the sweetheart of his youth to tease and plague him, there would no glint on the avuncular guineas.

The letter was a hearty one, and went the round of the family circle to a chorus of satisfied praise. The chorus did it. Someone has said that "perpetual representation amounts to inculcation," and this phrase ably describes the uses of chorus. Continued reiteration makes gospel truth. The family chorus on the subject of matrimony is the mainstay of parental soloists, its note brings the recalcitrant or frisking lamb to "mark time," and subsequently dictates the pace of a quick march to the impending sacrifice. Social excitement is almost as sustaining as fanatical enthusiasm; it is the intoxicant which inflames half the actors that strut through the world's dramas of marriage, murder, or martyrdom. It sustained and inflamed little Elsie, who, dizzy with congratulations, valedictory gushings, present receiving, dress trying, and orange-blossom choosing, ignored the importance of life's destination in the enjoyment of the surrounding and immediate scenery. There was great leave-taking and kerchief-waving and some coursing of tears down kindred cheeks and noses as the bride-elect was deposited, with wedding-cake, dress, and addenda, on board the s.s. *Kenilworth*, in temporary charge of a *passée* matron of skittish proclivities and Anglo-Indian epidermis. This obliging lady had volunteered to personify decorum until arrival in Bombay, when her youthful charge would be transferred to the chaperonage of Dorrien's sister, on whom the observances of marriage etiquette depended. Elsie was in no way averse from the arrangement. All was so novel and so exciting that the Columbus instinct outbalanced the romantic one. The world had much to offer and the suburbs very little. There was certainly a well-grown curate, an Oxford man, ingrained with pedantry and pomposity, and delicately veneered with artistic ethics; also a retired bookmaker's son, who wore loud ties and restricted "unmentionables," and who spent money lavishly nursing a constituency, no one knew where. On the other hand stood Victor as she remembered him, sound in wind and limb, handsome, honest, and professedly devoted. Her choice was unhesitating, and she started forth with dancing heart.

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As usual came the inevitable *dies non*, when the unfledged traveller makes a first bow to the Channel, followed by one or two squeamish days, when the Bay of Biscay as lauded in poesy and the Bay of Biscay as discovered in practice are two quite antagonistic things. After which, with rarified complexion, the sufferer forgets his troubles, and mounts the deck to enjoy a beatific spell of brine and breeze.

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So in due course did Elsie. She found Mrs Willis, who was an old campaigner, busily engaged in conversation, or its equivalent, the note-comparing, gossip-scavengering tattle which is inherent to feminine camp followers of a certain age. Her companions were one Major Lane and his friend, Captain Burton Aylmer, the latter a person of some celebrity in military circles where sport was supreme. He looked lazy, long, and languid, and to those who had seen him neither tent-pegging nor polo playing, who knew nothing of the spearing of veteran boars, whose tushes fringed his mantel at home, nor of the "man eater" duel, which in hunting annals had made his name historical, he seemed effete, if not affected. He was lolling at full length in a rattan chair, listening indolently to the flippant duologue of the major and the grass widow. The lady did not interest him. Her type was too cheap. She represented one of an order that seemed to be chromo-lithographed in reams for the benefit of garrisons in Great Britain, India, and the Colonies; but when he discovered in her the chaperone of a young *ingenue*, with fringeless forehead and skin like new milk dashed with sunset, his nonchalance subsided, and he became almost polite. Mrs Willis was prompt to detect the change of tactics, and swift to solve the problem. She plumed herself not a little on the possession of a decoy duck, capable of luring so desirable a prey as Captain Burton Aylmer into her social toils.

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"Be civil to him, my dear," she advised when in private. "Half the women on board would give their eyes to get him in tow. He is very *difficile*." Mrs Willis affected the slangy in talking to young girls. She thought it gave a contemporaneous flavour to the intercourse.

"He seemed to me pleasant enough," breathed Elsie, who was quite unscinded in complexities of character.

"He can be when he chooses. They say Lady Staines would have given her back hair for him and followed him barefoot across Asia—but he didn't see it!"

"Oh!"

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"He is very accustomed to that sort of thing. His heart is quite tear-toughened, a kind of

spongiopiline—receptive and impermeable at the same time."

"Perhaps you do him an injustice; there may never have been a question of his heart?"

"His sponsor so soon? Beware, little girl; they say he never loved since a certain queen of society threw him over for strawberry leaves."

"Threw him over!" A line of Tennyson regarding the value of coronets flashed across her. She wondered with a girlish contemplative scepticism how this bronzed physique, this heroic modelling, this almost womanly gentleness of expression had failed, having won, to hold.

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Hour after hour passed in the usual shipboard routine, by which every day became the exact counterpart of its forerunner. Only to Elsie was each moment a joy and a revelation. It was impossible to disregard the fact that, from being a juvenile of no account, she had developed into a personage—a personage, whose humble servitor society had been ready enough to serve. In the conquest there was no elation such as might have existed for maturer women. She was too absorbed with the all ruling presence to heed what happened around. The wind was only fresh when it carried his voice to her ear, the waves only buoyant when they danced beneath their mutual pacings; day was light, because she shared it with him; night was dark, because they were apart.

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At last Mrs Willis betrayed signs of alarm. "A mild flirtation is all very well, but people will talk; you must really be careful, Elsie! What will Victor Dorrien say when he comes to claim his bride?"

Dorrien! His bride! The words mentally thrust Bradshaw into the binding of Keats; she suffocated as though she had steamed direct from Eden to seaside lodgings. Was she indeed affianced to this almost unremembered lover of her childhood, and was she indeed journeying straight into his arms? How came it that the purpose of her voyage had been almost forgotten, that the seconds had grown so full of actuality as to outsize the horizon, the zenithed sunshine so blinding, that all surroundings seemed enveloped in atmospheric haze?

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Each morning in her cabin she registered a vow that the coming day should be the last of illusion, that the stern facts of destiny should be faced; each night her fevered, impatient brain cried for dawn, to prove by the sight of the noble outlines, the sound of the beloved voice, that the end was not yet come. It was scarcely his utterances that attracted; perhaps the knowledge of his soul grew best from what he failed to say, what he failed to seem. But she saw the weary boredom of his eyes change to fire as her glance sought his, and she knew her lightest speech sped like spores upon the wind to find a root and resting place within his heart. She yearned to hint at her projected fate—she yearned, yet dreaded. Dissection of the sentimental mosaic of years is no facile undertaking, so many scraps and fragments go to the gradual making of the romantic whole, and she dared not approach the culminating tangle of the love story without explaining in detail the nascence and growth of the dilemma.

Thus with the course of the vessel drifted the craft of emotion, past Suez, through the broil of the Red Sea, out again into a sapphire ocean.

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Mrs Willis, looking ahead, saw breakers and imminent wreck.

"You are both mad," she thundered at Elsie. "This must cease; you must tell him that in a few days, immediately on your arrival in Bombay in fact, you are to marry."

"I cannot."

"But, child, think of it. What can you do? You *must* go to Dorrien's sister's house—it is all arranged—you will be married the next day. You know I do not land, and that there will be no one but the Dorriens to take care of you. You could not even return to England without delay that would be scandalous."

All this poured in a breath from the agitated chaperone, who had awakened too late to a sense of her responsibilities.

"I will tell him to-morrow—to-morrow night ... it will be the last," sobbed Elsie to the pillows in her restricted berth. And when dinner was ended, the final meal on board—for the vessel was steaming extra knots per hour in order to reach port at daybreak—these lovers met for their farewell. They paced the dimly-lighted deck in silence, with weighted feet, and hearts that scarcely pulsed lest the bumper of anguish might run over. Then, behind the wheel, where the gusts of laughter from the expectant and happy travellers could not reach them, they halted—still silent, staring with parched, despairing eyes at the swirling water and the long track of dimpled silver that spread like the trail of an ocean comet in their wake. The night showed serene and purple, a universe in regal repose, only the ship, throbbing with insensate activity, rushed panting to doom; on, on, on, while precious moments flashed fast—a shower of jewels falling into the abyss, never to be retrieved. There was no Joshua to hold time in a spell; nothing to stay the deepening hours from waning into a disastrous dawn.

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She spoke. His profile cut dark against the ocean reflections; there was no fear of meeting his eyes.

"To-morrow morning we shall touch Bombay. I am going there to be married, Captain Aylmer."

Silence again. The ship's machinery rotated evenly—mercilessly. His face was sunk in shadow, she could but guess that her speech was heard. [Pg 89]

"Is it not news to you?"

Her words, like drunken footsteps on stony soil, reeled despite an affectation of steadiness.

"No; I was told you would marry unless——"

"Unless what?" she quavered.

"Unless you changed your mind—refused."

"Mr Dorrien's sister is my only friend in Bombay. If I refuse—leave her house—I shall be alone. I shall be helpless when Mrs Willis and you are gone."

A light hand, hot and feverish, shot its flame through his thin coat sleeve. He shivered.

"That is what I am coming to. Stand away from me—do not look at me—I want to say something which sticks very hard."

He shrank back into deeper shadow. There was horrible stillness. She stood transfixed, chilling, as Lot's wife must have stood when crystal after crystal replaced the warm and buoyant rivulets of being.

"Elsie—I may call you that just once—you must not refuse. If you do, you will be without any friendship but mine—and my friendship would be worse than deadliest enmity. The reason you must have guessed. It has kept me tongue-tied till now—a coward, a blackguard, some might say. The reason is because"—his voice blurred hoarsely through a strangled sob—"because I am married already." [Pg 90]

A convulsive gasp from her—scarcely audible—no word.

He clutched at a rail and resumed almost grimly, cauterising his gaping wound with reality's searing iron,

"My wife is in a sanatorium, mentally deranged. A virtuous woman, but she was wedded to mysticism and morphia, and loved me never a bit."

The fall of pitiful tears, tears from the sweet blue of her guileless eyes, came hissing against the red-hot cicatrice. His strength almost failed. Such innocence, such loneliness needed protection. But his! This man who had brought down wild beasts in the open, found deadlier tussle in the confines of his brain. He quavered—his firm jaws clenched. Reason is muscular, but nature is subtle and crafty. With a jerk, a twist, reason is overthrown, but it takes time and heart's blood to stretch nature prone and panting. [Pg 91]

When he next spoke his voice was hard—uneven.

"Elsie, for God's sake help me! Don't cry, or I must open my arms and hold you in them for ever, come what may. We have needed no words to translate love's language in—no signs to show we were each to each the complement that Heaven has made and laws of men have marred; we shall need no oath to bind us to remembrance. Good-bye. Some day, when you are older, you may know what it costs a fellow to protect a woman from her greatest enemy—himself."

The sound smote her heart, harsh and grating, like rusty steel. She could not scan the ashen mask that hid the rage of conflict; merciful darkness had enveloped the death struggle with a gossamer pall. There was not even a clasp of hands to tell his going; she knew it, but still stood there, as the vessel glided on into the sweltering night's maturity over a placid sea, under a placid sky, while human passions raged and rent themselves in useless agony. [Pg 92]

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Two hours later all was silent; most of the passengers, overcome with the tropical temperature and restlessness, were sinking into the fevered sleep that comes only when night's noon has turned a cool shoulder to the scorplings of the day. On the open deck, to catch what breeze there might be, the men slumbered, with forms inartistically outspread; the women, in a more sheltered nook, though not far removed, were stretched on couches all in a row like shrouded corpses awaiting the resurrection. Night looked down as on some pillaged city where only the dead are left to keep each other ghostly company. Suddenly, from among them there uprose a small, white wraith—lithe, barefooted, with wandering hair. It fled, looking nor right nor left—its footfall light as snowflakes—straight on, to where the ship's track threw a ruffled tongue across the stillness of the water. In a single flash the silver ripples gaped, parted, closed again, enfolding in the bosom of the deep the fair frail atom—an atom that seemed, in the immensity, scarce larger than the feather from a seagull's wing. Then the serene face of the ocean smiled smoothly as ever, hugging its hidden secret till the bursting of the grand chorus when the sea gives up its dead. [Pg 93]

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And Burton Aylmer, afar off, with outstretched, grey-flanneled limbs, lay motionless, his hands

clasped beneath his head, his eyes staring with haggard scepticism at the floating ultramarine of the heavens. His lips moved as though framing a prayer, but he was only muttering to himself, parrot-wise, the burden of the ritual that bound him to "a virtuous woman, wedded to mysticism and morphia," who loved him "never a bit."

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## Some Crazy Patchwork.

[Pg 94]

"Oh, love's but a dance,  
Where time plays the fiddle."

### I.

She was constitutionally a matchmaker, and though recognising the infirmity was not without its advantages, I refused to be made an accessory after the fact. I declined to lend myself to the introduction of my best masculine friend, Lorraine, to my best feminine one, Clair Conway. There was no petty jealousy at bottom of the dissent, for sixty winters had rolled over this philosophic head; it was merely that I shirked the responsibility of meddling with Fate.

But my sister, Sarah Sargent, had no such qualms. "Matchmaker!" she exclaimed. "Perhaps so—a woman without romance is like an exotic without scent; and what woman could know a lovely girl, and a man who is intellectually gifted and eligible to boot, without planning to introduce them?"

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About Clair Conway's beauty there admitted little dispute, though it was complex to apprehend. Every feature was in drawing, but nowhere arrogantly classical. A faint scumbling, which poets might have described as the mists of youth's Aurora, endowed the face with a soothing indefinitude. In effect, it acted like dew on summer turf which drapes the emerald crispness in silver sheen. The only obvious irregularity was a contumacious tooth which peeped impertinently over the centre of the lower lip, dimpling its fulness with a tiny shadow. In that dimple lurked the most fascinating lisp that was ever modelled—a lisp not sufficiently full-bodied to disturb the accent, but strong minded enough to put stress upon it. Her figure was in the bud. It had small natural curves, which hinted at feminality, but it was fitted far too well; the tailor had forced a masculine exactness which was foreign to the subject and to the statuesque creasings of her neck.

To me from her youth she had always been a centre of interest. She was like some half-studied volume of *belles lettres*—full of temptations, subtleties, prose melodies, poetic realisms. Her speech was fragile, and her words, subdued by their passage through the dimple, lagged now and then. Her expression was seldom either animated or pensive; never did green and yellow melancholy chase the vermeil from her cheek, seldom did excitement heighten it. She was as serene as innocence and as clean-eyed, the very woman I would have worshipped had youth quickened in my veins.

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"I knew Philip would admire her," my sister related, when describing the kettledrum she had given in furtherance of her scheme, "so I introduced them at once!"

"Lorraine's fancies are protean, my good Sarah. They are the result of appreciative faculty. Someone—I think Emerson—says that 'love is a mutual perception of the same truth,' or something to that effect. Unfortunately, as the artist soul is always in pursuit of new truths, the deduction is perilous."

"But," argued she, "Clair is the white light of truth itself. One might go about studying nuances, contrasting tones, and yet value that truth eternally. I expected Mr Lorraine would appreciate her for this reason. He is a colour theorist, and with his knowledge of values he can gauge the true beauty of white light."

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"Well, and the result?" I questioned, with interest; for I myself had seen him spy out Clair from among crowds of women, watched his eyes lean on her, on the picturesque brim of her hat and the curling feathers which insinuated themselves against the contour of her transparent ear, but had afterwards escaped to avoid participation in Sarah's plot.

"They seemed designed for each other," my sister pursued, "and I introduced them, quite informally, of course. All the girls had appropriate cavaliers, and I started some music to give a spurt to the conversation."

"Music is certainly an excellent dam for discursive shallows," I muttered in soliloquy.

"Whether the introduction pleased her or not," she continued, heedless of my remark, "I could scarcely observe. She is an equable enigma."

"A puzzle that is a wonder rather than a challenge," I agreed. "And Lorraine?"

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"He, with his whole soul—and not a driblet of it as usual—beaming in his eyes faced her on the ottoman. The light from the hanging lamp treated him kindly. It threw some ripples on the silvery edge of his hair, and shrouded the cynical depths of his eyes in pensive shadow."

"If you were a younger woman, Sarah, I should say you were in love with him yourself."

"You may say what you please. He had dropped his eye-glass—his solace in boredom, as you know—and was listening, interestedly listening, while she talked."

"Perhaps you exaggerated his interest?"

"No; there is a way of listening with the eyes as well as with the ears. I could see his fixed on the lisp dimple as it dipped. Then the music began; I turned over the leaves, and struggled to applaud, flatter, question, but my brain was with them."

"Much better have left them alone," I grunted.

"After all, they are your best friends—he is your prince of poets, and she is your ideal heroine." [Pg 99]

"One does not express friendship by laying traps—but go on," I urged, curious in spite of myself.

"Tea was distributed, and, either from laziness or diplomacy, Philip never vacated his perch. He sat intently watching her while she dipped inquiring fingers into each tier of the muffinière, and piled a huge meal on the Japanese plate at her elbow. She seemed bent on advertising a Cassowary digestion."

"An implied antithesis to poetic ideals," I volunteered, to enhance my sister's discomfiture.

"Perhaps so," owned Sarah, vexedly. "Girls are very contrary. But," she continued, "he perseveringly looked on with his quaint air of critical inquiry while she spread her handkerchief upon her lap, distending every corner in ostentatious preparation for her feast."

"Talking to him meanwhile?"

"Yes, *par parenthese*—between the nibbles at a chocolate bouchée, an anchovy muffin, two biscuits, and a tartine."

"My good Sarah, it is scarcely hospitable to register the appetites of your guests." [Pg 100]

"I was really burning to hear them talk, but Percy Vansittart buttonholed me to say the muffinière had run short of supplies. We rang for a fresh consignment, then more music was proposed. I induced Vaudin to sing those exquisite verses of Philip's—about the poet's tears, you know, which froze pearls on the neck of the woman he loved."

"Just the thing to annoy Lorraine!"

"He ought to have been highly flattered. At the end of the song," Sarah pursued, "people began to go, and I thought I would take a seat in their direction without disturbing the conversation."

"In fact you played the eavesdropper?"

"I merely wanted to catch some stray sentence as guide to the situation. Had I felt *de trop* I should have moved. I approached cautiously and affected to be busy with plates and dishes on a neighbouring table. Philip's attitude was full of interest—he was intent on some argument apparently."

"I believe a pin is the orthodox weapon,' I heard him saying with questioning eagerness; to which Clair replied, 'Take my advice next time and try a darning-needle.'" [Pg 101]

"A darning-needle! My curiosity was aroused, and, as the subject seemed to admit of invasion I adroitly wedged in."

"A darning-needle? for what?"

"'Oh,' she exclaimed with *empressement*, 'we were talking of periwinkles—discussing the efficacy of pins *versus* darning-needles—what do you say?'"

## II.

After the routing of my sister Sarah, I should have given up interest in her proceedings had not a letter from Clair reached me. It referred to a commission for book illustrations that I had secured for her. From this she volunteered her own patch of information—a crudely-contrastive one, but not without its value in the harmonious scheme.

"To-day," she wrote, "I was introduced to your *rara avis*, Philip Lorraine. Lady Sargent cannot praise him enough. Continued praise of one individual to another is boring, don't you think so? It is a moral throwing of the gauntlet. Besides, I always suspect the dear creature of designs. Something about her mode of introduction is Autolycus like; one feels like a pedlar's pack with all its little trinkets and tawdrinesses spread out for the buyer. Ah, you don't know your sister. To me she is a dear transparent soul with her whole purport printed on the surface like a sandwich board. She thinks the woman world is ranged in three tiers—the top story for eighteen-year-olds. Everything there must be out on approval. It's no good ticketing yourself 'Not for sale,' nor even pricing yourself at a prohibitive figure—no good whatever. She brings round her customers, provides them with her own lorgnon in the form of opinion, and pads them with conversational treatises on the subject in hand, like a Cook's guide to a party of tourists." [Pg 102]

"'She has more refinement than that,' I can hear you say."

"Refinement, yes. Flowers do not grow with their roots uppermost, but we know they have roots all the same. Her social smile is a very guileless plant, but I detect how far its ramifications extend.

"Her second shelf is scarcely better, it is for the mothers, mild brooding creatures whose brains perform kaleidoscopic revolutions with the same *materia*—dinner *menus*, infant food, servants' industries, and wardrobe renovations. 'The idea,' she would say, 'of a woman earning her share of the family income, contributing three hundred or so to the housekeeping instead of saving! It is unconventional, and, consequently, bad form.' [Pg 103]

"And the last shelf is for the matrons, dowagers, chaperones—middlewomen of the matrimonial market like her dear misguided self—social seals of respectability stamped with the impress of a Buckingham Palace curtsy; godmothers for the distribution of hall-marked silver and hall-marked morality, dragons—. But I forget your friend, the poet. Of course he thought I was 'trotted out;' of course I hated him for thinking it. I pretended never to have heard of him or read his works. Literature was practically barred, for I confessed I loathed poets. He agreed, quoted Coventry Patmore, who says a poet is one degree removed from a saint—or Balaam's ass. Well, men saints are chilly, and donkeys are troublesome, and kick. I told him so. Yet I abhor compromises! I can't say what I do care for; certainly not being thrown at men's heads like stale eggs at election time! [Pg 104]

"And what do you think we talked of?

"Not the modern girl, you may be sure. Mr Lorraine is romantic, and thinks that intelligent women are bound to be ill-shod, splay-waisted, and brusque. I had half a mind to undeceive him, but he might have imagined I was accentuating my points. We talked of all sorts of things—neutral things. I believe we should have liked each other had I been some nice young married woman with a red star for 'Sold' dabbed on my frame. We always admire pictures that are so ticketed, don't we?—from sheer perversity, I suppose.

"I ate a huge tea. Byron hated women with healthy appetites; I daresay Mr Lorraine does the same. He watched the muffins and the cakes disappear with an almost zoological interest. I was on the verge of inquiring if he ever visited the lions at feeding time—but a song interposed.

"During this I intuitively felt his eye exploring, 'totting me up,' so to speak. [Pg 105]

"Vaudin, the tenor, was singing exquisitely. The words were from Mr Lorraine's last book—they were beautiful, and I knew every line, but affected ignorance.

"'What is that tune?' I questioned with vulgar simplicity.

"'The one the old cow died of,' he answered.

"'But the words aren't bad?'

"'Think so?' he drawled, putting up his eyeglass and surveying the singer, as though the voice came from a marionette.

"I proceeded with some chocolate cakes, too nervous for the moment to meet his eye. He did not observe it, however, but resumed his interest in the departure of the edibles. It seemed absorbing! I wonder if he will write a poem on *gourmandes*! What fun to illustrate it and surprise him! He does not know that I illustrate—what a horrible discovery! To find in this piece of plastic putty a nineteenth century working woman!

"If he had not been a poet and a *parti* he might have been very charming! As Lady Sargent's dear friend, of course he shares her opinions about the shelves, and my mind was bent on dispelling that old-worldism, on stamping, 'Not for sale' into my speech somehow. But there was little opportunity, I saw he had mentally pronounced me such a silly little girl. [Pg 106]

"'Did I play tennis?'—'Loved it.'

(Truthfully, it has no attractions for me. It was a recreation once, now it is a profession, and one cannot adopt two professions, but I didn't tell him that.)

"'Did I dance?'—'No.'

(I was forced into this admission. Balls I forswear—the shelf is bad enough, but to literally earn a husband by the "sweat of one's face" is humiliating.)

"'No, I never danced,' was my answer. 'I had no superfluous energy to work off.'

"Then we skimmed more trivialities.

"'Had he seen the new roller shaving apparatus?'

"'Did I approve Ladies' Tea Associations?'

"'Did he prefer German to French food, and was he a connoisseur of birds'-nest soup or frizzled frogs?'

"'Scarcely, but in his youth he had tackled periwinkles. That was valiant?' [Pg 107]

"'Not at all. I was his match. I had eaten forty-two at a sitting!'

"'All self-picked with a pin?' he queried.

"No,' I confessed, triumphantly, 'with a surer weapon still.'

"I believe a pin is the orthodox weapon,' he advanced.

"Take my advice next time and try a darning-needle.'

"Here Lady Sargent overheard us. You should have seen her face of disgust! Poor dear, how promptly her castle of Eros was blown to smithereens!"

### III.

Two days later we were talking of the divine afflatus, and the relation of great work to character, when Lorraine demanded my opinion as to the analogy between thought and conversation.

"Speech was given us to hide our thoughts," I said, quoting Tallyrand without in the least agreeing with him.

"I fancied you would say that," he replied, and opened his note-book to refer to some jottings which had evidently been recently made, and which supplied, strangely enough, another impromptu and bizarre patch to the unconventional whole so recklessly commenced by my sister Sarah. [Pg 108]

I append the jottings shown me by their writer as a problem for unravelment. They began:—

"Charming because she is perplexing, or perplexing because she is charming? It is impossible to say. At anyrate, the external pencillings are pretty. Her manner at times betrays pre-disposition to enmity, for the flippant pose is merely a disguise. Is it enmity, or is it reserve? One must take into account the larger reticence of larger natures in serious matters. A woman who can be good reading to the clown must fail to attract the scholar. Yet me she keeps on the bare threshold of comprehension. Is it because there is a barn at the back, or a palace? Most people open up their drawing-rooms at once, and parade their bric-a-brac. Is she given to this want of hospitality in speech, this loitering in the open air, or am I alone treated as a burglar—an intruder, who longs to drag the arras from her sanctum door?" [Pg 109]

The next page rambled on in this fashion:—

"There is an initial stage of some characters which is purely parabolic, though every phase of the stage has its analogy in the actual. The difficulty is the tracing of corroborations. With so much promise one looks for some fulfilment, but she contrives to make out of the very postponement of promise a larger reiteration of it. She permits no shadow of negation that might disappoint, no growth of hope that might encourage. Her talk is so well conventionalised to suit the tonic and dominant of social exigence that one must avoid the vulgarian error of striving after a literal transcription of it."

A day later had been scrawled, with a dash of irritation in the caligraphy, a third note:—

"Of dispositions like hers that are worthy analysis, it is expedient to restrain the lesser deduction in order to gain the full breadth of the greater; one must look through the eyelashes at the substantial flesh and blood perfections to achieve the infinite spiritual possibilities deduced by the instinctive calculus.... Spiritual possibilities! Am I mad to seek for them in a woman-creature with the appetite of a schoolboy and an avowed *penchant* for periwinkles?" [Pg 110]

"That last clause," Lorraine said as I came to it, "is merely an ebullition of annoyance. I mean to proceed with my analysis more cool-headedly. The subject is interesting."

"Yes, proceed with it; but I won't warrant the coolness."

"What do you bet?" smiled he thoughtfully.

"My dear fellow, I don't bet on certainties."

Just then the advent of visitors interrupted the discussion, and a whole fortnight passed without my seeing either the poet or my sister.

I had begun to relegate the patchwork romance to the store-cupboard of memory, when into my room rushed Sarah with almost juvenile impetuosity.

"Look at this! Did you ever hear anything so crazed?" She threw a scrap of paper on the table. It was addressed to Clair, and I read it aloud:—

DEAR LADY,—You loathe poets. I therefore desire to adopt another calling. Cab-driving might suit me, but I fear I am lacking in the necessary command of language to ensure success. I could sweep a crossing with neatness and precision, and can pick periwinkles with unrivalled velocity. To this end I have been practising daily with a darning-needle and a stop-watch. Have you any objection to entering the lists against me, the winner of course claiming whatever guerdon he or she may desire? [Pg 111]

The note was in Lorraine's handwriting, and affixed to it was a copy of Clair's answer:—

DEAR MR LORRAINE,—Your poetic gifts will, I fear, militate against



advance as a crossing sweeper. The occupation admits of no impressionism, and requires uniform scrupulosity. With regard to the tournament, I accept your challenge, provided, of course, there is a competent umpire.

"What do you think of that?" questioned my sister with concern.

"I think, my good Sarah, it is the oddest piece of work you ever set your hand to, and that you have let us both in for substantial damages in the form of wedding presents."

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## "The Soul of Me."

[Pg 112]

"The wrong was mine!" he cried. 'I left my dove'  
(He flung him down upon the clay),  
'And now I find her flown—ah, well away!'"

After long sauntering in the Antipodes, I was naturally anxious to hear of him—of his inner life particularly—for his fame as a worldling had skirted the globe. The north wind had trumpeted of it; the south had whispered poetically, if insidiously; the east had contradicted the poetry and accentuated the venom, and western zephyrs had harmonised the whole with a dulcet cadence of admiration and pity. In his profession, however, public opinion was unanimous in proclaiming him pre-eminent. The signature of Wallace Wray—"Woll" we called him—at the corner of a canvas lured the artist mind to praise and thanksgiving; it did more, it loosed some sluggish thousands from speculative coffers—coffers that, prompt enough to gape at safe investment, could stand in the face of the divine afflatus, hermetically sealed. He had reached the peak on Parnassus where criticism drops crippled and diagnosis wrings its hands; his dexterity of brush had become a species of sleight-of-hand, backgrounded by the mysterious tissue of philosophy, science, and emotion, which, commonly called genius, defies ken or comparison.

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He had been a singular youth, the solitary output of one of Nature's quaintest moulds, and from what I learnt, the singularity had become pronounced rather than mellowed by the glaze of time. Yet, as I remembered him—it was five years since we had met—he was an excellent fellow, a mass of incongruity, courageous, sensitive—morbidly so—modest, with a humility deduced from keen self-knowledge, a generous companion and a witty, dispensing the fine flavour of his humour through a countenance as nearly classical as individuality of expression would permit.

This countenance now showed its presentment on the Academy walls. It was this portrait, done by his own hand, which roused my admiration and awoke a greed for more of him. Around me, the wagging of gossip tongues fanned the air, and scraps, hints, fragments of scandal were wafted to my ears as I stood amazed to salute his art in the superb masterpiece of portraiture.

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From the confused babble I was straining to sift a grain of truth. It seemed that Wallace Wray had been outraging the feelings of his admirers, had dealt them a slap in the face as cleanly, or rather as dirtily, as a realistic brush could deal it. In the nick of time, Spry, a brother of the craft and the very sieve I needed, jostled at my elbow.

"Splendid likeness—the best he has ever done, eh? He calls it 'The Body of Me.' Ha! ha! The Corporation of H— commissioned, it, and luckily he got it finished before he took leave of his senses."

"Senses!" I echoed, stupidly. "What is wrong? What has he been saying, doing?"

"More antics! Haven't you seen 'The Soul of Me,' there, in the next room?"

And Spry, scarcely waiting for dissent, led off, inviting me, by backward twists of the head, to follow his pioneering.

The crowd was too great for conversation, but it was easy to know from the congested state of the room in a particular spot where Wray's work must be hung. When patience was nearly exhausted we reached it. Comments and criticisms were freely bandied aloud.

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"Decidedly morbid," spake a sightseer in disgust.

"Hideous! I wouldn't own such a picture for worlds," confided one woman to another.

"It is astounding," an art critic remarked to his companion, whose face I knew. "What power, what genius, yet—"

"Genius is a loganstone," said the other, shaking his head. "It rocks and rocks, but a stalk of asphodel may shift it from its centre."

"For 'asphodel' translate 'woman,'" the critic replied, "and you solve the riddle."

At this moment a gap opened; it was sufficiently wide to reveal the subject without the frame of the picture.

On a slab of wood in semi-darkness lay a drowned woman. The rays from a lamp, held aloft by a bargee or coal-heaver, flickered down on the green-grey features that had already lost the

expression which accompanies the first beatitude of death. Some outcast, as the worn finery proved; young in years, we knew by the modelling of her throat; aged in worldliness, by the hard set of her features, the sparse strands of faded hair that might once have glittered. The folds of the frayed gown hung lank, heavy with dark drops of liquid mud which oozed and fell slowly to the ground, already a morass of wharf drippings that reflected pallidly the meagre gleams of the uplifted lamp. The magnificent anatomy of a beautiful arm, a shapely bosom—bared, it seemed, in an effort to reanimate—showed that this was no plebeian waif driven by stress of poverty over the water's edge. On the elbow was grim evidence of Wray's realistic mood—a bruise, wide and purple, and higher up, the dull indenture of a water-rat's tooth.

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"Well," said Spry, watching my mute amazement, "he has left no part of his gruesome task undone; he has gloated in it—look!—even to the snipping of the linen."

A definite jag on the front of the shift—the place which is usually inscribed with the name of the owner—was carefully insisted on. It was the highest light in the picture, and seemed to emphasise a piteous degradation and still more piteous consciousness thereof.

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"Wray turned moralist?" a bystander sneered.

"We may find sermons in stones, but we don't want 'em on canvas," bounced another, a "port-wine-flavoured" personage, who ogled for applause with the confidence of the self-crowned wag.

I eyed him with swelling spleen, and shot a dart at Spry which was intended to ricochet.

"Wasn't it Flaubert who said that, in the hands of an artist, a disembowelled ox would make as fine a subject as any other?"

"I don't know," returned Spry, "but, anyway, about this work there are ugly tales afloat. It is too true—unpleasantly, unnecessarily true."

It indeed appeared to be inhumanly horrible—a vulture swoop of the brush—and, much as I appreciated Wray as a friend and worshipped him as a disciple, I was forced to recognise a want of reserve, some lack of sentiment in the handling—say, rather, over-handling—of so repellent a subject. His aim seemed to lie in choking sentiment—suffocating it in loathliness and disgust. There was a violence of passion that suggested the manner of Prudhon—suggested it, but, giant-like, overshadowed it with the brawny vigour of modern actuality.

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I turned from the picture to the crowd, blinked dazedly to find myself again facing daylight and colour, and stretched myself awake as far as enviroing shoulders would allow. Looking away from this squalid scene, I became suddenly aware of an unusual amount of paint and gilding on the walls—an art tawdriness that had not before obtruded itself. My taste for the reproduction of veined marble and glossy parquet, for pretty pussies and portraits of gentlefolk was exhausted. I made for the turnstiles, and nodded to Spry to get quit of him.

"I'm off," I said, curtly, "to look up Wray and offer my congratulations."

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Green Park, bedecked in spring raiment, seemed to me at that moment a welcome oasis of verdure in the midst of the swirl of Piccadilly; it offered no impediment to the bubbling flood of conjecture that Wray's strange *chef d'œuvre* had let loose.

So far as I knew him—and our friendship, though spasmodic by reason of my wanderings, had existed since our teens—he was the last man to sneak voluntarily into the shadowy niches of life; his nature clung to radiance and his sentiment revolted at the opacity of pessimism. Why, then, this sudden hectic of the sensational? Why, indeed, unless the genius, the loganstone, as suggested by the fellow in the exhibition, had rocked till it tilted?

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In the midst of my mental tussle, while twisting the pros and cons in favour of lunacy, and walking with bent head and irresponsible stride, I fell foul of an obstacle. It was Lawrence Vane, the poet, who, being well known to me, chose this mode of salute.

"Your *moutons* are causing you trouble," he laughed. "Debts?—love affairs?"

"I have neither," I replied, without a vestige of humour.

He was a breezy fellow, good tempered and sound, but at the moment he was out of place. Despite my abruptness he wheeled round and kept pace with me.

"You were totting up your virtues then?" he pursued.

"I can do that on my fingers. It was Wray's vagaries that puzzled me. I am on my way to him."

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His cheery mood vanished.

"Don't go near him," he burst out. "He is a beast; I loathe him."

"He is my friend." (This with an accent on the last word.)

"I expected that. They were my friends once, but I never go there now."

"They?" I inquired. I had forgotten the report of Wray's marriage, five years before. It had taken

place in Rome on the eve of my departure from England.

"He and his wife. You met her? No? She was the sweetest girl that ever stepped."

"Was?" I exclaimed. "Is she dead?"

"Dead to us, to society, to happiness. She left her husband within the year."

"Poor fellow!"

It was well to have met Lawrence before going to Wray's studio—awkward situations might have ensued. I delved for more of the domestic history.

"She was the prey of mischief-makers—there were so many who envied her. People whispered cruelly of her mysterious elfish beauty, and women coveted her golden hair; for nothing women resent so much as Nature's own coronation of sovereignty. She was only eighteen, and believed in him—worse luck for her. Afterwards she became jealous and tried the spur. It makes some beasts go and some stand stock still. He gibbed. Rash people—men—quoted Byron, told her that constancy was woman's greatest vice; others—women—bragged of the equality of man and woman, hinted at levelling down when you can't level up."

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"He had cared for her?"

"It was a love match. But you can't plant figs in the midst of thistles. He was easygoing, hated a smart, so there was no uprooting, and the fig tree perished!"

There were tears in Lawrence's eyes, but he began whistling a music hall air in affectation of nonchalance.

"Well," I said, extending a hand as we neared Buckingham Gate, "it is miserably sad, but thanks for instructing me. I shall be saved unlucky allusions."

"You mean to see him?" he asked, dejectedly.

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"Certainly."

With a wry sneer of dissatisfaction he bade me good-bye, and I continued my way to the studio.

Lawrence Vane's view struck me as narrow and one-sided. He ignored the fact that Wray was one of the most courted men in London, that in England and America his genius drew to him followers, patrons, friends of all ranks, and that, as a natural consequence, there were warm corners in women's hearts for this spoiled child of fortune. With the world beckoning, the fair sex flinging petals from the rose gardens of love and admiration, he had needed more than human dexterity to pick his way through the scented labyrinths that were continually twining around his feet.

I found him in, and he greeted me with his rare smile. In an instant I observed that he was no longer the same Wray, whose presentiment he himself had painted for the Corporation of H—, no longer the harum-scarum painter I had known five years ago; it seemed as though he had thrown all the buoyancy of colour and tissue—the veritable body of him—on the canvas, and had left merely a shadow of the original to walk the earth.

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The studio, a temporary one, was on the ground floor. It looked out on the bustle and swarm of the Buckingham Palace Road, where the roar of traffic was accompanied by wafts of martial music from the adjacent parade ground. It made a bizarre accompaniment to our reunion.

I strained his hand, shook it more than once as an assurance. I wished to convey to him that I was not ignorant, nor curious—in fact, that I believed in him. My allegiance was unshaken by Lawrence Vane's history. I gave him the faith of friendship, which is a closer grained quality than the faith of love.

We stood among his pictures and gossiped of art, praising H's brush-work, wondering at R's anatomy, arguing L's historical accuracy, and talking of everything warily—on the brink, as it were, of a plunge, like timid girls at a river, dipping now a finger, a foot, an arm, in the chilly depths, and wavering. When at last we were seated he took a header.

"You've seen my portrait?"

"At the Academy? Just come from it."

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"You think I've flattered myself?" he said, with his head on one side, his eyes asking more than the question.

"It would not have done you justice three years ago," I evaded.

"Good! I wished the husk to be a thing of beauty. You think it a work that will live?"

"Assuredly, or the Corporation of H— would not have unbuttoned to it. It keeps its heart well within the limits of its waistcoat."

"And the other—the kernel?"

I looked at him and arched an interrogative eyebrow.

"The other picture? 'The Soul of Me?'"

"Of course I've seen it. It's magnificent work, Woll, but I don't like it."

"Crude realism, eh?" he said, leaning sideways and bending a palette knife backwards and forwards on the back of his chair.

"More," I said—"exaggeration."

He paled. I thought it was in offence at my critical presumption.

"There was none," he averred. "You shall see the original sketch," and he paced to an easel that stood, covered with a cloth, in a distant corner. He unveiled it.

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"Ugh!" My cry was inevitable. I resisted the impulse to shroud my eyes, but my teeth clenched on words.

It was the same picture with a terrible difference. Vivid, almost glaring, in the black gloom and silence, the woman's form represented a combination of all the debasement and degradation of the world. Evil spirits seemed to mock and writhe and gibber in the sludge of the foreground; the iridescent atmosphere hung with noisome miasmatic dews, even the face of the bargee glowed like a fiend in the glare of his lamp, held viciously aloft to reveal in its completeness the whole squalid history of spiritual failure.

"Who was she?" I whispered at last—it was a sight to shackle the tongue—and his answer hissed back like the sound of searing iron on sweating flesh:—

"It was my *wife*."

Heaven forgive me, I shrank from him. The man who could thus portray accurately, unmercifully, this tale of hideous defilement—the victim his wife, however sinning—must be himself either morally debased or partially insane.

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He saw the gesture, and moved away to the foot of the model throne and waited.

I could think of nothing but the ghastly achievement, could stand only with bulged eyes staring at it, a dry, dusty flavour parching my tongue. At last I broke from the horrible fascination—a fascination that almost prompted me to snatch his knife and rip the canvas from end to end.

I flung down the cloth.

"Sit there," he almost commanded, and pointed to an arm-chair at some distance from him.

"You may shun me. It is what I wanted—deserved. To that end I confessed it, 'The Soul of Me.'"

Then on a sudden his meaning dawned.

"The body," he went on, "was painted before I learnt what colour the soul was. I will tell you."

"No, no!" I remonstrated, perceiving the tension of his set jaws. "It will pain you, and do no good."

"Pain?" he said. "There is no pain that eats into the heart like silence. The knowledge of guilt hidden corrodes like an acid. It must have been that which taught the Catholic Church the value of confession."

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"Possibly," I said, moving from my distant chair to his side, and grasping his hand. "But remember I am not a priest; I am only, and always, a friend."

"I know, I know," he said, hurriedly, staring out across the room at the humming, busy road. "My confession is not to you. All that humanity can do the priests have done. You stare? Yes, I've turned myself inside out for them; but all their altar flowers cannot scent a foul soul, nor can their sanctuary lights illumine its crooked corners. I'm no historian, but I've heard of cases where private penance, remorse, and religious absolution have totally failed to wipe clean the hearts of intellectual men—they of the world, sinners, needing absolution of the world. Such men, who live in the open, and trumpet their triumphs there, need, too, to howl their confessions from the housetop, carve their contrition, like the wisdom of Asoka, on the immemorial rocks as an outcry to the generations."

He started up, and began to stride about the room. His face was full of passionate grief, and his wandering eyes passed beyond me as though watching a sunset.

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I thought of the loganstone, and of the frail woman, the stalk of asphodel, who had unhinged it. The great painter, sensitive ever to colour and beauty and flattery and happiness, to pin-pricks and to sneers, had dropped in pieces before a real strain—sin for which he held himself responsible, remorse that found no outlet wide enough for his great transcendent heart.

Presently he stood still before his picture, threw back the curtain, and surveyed it with folded arms.

"She was pure," he muttered, half to himself; "sweet, sweet as new milk from warm udders in cowslip time, and I—I brought her to my cobwebbed life without so much as a preliminary sweep of the broom. She thought me like herself, and I dared not undeceive her; but others—curse them!—they taught her. She was pure as milk, I said—ay, for milk absorbs poison quicker than things less pure. She breathed the taint from the loathly atmosphere of my world—of the world

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that had been mine.... But I loved her ... would have won her back—cringed to her. She spurned me, spited me through herself, evaded me, till"—a shuddering horror stifled his voice—"till, by chance, I came on *that*."

I followed him to the easel, and placed an affectionate arm on his shoulder.

"Well, old man, you must clear out of this. Come along with me back to the Bush, and drop this nightmare."

"Drop it?" he flouted; "why, the world reeks of it!"

"Not now. You say that even the priests absolve you."

"Cheap contrition! cheap absolution! how one cuddles them at first—at first! But in time we feel our canker—it grows under the clean Church wrappings—in time we learn that where our sanctuary is, there, alone, can our penance be. Hence this picture. It accompanies the portrait, a gift to the nation. You can't think what a going down on the marrow bones it was—down on the stones for every rascal to gaze and prod at, an attitude for eternity."

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"You'll come to Australia?" I repeated, adhering obstinately to my matter-of-fact bent.

"As you please. I feel clean enough for your company now, for I have committed suicide—not vulgarly, by murdering myself, but suicide spiritually. I have given up the ghost by working out the pitch through the point of my brush, and the carcass is yours to bury where or how you will."

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## In a Cornfield (Dialogue).

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*(The field is divided by a stile and a hedge from some pastures.)*

HE *(bent double in the act of gathering poppies)*. And what would you vote about?

SHE *(with hand extended to receive them)*. Oh, anything—everything!

HE. And the candidate who paid most compliments would get most votes, eh?

SHE. It would depend on how he paid them.

HE *(looking up and laughing)*. Then it's the quality, and not the quantity, which tells?

SHE. Nothing would "tell," as you call it, if we did not approve his principles.

HE. Not even the offer of a new bonnet?

SHE. That would be bribery and corruption!

HE. But some *bonbonnières* at Christmas time?

SHE. Oh, everyone accepts them.

HE. Then the vote would depend on the excellence of the confectioner?

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SHE. Do not chaff on serious subjects.

HE. I was never more serious in my life!

SHE *(pouting)*. Then you are horribly rude and unkind! Don't pick any more poppies; the bunch is too large already.

HE. Let me take it for you.

SHE *(with warmth)*. I don't want you to do anything for me. It is time you learnt that woman can be independent if she choose.

HE *(with a merry twinkle in his eye)*. You will permit me to carry your sunshade?

SHE *(simmering)*. No; I don't want services from people who laugh at one.

HE *(drawing his moustache carefully over his lips)*. I am not laughing.

SHE. Then you ought to be. There is no excuse for a man arguing seriously against woman's emancipation.

HE. I thought you wished me to be serious.

SHE *(tossing her head)*. You know very well what I wish.

*(They reach the stile.)*

HE. Let me help you over.

SHE. I don't need any help. Women can climb stiles as well as men.

[Pg 133]

HE *(turning away)*. Of course.

SHE (*amazed because he does not insist*). I wish you hadn't come. I wouldn't have asked you to pick poppies for me if—

HE (*interrupting*). I came as your escort—nothing more.

SHE. I don't require any escort. You can go home by the road.

*(His face falls. The roads are hot and dusty, and the fields green and fragrant. Besides this, he has curved his spine flower gathering for two hours in the hope of gratifying her.)*

HE. You will not send me off like this? Lilla, darling, don't let us quarrel about trifles.

SHE. Woman's independence is not a trifle.

HE (*laughing*). Of course not.

*(The laugh is fatal.)*

SHE (*indignantly*). Good-bye!

HE. What do you mean? I am coming with you.

SHE. Never!

HE (*looking at her askance*). Lilla!

SHE. I mean it.

HE. And your decision—

SHE. Is irrevocable!

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*(Her foot is on the step of the stile. Her right hand holds the poppies and supports the open sunshade which rests on her shoulder. She turns her back on him.)*

HE (*in a huff*). Oh, very well.

*(He commences walking towards the road gate. She half mounts the stile, looks across the field, then pauses. He, some yards off, is fumbling with the chain of the gate.)*

SHE (*after making another movement towards the field and then shrinking back*). Frank!

*(He does not hear.)*

SHE (*louder*). Frank!

HE (*not moving*). Yes.

SHE. Come here.

*(He obeys. She remains seated on the top rung of the stile.)*

SHE. Frank!

HE (*by the side of her*). Well?

SHE (*in rather an anxious voice, and pointing across the field*). What's that?

HE. A bull.

SHE. Oh!

HE. Well?

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SHE. Frank, are you sure you didn't mean to laugh at me?

HE. Quite sure.

SHE. You apologise?

HE. As much as you like.

SHE. And you'll never oppose woman's independence?

HE. Never!

SHE. Then you may carry my poppies for me.

HE. And come home with you?

SHE. If you promise not to tease.

HE (*leaping over the stile*). I promise.

SHE (*following leisurely and glancing warily across the field*). And, Frank, dear, hadn't you better cover the poppies with your handkerchief—

HE. Why?

SHE. Oh, because—isn't it rather glary in the field? They might fade, you know.

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## On the Eve of the Regatta.

[Pg 136]

"Why dost thou look so pale, my love?  
'I hear the raven, not the dove,  
And for the marriage peal, a knell."

"A year to-morrow since our wedding day."

He lounged opposite to her in a Canadian canoe, now talking, now soliloquising. Her eyes were closed, the fine pallor of her face, the steely lights of her dusky hair showed contrastingly against cushions of amber silk which propped her head. Grey was the background and green—grey with falling gauzes of twilight, green with luxuriance of leafage in its emerald prime.

They had paddled to Shiplake at set of sun, starting from their house-boat, moored in Henley Reach, to return through the shady backwater, which coiled like a slumberous silver snake through the heart of a mossy lane. Here they lingered under a languishing tree—a very Narcissus pining over its own image in the water, and shedding subtle resinous odours of gum and sap upon the mellow air—determined to enjoy Nature in mood of most infinite peace. Time passed unheeded, and silence, the euphonious silence of dual solitude, was only broken by the casual twang of lute strings, or the sudden enunciation of a half-modelled thought.

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"A year to-morrow since our wedding day." His voice thrilled with love and tenderness, its tone caressed her ears, though her eyes remained closed.

"You have been happy, dearest?" he said, leaning forward and clasping one of her warm, white hands.

"Very happy."

"And had all you anticipated?"

"All—more," she breathed, with opening eyelids, "you have been very good, very generous to me."

"Good? Can selfishness be mistaken for goodness? You said you loved fine dresses, it became my pleasure to choose you the finest in the world—you longed for jewels, and it was my pride to search for gems to match your beauty."

"I was very greedy—too greedy. I care less for such things now. Poverty makes one worldly, selfish, mercenary; don't you think so? I was so poor!—the very rustle of silk was music to my ears, and the lustre of precious stones seemed to conjure majesty and beauty in a flash."

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"And now you have nothing left to long for?" He bent over her hand and kissed it, and the little canoe, like a fairy cockle, began suddenly to shake and dip in the swell of an unusual tide.

"Nothing, dear," she answered him, while her eye scanned the waves that had so strangely ruffled their nook. "I wonder if some launch is passing to swell the river so?"

"Scarcely; that bend in the creek would save the wash from reaching us."

"But the water is agitated; look! it seems as though a high wind were raking the face of it." She gazed curiously up, and then down the backwater.

The trees were swaying with a soft unheard whisper of wind, and in the deepest shadow companies of gnats were playing hide-and-seek with each other. No sound but the hum of insect life reached them.

"It is strange," she went on, stretching her hand to the quaking water and withdrawing suddenly from the chill touch of it, "very strange; it looks as though the sleeping river had suddenly awoken."

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"Dear little pottle of whims"—so he had christened her—"what new romance will she weave?"

"Oh, there is nothing romantic about that. If it were grass, the 'uncut hair of graves,' it would be different."

"Different! Is grass portentous? churchyard grass especially?"

"Every green blade of the earth must be 'churchyard grass' as you call it. It all springs up from life that was." She plucked a tuft from the bank as she spoke, and laid its moist blades in her lap.

"Then where's the omen?"

"A silly one—an old Teutonic superstition. They believe that if the second husband of a woman treads the grave of the first, the grass will wave till the corpse awakes from its rest."

At this he chuckled joyously, her voice was so appropriately tragic.

"But here we've no second husbands, and no tombs; only a fanciful little wife who has burst the bonds of the matter of fact." [Pg 140]

"Was I so prosaic?" She stared at the dancing gnats and flicked at them dreamily with her glove. "Ah, perhaps so—in the days when the pinch of penury forced one to be tough and calculating. You could not imagine, Harry, the fret of blue blood in starved veins. To be poor makes one mean, grasping, heartless; once rich, we can become amiable, virtuous, heroic even."

"And poetic, eh?" he said, flushing at the recollection of transformations that his love and his wealth had wrought for Cinderella. "Come, we must not forget the Lowthers' dinner, we're due there now."

With this he paddled out from their retreat, carefully—for the dusk was closing round them—into the open river.

All along the banks a misty vapour, rising from the earth, twisted and wreathed till it wrapped the tow-path in gloom. Deep shadows stretched their quaint deformities fantastically across the wave, mingling deceitfully with black clumps of tall reeds, into which the canoe occasionally glided with a dangerous swish. [Pg 141]

The distance from the backwater to the Reach was fortunately short. Coloured lights from the numerous house-boats that were gathered in line to view the morrow's regatta guided them, and from the merry laughter which assailed their ears they learnt the geographical position of Sir Eustace Lowther's floating fairyland, styled ironically "The Raft."

"We're famishing," roared someone from its balcony.

"So are we," came in duet from the canoe.

"Take care of the ice-box," called another voice from the gloom, as a paddle hit some obstacle in the darkness.

"Fiz cooling," explained a guest, appreciatingly. "Your hand?"

Lady Rolleston gave it, and was escorted up the steps to the feasting place.

It was set out with a studied view to polite vagabondage. Deftly manœuvred forks, two-pronged twigs mounted in silver, and clasp knives with chased and monogrammed handles, garden lanterns in frames of fretted iron, osier baskets bursting with an incongruous burden of river flowers and hot-house fruits, champagne in old Bohemian mugs, ices to be dug from crystal troughs with silver trowels, all these heterodoxies accentuated the bizarrerie which made "The Raft" such an unique and enviable lounging place. [Pg 142]

Among the guests were three painters, a peer, a novelist, an actress of note, and one or two women whose beauty was, if not classical, at least effervescent and exhilarating. Merry talk prevailed as a matter of course, and bets were freely exchanged on the prospects of the crews.

"I hope to-morrow won't be a pelting day like last year; it was ghastly," said one of the belles to Sir Henry Rolleston.

"I didn't find it ghastly," he chuckled; "but then I wasn't at Henley. It was my wedding day."

"Lucky is the bridegroom that the rain rains on seems to be your version of the proverb," chirruped his companion.

"We've been lucky enough, sun or no sun," he said, looking across at his wife, whose lovely face wore a decidedly bored expression.

She was being worried by the peer, who, on the "if-you-want-a-thing-well-done-do-it-yourself" principle, was vaunting his own attitude towards the agricultural question. [Pg 143]

"I never had such a wretched time," went on the beauty, "we were moored higher up last year, by the island, near where you are now. But it wasn't all the rain, it was poor Kelly's accident—you knew him, Basil Kelly? Drowned, poor fellow, in the dark—canoe washed ashore in the morning."

"Hush," exclaimed Sir Harry, looking across the table and lowering his voice. "I never knew the poor fellow, but my wife did; they were boy and girl chums for years. He was master at the Grammar School near her, and a capital oar."

"That's what I couldn't make out. Did you see what the papers said?"

"The papers were purposely kept from us. It was too deplorable a subject to be mooted on our wedding day."

"Did she ever know?"

"Yes, later, and bore it very well. She was indignant at the suggestion of suicide, but has never alluded to the subject since."

"Harry," called Lady Rolleston from the opposite side, "Sir Eustace wants to know why you moored so far up?" [Pg 144]

"Oh," he replied, "partly because I was a bit late and partly because we're best out of the thick of it. I enjoy seeing the start almost as much as the finish."



"We have the Club grounds to go to if we like," explained Lady Rolleston, as they mounted to the balcony where the thrumming of guitars had already commenced.

All the racing visitors were gathered in knots in the blue darkness; companies of performers, niggers, German bands, and banjoists were skimming along from house-boat to house-boat, making music to the guests and indulging in mild badinage with each other. The moon peered out from the heavens through a silvery haze, and one by one the timorous blinking stars grew more audaciously golden as the night became darker.

On "The Raft" most of the company disposed themselves in groups, and boisterously chorused the musical sentiments of a young man who had boarded the boat to recite of love-making on modern methods. Lady Rolleston, exhausted from the fatigue of entertaining the indefatigable agriculturist, sat somewhat apart on a long cane chair. She fanned herself, and from time to time applauded. It was a pleasure to contemplate the boyish zest with which her husband led the roar. Song after song followed, and then came a "breakdown" from a young "Middy," whose spirits were infectious. At last, when the rampage had almost ceased, Harry Rolleston became aware of his wife's silence and exceeding pallor.

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"It's awfully late, we must be off, or we shall face daylight before we know where we are."

Jovial farewells were exchanged, parting bets quoted, then the pair descended into darkness.

The river was now almost deserted; its face like a black mirror giving forth only exaggerated reflections of such illuminations as still glowed along the length of the Reach. These, however, served well to steer by, and they neared their own house-boat with little difficulty. Outside, though the night was sultry, tiny breezes that came and went fanned the skin like the breath of babes. Under the roof, however, not a whiff of air could penetrate, and, within the room, the atmosphere seemed hot and asphyxiating.

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Maud Rolleston, as she threw off her gown, complained.

"The air here is stifling, I should like to sleep on deck."

"Impossible," her husband said, "you would have the sun routing you in an hour or two."

"Then we must keep the door open. I don't suppose there are burglars about."

"Burglars? I'd like to catch them—but damp—one can't fight that."

"It is too hot to be damp," she asserted, laying a hand on the frilled pillows of her tiny bunk.

"But dangerous mists rise up from the river," he argued, warningly.

"I am not afraid of mists," she said, and in her long silk bedgown she tripped to the outer door, opened it, and returned to fling herself in abandonment of fatigue upon her tiny couch.

As accompaniment to her slumbers the lapping of the tide against the house-boat steps made a soft, incessant music, while the swishing of reeds by the river bank sighed a sweet response to the whispered endearments of the wind. On the air still floated drowsily the sound of strings from guitars, and the muffled echo of voices that sang in other house-boats farther down the stream. Then by degrees, within the space of an half-hour, came a greater hush—the hush of a sleeping world worn out with laughter and laziness.

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And Maud Rolleston, dreaming, grew paler under the moonbeams that peered through the lace shroudings of the narrow window. She sighed sometimes in her sleep, now and again lifting her head upon an elbow, as though to look out on the expanse of water that purred almost silently to its inevitable future. Her eyes were open, expressionless, but tearful. In the crystal seemed a reflection of the water's suddenly ruffled surface which the moon was dappling with points of silver....

By and by she put her feet to the ground, hesitatingly at first, and then gliding through the open door, she stood on an old Moorish prayer-carpet that covered the head of the steps. Two nautilus shells holding their burden of giant mignonette shielded her from the air; but it broke at times fragrantly from the scented forest of blossoms.

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With a lily in her hand, backgrounded thus by stars and midnight, she might have represented a virgin saint on a missal, but her arms were bare and extended, and she seemed rather to be a prophetess, a sybil, uttering invocation.

Her lips scarce moved, but they sighed a name, "Basil."

The ruffled waters, at the steps of the boat, swayed and parted. The visage of a dead man looked out from the depths to her. His hair hung lank about his brow, the tide washed it along in passing, as it washed the weeds from the face of the lilies.

"Basil," she murmured.

"You called to me? Or was it but the haunting of a name that once did melt like honey from your lip?"

"I called...."

"Was it the wail of love?—Ah no, perchance it was a sigh—the pitiful sigh of happiness compassionate—happiness regretting sorrow?..." [Pg 149]

"It was love alone that cried."

"Searching?"

"And finding not!"

"But why doth love cry here—here by the wet tomb of dead men? what may it find where the waters slide and shift, and the fishes twist, and the reeds tangle?"

"Rest."

"Where satins shimmer not, and gems are few, save those bled from the heart of despair—frozen in flowing...."

"The rarest——"

"Where no song ever swells, and the dirge of the river pleads and pleads for the soul of faith murdered...."

"And saves it."

"Doth love come here to find rest that no earth could give, here, in the cradle of the weeds: to wear jewels, rarer than rubies of the crown, tears of passion, ice-bound and spurned? Doth it come to sing the river's anthem, to wash itself white and holy, and save its soul for ever?" [Pg 150]

"It comes."

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Close by among the rushes a wood pigeon stirred in its sleep and cooed, and the river at the foot of the house-boat step yawned like a bath of silver, pale and cold. Over the gulf swayed the warm, white body of a dreaming woman. Her arms were flung out, and a soft sob, sweeter than the dove's note, a sob of rest and rapture and realisation broke from her lips.

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Far across the fields, the note of the chanticleer rang out; the gulf closed, the porch of the house-boat stood empty, and the moon and the stars paled at what they had seen. Then they hid their heads and wept in the dawn.

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## Peach Bloom.

[Pg 151]

"'Twas only a dream—a boy's first passion,  
A foolish love, and a mock of bliss."

### I.

His first love; this is what his heart called her. But his head and a poignant memory offered many negations. There was, for instance, the girl who sold papers outside bounds, when fourteen-year-old effervescence converted a toast-and-water emotion into an intoxicating passion. And his best chum, Harry's sister, whom he had never seen, but whose photograph had lodged in his breast pocket—she, for a short time, had presided in that revolutionary area called his heart. He had the photograph still, with its central yellowy patches, which betrayed repeated collisions with an ardent nose above the place aimed at by his moustacheless lips. When the down began to grow like the feathers on a nestling bird, there had been someone else—a fairy all gauze and wings, a chameleon creature that changed her soft transparencies under the magic of limelight for a limited sum nightly during the pantomime season. Being somewhat of an idealist, his mind retained the fairy element in spite of rather harsh contradictions in the way of healthy appetite, indifferent pronunciation, and dubious finery. Of course he recovered the illusion, as he had recovered the measles, and, moreover, allowed his fancy a few other experimental flights before he encountered Carol Silver. [Pg 152]

The introduction was made by Harry Burnley at the time when, let loose from Sandhurst, their movements hung on the voice of the *Gazette*; it was made with reluctance, for Harry was well versed in his friend's inflammability, and had himself for Carol more than a brotherly regard. However, the day was Sunday, and opportunities for detaching himself from Tyndall being scarce, Harry could but pursue his customary route to the Silvers' house, accompanied by his friend and guest.

But Yate Tyndall was not thrust under fire without warning.

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"She's an awfully nice girl," jerked his chum, as they crunched the gravelled drive to the house; "but it's no good fooling around in that quarter—everyone knows she's gone on Rosser, some say engaged, but I don't think it's come to that."

"What's he in?" questioned Yate, soldier-like believing that every man that is a man and not a vegetable must be "in" something.

"Oh, he's waiting for the *Gazette* as we are. He scraped in through the militia, as much to his own amazement as to everyone else's."

Yate's opinion of Miss Silver's suitor shrivelled.

He was himself a mightily clever youngster who had passed into Sandhurst straight from the schoolroom. Perhaps fate had favoured him in providing on the mother's side some German profundity and on the father's a sturdy vertebral column and proportionate wrappings of British muscle; perhaps it had not, for inside the profundity was a luxuriant growth of romance, and through the British muscle coursed subdued but dangerous fires.

"He's a good-looking chap," explained Harry—for Rosser was an old friend—"a dashing rider, and a capital shot—everyone likes him." [Pg 154]

"Lucky fellow," grunted Yate. "I've often observed that the failures are quite the most popular."

"Because it's their popularity that does for them." Harry, who had occupied a humble position on the nethermost hem of the Sandhurst list, was conscious that his own anxiety for cavalry was due rather to the "beggars can't be choosers" system of the idle and popular ones than to a direct equestrian penchant.

"And women pet them; they'd prefer a fool who can pot rabbits and do a barn-dance to Homer himself," growled Yate.

"I expect Homer in the flesh was a bit flabby," said Harry, contemplatively rubbing the knob of his stick over an immaculate chin. At this moment the door was opened, and they were invited to follow straight through the house to where the conservatory gave on to a rose garden; Miss Silver and her mother were there reading, said the maid.

From the top of the steps Yate caught a pretty glimpse of Sabbath repose. The lawn and the standard roses were formal enough, but there were acacia trees on the left, and, under them, grouped artistically, an Indian drugget, a tea table, and long basket chairs. In one of these Carol lay curled up like the letter S, with head deep in a frilled cushion. Harry, from his point of vantage, whispered, "She reminds me of a lettuce." The soft green of a shimmering tea gown tipped with transparencies of lemon-tinted gauze was gratifying to parched eyes in over-ripe midsummer. [Pg 155]

Yate frowned. He was not on friendly enough terms to appreciate a joke which might be overheard.

Harry proceeded to shout a jovial self-announcement, upon which she lifted her eyes from what seemed an absorbing theme.

Yate's quick glance, in the moment of introduction, observed the book was upside down. Her thoughts had evidently been fixed on something more intensely earnest still. Rosser, perhaps, he thought to himself—he had already begun to detest Rosser.

Her face brightened when she greeted them, and she commenced talking with almost excited volubility. [Pg 156]

"I'm so glad you've come."

Harry's expression widened to a grin; his mouth was one of those expansive ones which are born grinning. It sealed for him the reputation of good nature.

"Sunday in the suburbs is such a dull thing, one feels quite asphyxiated, even to the marrow," she said, addressing herself to Harry, and veering weathercock-wise in the direction of Tyndall.

"I thought ladies saved that day for gossip and scandal?" said Yate, dropping, after the fashion of male monsters, into the smallest of chairs indicated by her. Harry had appropriated a footstool, which brought his grasshopper outlines against the green of her gown, and was already resuming his customary pastime of sucking the knob of his walking stick, a survival of babyhood which was doubtless responsible for the awning-like upper lip wherein lurked his impressive joviality.

"Oh, so they do, but at this season of the year all the women wear their old bonnets and their faded summer gowns—they're not even worth abusing." [Pg 157]

"Then you do enjoy a little vinegar?" volunteered Yate, with eyes that declared her all honey.

"No, it's too crude; but I like spice—just a pinch or two to leaven appreciation."

Mrs Silver at this moment loomed expansively in the distance. Harry leapt up to join her, and only the acacia leaves above were eavesdroppers to the rest of the conversation. It flowed evenly, sometimes stopping against an impedimental stone of argument—occasionally gushing with iridescent bubbles from the force of energetic collision. Yate was a serious thinker and a confident talker. Carol had by nature that light quality of intellectual exuberance which,

ornamental and active as foam, has no kinship with real erudition. They were speaking of Yate's career, the first steps, the coveted Victoria Cross, the laurels, and a warm blush underlay the bronze of the young soldier's cheek.

"A year ago," she said, "I was rampant with your ambition, now I cannot forget that the rungs of a soldier's ladder are made of dead men." [Pg 158]

"What are a few lives compared with a country's greatness?"

"Only a subtraction from a multiplicity of mourners whom death rejects, the numberless babes bereft, the women starved of love."

"Surely love were a petty consideration, a paralysis to the hand of——"

"Don't you remember what Byron says?" she uttered, her glance fastening itself on the floating mists of sunset, "'Love is of man's life a thing apart, 'tis woman's whole existence.' If war costs him his life, it takes her whole existence too!"

"Yes, but—but—" stammered Yate, fighting with a wave of sentimentality deeper than any to which he had been accustomed, "women nowadays don't love in that way."

"The more fools they if they do," she answered, flippantly, coming abruptly from the clouds, and flicking at a gnat with the stem of her fan. "Have some tea, it is iced and flavoured with lemon peel, *a la Russe*."

"No tea, thanks. There is Burnley waving at us. I think he has an engagement, and means me to be off." [Pg 159]

"Not yet, surely. If you are not booked for anything you need not hurry."

"Thanks. I should be glad to stay. I say, Harry, there's no good dragging me to the Waymans, is there?"

"Besides," interposed Carol, as her mother approached, "he has not been introduced to mamma."

"I beg your pardon," said Burnley, posing himself with mock formality, "Mrs Silver, let me present to you my friend Yate Tyndall—he's poor but pleasant."

"The fact of poverty is an unpleasantness of itself," affirmed Yate, extending a hearty hand to Carol's mother.

The expression of the salutation was scarcely valedictory, and Harry Burnley found himself doomed to solitary departure.

## II.

There was—after the manner of suburban vogue—a tennis club in Weytown. To this the *élite* of Weytown society, composed mostly of shelved officers in various degrees of dilapidation, and their growing families, belonged. Here the Burnleys and Silvers had met, from the years of teetotum to those of flirtation, and here, outside the cabalistically marked acre, in their search for truant tennis balls, had Carol and Rosser commenced the engagement which some said was serious, and others declared to be but a boy and girl pastime. [Pg 160]

When the Burnleys' visitor, Yate Tyndall, appeared upon the scene, which he did almost immediately after his introduction to the Silvers, there was spoon diet for the gossips in plenty. Where Carol was, there the six feet two of the lumbering youth perambulated also; where she was not—and the colour of her caprices was changeable as the iridescence of soap-suds—there, *pro tem.*, was the soldierly figure extinct.

Burnley laughed, then he chaffed, then he warned. Reminiscences of Rosser were flaunted, dabbed forth like blisters, their unpleasantness being excused by their curative intent; but to no avail. Then Harry, never tolerant of home tattle, suddenly lent himself as its mouthpiece. Carol was a flirt—nay, more; Rosser, her childhood's one chum, her girlhood's sweetheart, had been but two months absent, and she had picked up with, to her, the merest stranger, etc. etc. Harry further hinted at spiderly instincts, and hummed, "Will you walk into my parlour" somewhat portentously. The fact was that there was slight abrasion of his own heart's surface, but that he overlooked to view himself heroically, as most of us do, and believed his animus was purely in the interest of his friend. But the friend rejected salvation—flouted it—and in a few days the subject was emphatically—Yate could be repulsively emphatic when roused—closed between them. [Pg 161]

On the tennis ground Carol and her new admirer made an almost daily group. They seldom played, but they wore flannels in compliment to the surroundings, and dallied with time in talking what one, at least, of them believed to be philosophy. But, as before said, Carol's moods were never stationary. She had a mischievous wit and an effervescent, infectious sprightliness about her—it was a constitutional characteristic rather than the immediate outcome of gaiety. This made acquaintances consider her one of the happiest girls in the world. But of late her friends were prone to notice a suspicious drowsy pinkness of the eyelids, a sad pucker of the lip corners which argued complexly with the gusts of exuberance that followed any fit of pre-occupation. And Yate, as he grew in knowledge of her, could have testified to other moods still—ugly ones—had he not been too neck-deep in emotion, too loyal, too profoundly worshipful of the secrets of Nature to notice anything but beauty in the characteristics of an ungarnished reality like hers. Besides [Pg 162]

this, though he was but a youth, he had cosmopolitan blood in his veins, and cosmopolitan dilution means poetry at a very early age—poetry which clothes womanhood with mystery, and makes her a ravishing mixture of puny weakness and irresistible strength. To him she was the handwriting on the wall of Belshazzar, a sign for wonderment and awe and dumb prostration, a problem too sublime for solution, though the key to many exalted enigmas lay, alas! merely with Rosser.

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Of this Yate suspected a little—a very little. He never fully knew—nor indeed did she—how far the man was responsible for the development of the ineradicable events which crowded that autumn-tinted period. Once he spoke of him. It was when they had rambled from the tennis regions to where the edge of an adjacent common was banked with trees and dotted with seats arabesqued with initials by the playful penknives of holiday hordes. She had been capricious all day—moody, petulant—snappish, in vulgar phrase.

"Won't you tell me what bothers you?" he said, addressing the coil of her hair, for her face was bent to some hieroglyphics traced by her sunshade in the sandy ground.

"You!" she blurted.

"Shall I go?" he asked, meekly. "I've offered to do so often if it would make you happier."

"It wouldn't—nothing would make me happier."

"Why are you miserable?"

"I'm not," she muttered, and a heavy tear fell with a thud on the back of her glove.

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He lifted the hand to his lips and kissed away the drop before it had time to sink in.

"Would it make you glad to know that if this were poison I would take it, to share even so much of you?"

"It *is* poison, rank, acid poison, straight out of my wicked heart——"

"Then empty it; let me drain it, that there may be room for nothing but love."

"Love is a vaster emptiness—it is only a shadow thrown by ourselves."

"You have proved it so?" he questioned, anxiously. "You have loved?"

"I have loved," she breathed, with a weary accent on the middle word.

There was a long pause while they looked intently into the evening mists, which were weaving themselves into a veil of purple tissue over the horizon. A horrible tremor had seized him, and his next words, when they found voice, came thickly out from the burial place of a sob.

"Was it—was it Rosser?"

She merely bowed her head without looking at him.

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He rose mutely, stretched his arms to right and left, drew himself to full length like some huge dog wakened from slumber, then for some moments he stood with hands clenched on his stick before he spoke.

"I suppose it must be 'good-bye.'"...

She looked at him dreamily.

"Need it?"

He leapt to her side.

"Do you mean that you do not want me to go—that you would rather I stayed?"

"Much rather."

"And he?"

"He has ceased to exist for me!"

A torrent of hot blood seemed to burst from Yate's frozen brain, as watershoots from the glaciers in summer.

"God! have you given him up?"

"I made a misstatement. I should have said *I have ceased to exist for him.*"

"That means that you love him?"

She faced round angrily.

"How dare you suggest such things of me? Do you think that women like I are made the same as slippers, to wait till footsore wanderers have need of them? Do you imagine I would waste an eyelash in weeping for milk wantonly spilt?"

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"Yet you cried?" he ventured, very softly.

"I cried from desolation. Can't you understand the loss of the illusion being more lamentable even than the loss of the reality? Come, let us go back," she added, "it is growing dark."

They wandered homewards lingeringly. The summer dusk was full of sweet mystery, of hazy, promising indefinitude; the heath led to the high road, and from thence they came under the darkness of trees, copper-beech and acacia trees, which made a fringed avenue along the back of the Silvers' orchard.

They halted as they reached the wicket. Each longed to express something, but the something was in so many volumes they could not decide whence to light on their quotation. At last she said:

"I feel you are good and loyal and true. I wish I were worthy you."

He took her hand in his wide palms and smiled.

"Don't flatter me—if flattery it can be called. I question whether saintliness in broadcloth is lovable; but I appreciate the compliment the more for its being undeserved." [Pg 167]

"Boy, you are frivolous; if you weren't so good I should not have qualms about——"

"Do you know," he interposed abruptly, "how the Orientals prostrate themselves before their divinity? I would do more."

He flung himself on the ground at her feet, his forehead against the earth, and with a quick touch placed his head beneath her heel.

She uttered a sharp cry and stooped to him—to lift him. Had it been Rosser's, she thought, the act would have loomed magnificent; as it was, the combined self-abasement—the devotion, the allegiance of it—was crude and colourless. For her there were no passionate illuminations to preserve the margin of the sublime. She had argued love to be but the shadow cast by ourselves, and at that moment her soul's lamp lighted only conceptions that were blurred, formless, and grotesque.

But as he rose he caught her in his arms, and she did not resist them. She lay inert, like a wounded animal after long strife, and pleaded as though for physical or mental refuge. [Pg 168]

"Make me love you! Make me love you!"

And so he kissed her.

It was a kiss that might have awakened a statue to tenderness. The wine of her lips, as he pressed and bruised and crushed them, intoxicated him. He forgot Rosser.

### III.

The next day a stone Galatea faced the mirror. There was a purple stain upon her mouth—a tiny swelling that would not disappear. It was scarcely perceptible, but it burnt brand-like on her heart; it glared at, and mocked her, and seemed to beckon with horrible witch-like fingers along the grimy gutters that fringe the paved paths to despair.

Loveless surrender! What more unredeemed debasement! Yet she would have vowed her being to lifelong slavery for Gordon Rosser's sake, and held such sacrifice but glorification. One kiss! What was it? Was it gold or was it mud? Mud, mud, mud, which only the magic of love's alchemy could transmute to gold and pearl. Yet the mud had served its purpose. Was it not sufficient to defile the temple that had been consecrated to an unworthy idol, break down its altars, obliterate all memory of misguided worship—child-like, unreasoning faiths? [Pg 169]

But her revenge—her curse on the falsity had come home to roost. It not only branded her—it seared the innocent! Poor, poor Yate! What had he done that a suffering girl should have clung to him to avert mental death in an ocean of despond, while he had imagined it but a dancing duet on the waves of love? And she had aided the deception. It had been to gain time, to kill regret, to help in wrenching the weeds she had mistaken for flowers from the garden of her life. Well, she had failed, and the travesty must cease. But before it ceased that which she had striven to do as a duty to herself she would now do as a duty to Yate. She chose paper and a pen with deliberation, and wrote very proportionately and legibly:—

DEAR MR. ROSSER,—Pray do not consider yourself bound to return as you suggested, and resume our childish relations. Your long silence has proved you now know your own mind, and I have already found someone worthy of a woman's esteem and affection.—Your sincere friend,

CAROL SILVER.

She reserved the posting till night, after the coming of Yate, who was due at dinner. In the evening the young man arrived. He had fought his way on foot through a deluge of rain and a thundering blast. The tussle suited his mood, which had rebelled against the suavity of conveyance to his enchanting goal. A handsome colour glowed through the tan of his cheeks, and the sombre green-grey of his eyes shone gallant and golden with the illuminations of love. At first glimpse of him Carol recognised in his personality that almost godlike quality which welds mere [Pg 170]

dust into heroes. What devotion he was prepared to give her! A crown of sovereignty to lift the chosen one above princes and peoples, pain and penury, and privation. But the diadem was too large, too massive; her poor ignoble head might sink under it. And then princes and peoples would become but a mob, antagonistic or inane, and the pinch of pain, privation, and penury would eternally grip at the strings of her love-famished heart.

She showed him her renouncement of Rosser, and sent it forth to post. His heart bounded, for her composure deceived him and masked the cost of the decisive action. [Pg 171]

After dinner, Mrs Silver, complaining of the elements outside and the leaden temperature within, retired to lie down in the adjacent boudoir. They were alone. On a distant pedestal a lamp, petalled like a poppy, threw sleepy rays across the room; at the piano some smaller flowers leant their rose blush to the winking candles. She was seated at the keys in a gown, gauzy white, with two dreamy hands expressing some twilight theme of Schumann's—a reverie of sorrow and sighing. He sat passive, but it was the passivity of the spinning-top. His greedy eyes looked at the wandering fingers and longed to detain them, leant on the mignonette which cast a languid breath from the muslin folds of her bodice—fastened gladly, almost possessively, on the tiny blue speck that marred the outline of her under lip. Poor sweet speck! Oh, that it might there remain for ever as seal royal of the eternity of his truth! At last she lifted her hands and rose. He rose in sympathy and advanced, half afraid; restrained by the indefinable awe with which we all approach joys that are too delicious to be seized. [Pg 172]

For a moment she scanned him earnestly but not regretfully, and, as she gazed, she noted the passage of his eyes as they travelled conqueror-wise to the dark flaw on the margin of her mouth. His glance let loose the words that had swelled her heart with pent-up purpose.

She held out her hand. He grasped it eagerly; but there was a stiff wrist and elbow at the back of it which dictated the distance from him to her.

"Yate—Mr Tyndall—I want you to go away!"

"What!—now?—this moment?"

"Yes, and for ever!"

She spoke deliberately, without a quaver of sorrow, and every word on his heart spat like hailstones coming down a chimney on live coal.

His huge frame trembled and swayed an instant. Then he laughed. It was a jarring, joyless convulsion.

"You don't mean it—you are doing it to try me—say you don't, Carol, my darling." [Pg 173]

"But I do," she explained. "Listen. I have behaved infamously to you. I will take all the blame. You were so good, so noble, so loving. You came just when I was dying of heartbreak—people do die of it, no matter what the philosophers say. You saved me, you lifted me to life and womanly pride, you prevented me from writing cringing letters to—in short you saved me from throwing myself at Mr Rosser's head. Nay, don't speak. I told you I had loved him."

"You love him still!" he cried.

"No. I showed you my letter this evening to prove it. But that is no reason for loving you."

"But you'll try and love me? I would make you—you said I might," he murmured, as though coaxing trust from a child.

"No," she said, disengaging her hand and brushing it across her eyes as if to sweep away a blighting memory. "No, it was then I knew myself, then I took courage to face the future without him—without you—"

"But because you refuse him, why—"

"I will not become a thief. Because my own gold has been filched and squandered I should be no less a thief were I to fill my purse with what I can never earn—never repay." [Pg 174]

"My love is a free gift, Carol—I don't make reservations," he mumbled, hopelessly, for he knew her tones dictated rather than argued.

"Won't you see that it is because your gift is so lavish, so rare—because I cannot return—I cannot take it? Offerings of real worth cannot be so accepted without degradation. Dear Yate, good-bye. Some day when you have recovered this you will know I am right. Perhaps, even, you may place me, faults and all, in some special heart-niche reserved for defunct yet exotic truths."

She affected flippancy, but her mirth hung lank, like the curls of a drowning man.

He bent over her hand and kissed it.

Then he said thickly, in a drunkard's voice, "I'll go ... by the garden way—"

and rushed out. She heard the conservatory door bang behind him, and lost the sound of his footsteps in the howl of the storm.

They took him over the soaking lawn, along the orchard, out by the wicket, into the avenue of [Pg 175]

copper-beech and acacia where last night they had stood together. There he beat his head against the senseless bark of the dripping trees and wept aloud. And the burst of his sobs mingled with the roaring of the wind as it swept over him and expended its wild tumult against the closed windows of her house.

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## Twin Souls (Dialogue).

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### *Characters.*

ARDILAUN VYSE, *a popular poet; and* CYNICUS NEERE, *an old bachelor.*

### SCENE—A SMOKING-ROOM.

ARDILAUN. I can't think why we discuss it. It's as useless to expect sentiment from you as—

CYNICUS. To import coals to Newcastle. Who hawks goods in a stocked market?

ARDILAUN. One likes sympathy.

CYNICUS. I sympathise profoundly; but talking about a leak doesn't stop it.

ARDILAUN. This can't be stopped. It means the wreck of two lives—Letitia's and mine.

CYNICUS. Together?

ARDILAUN. Together! Why, the universe would be re-created! It is severment that ruins. There is she, brilliant, beautiful, famous, tied for life to a money-grubber on 'Change: a wretch who cuts the leaves of her books with his thumb, and snores over them like an apoplectic pug.

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CYNICUS. He earns his dose.

ARDILAUN. Money again! That's all you think of—it's all my wife thinks about. Petty parsimonies, cramping retrenchments, harrowing details of household economy—

CYNICUS. Very necessary, even in the *menage* of a popular poet.

ARDILAUN. They needn't be flaunted. To come in and read your most brilliant stanzas to a woman who never looks up from darning—

CYNICUS. Your socks?

ARDILAUN. When you know of another who would listen to every word and criticise—

CYNICUS. Pick holes, not mend them!

ARDILAUN. Who would share your highest exaltations and lift you—

CYNICUS. Off your feet, till you bashed your crown against the hard fact of orthodox opinion.

ARDILAUN. What is opinion to souls the law of the higher intelligence has made twin?

CYNICUS. A thorny briar, with twenty prickles to the rose.

ARDILAUN. What were a thousand prickles to one such rose?

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CYNICUS. I concede, Letitia is too fine a prize to be lost for a scratch—a thousand scratches.

ARDILAUN. Well said—now you speak like a man.

CYNICUS. She must be grasped and all the little spikes allowed to probe their way through the skin. You can rise at cock-crow and salve your wounds with morning dew—you rival the lark sometimes, don't you?—you—

ARDILAUN. Nothing to laugh at. I find my best inspirations at sunrise, when the first glow of day blushes through the trees.

CYNICUS (*scratching his chin and looking at the ceiling*). Letitia sleeps till nine. Her inspirations blaze best in moonlight. At dawn her rest commences and is never broken—no, not even by the "apoplectic pug." He slinks off on tip-toe to his money-grubbing in the city.

ARDILAUN. Does she work so hard?

CYNICUS. Books like Letitia's are not written without mental strain. Poets may weave, like spiders, from their innermost, but authors grind.

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ARDILAUN. Noble woman! Yet she shows no signs of fatigue.

CYNICUS. The "pug" again. Snacks before she goes out, snacks when she comes home; oysters and stout at eleven, by his orders. Saves the digestion and helps to recuperate, he thinks.

ARDILAUN. But eating in the usual way—



CYNICUS. Couldn't be done by genius; nothing so conventional.

ARDILAUN. Me you put outside the pale?

CYNICUS. Oh no; you've your vagaries, though not as to time. How about the vegetarian diet and distilled water?

ARDILAUN. The simplicity of the philosophers.

CYNICUS. Troublesome to keep going?

ARDILAUN. Not so; my meals are perfect—fit for a king.

CYNICUS. Your wife's recipes, I suppose? Our English cooks are dolts at vegetable dressing.

ARDILAUN. They are. She superintends—she prefers cookpots to poetry. That is the hard part of it. Were it Letitia—

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CYNICUS. The vegetables might go to the—

ARDILAUN. Nothing of the kind. A clever woman could master such trivial details in a trice.

CYNICUS. And pen her books with a squint eye on the saucepan?

ARDILAUN. You say she only works at night.

CYNICUS. And your matutinal repast?

ARDILAUN. My milk and lentils at eight—anyone could manage that—

CYNICUS. And Letitia's coffee and roll in bed at nine, her *déjeuner à la Fourchette* at eleven, your lunch at one, her snack at four, your tea at five—

ARDILAUN. Come, you're overdrawing it. We should at least have dinner together.

CYNICUS. Yes; Letitia is what you call a flesh-eater and wine-bibber like myself. We'd have a good square meal, finishing up with some fine "fruity." I forgot; in the ideal household the "pug's" noted port would be conspicuous by its absence.

ARDILAUN. Poets don't gamble to fill their cellars.

CYNICUS. So they go empty. Poor Letitia!

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ARDILAUN. Letitia would prefer love to the rarest vintage that was ever pressed.

CYNICUS. How about the machinery? The nectar of the gods won't drive a cog-wheel.

ARDILAUN. I suppose I have machinery, as you call it?

CYNICUS. Greased on special principles, too. Drop your principles and bang goes everything.

ARDILAUN. Puns won't silver your moral bolus. You can't convince me.

CYNICUS. Morally? I don't attempt to, but practically I can show you it is one thing to love flowers, rave over their colour and scent, and another to crack your spine in digging and hoeing, watering, slug-catching, and all the rest of it.

ARDILAUN. You've shifted your premises.

CYNICUS. Pardon me; instead of preaching I used the Kodak. Tableau: Two precious exotics; to right, the "pug," armed with spade and watering-pot; to left, your wife, darning-needle in hand, impaling slugs.

ARDILAUN. Bosh! You're too irritating for words; I'm off. (*Exit in a rage.*)

CYNICUS. To develop the negative, eh?

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## Pain's Pensioners.

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"Love's wings are over-fleet,  
And like the panther's feet  
The feet of love."

The little travelling clock on his mantel struck with soft, gong-like chime; it seemed to speak from a great way off, like a person facing you, who answers your questions with an absent eye. Half-past six, and he was due from the Continent every moment. His lamp—green-shaded because his vision was weak from over-work—some soda water and a spirit stand were awaiting him on the table, and a small mass of letters and papers was congregated in front of his chair. All these were tones in the gamut of expectation that found its keynote in myself.

We had been "inseparables" before his going, and we would be so never again I felt convinced. She had absorbed him: mind, desire, future were packed in the little palm of her hand. Yet I was not vulgarly jealous. I loved Aubrey Yeldham better than I could have loved a brother, but I had

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seen her and had caught the reflection of his sentiment, though in a tempered degree. I had met her but once, for on the day after our chance encounter—in a verdurous Devon lane where she had lost her bearings and we had come to her assistance—I had been summoned to the bedside of a sick relative in town. Returning to the old haunts, I naturally expected to resume our fishing expeditions in the picturesque valley of the Exe, but I soon discovered Yeldham to have found other pellucid purple depths that interested him superlatively. I had watched the drama from a distance, and administered cautions with the cool pulse of an umpire. But he was past redemption. I suspected the truth when I made an impressionist sketch of her—milky complexion, dead copper chevelure and pulpy eyelids like some Greuze dreamer—and saw his greedy eyes fixed on the canvas, not daring to name a price, too delicate to crave a charitable dole. I learnt more from the attitude of reverence, almost of awe, wherewith he received the gift from my hands and hurriedly carried it to his own sanctum, hid it from me, the maker of it, as though to veil its charms from alien eye. I knew Aubrey Yeldham well, had shared many of his escapades, and winked apprehensively at others. But here I was of no use, and decided we had come to the supreme moment of life—there is always one—when we must let things slide.

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Her name was Ruth Lascelles, and she was a widow; that was the sum total of our knowledge of her. She might have been twenty, but we estimated her age at twenty-five, deducing our theory from a certain fatigued languor of voice and expression that accorded ill with the girlish satin of her skin. This was arrived at on the first day of our meeting—we had not discussed her since. I had not been Yeldham's friend, his disciple, a mental sitter at his feet, without learning to walk warily where the fuse of his passions flickered. For some time there was a tacit agreement to ignore the impending danger, to talk of trivialities, wheeling round the central idea without ever settling there. But one morning when he had called at the little farm cottage where she lived and had found her flown without a word or a regret, his despair had been too much for him. The whole story rolled from his lips: his love for her, her seeming reciprocity, their wanderings in the woods, her reliant, trusting attitude—which had taught him to wish himself some knight of the Round Table and not a mere besmirched man of many passions—her flutterings of childish gaiety and sombre philosophy that had tinted her speech garishly as rainbows on thunder-clouds: he gave forth all, and asked, with an expression jejune as Sahara, what the sudden flight could mean.

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I was so out of it, as the phrase is, that I could volunteer small elucidation: that she was a coquette of the first order seemed the most feasible solution, and I offered it. He derided the notion—it was apparently so frivolous a venture that it failed to anger him—he never set hands on the cudgels for defence. "She is not shallow," he had merely said, and his poor brain had tackled the enigma so often and to so little purpose that its purport had become an unmeaning and vacuous reiteration. But one day, after we had returned to town and were working well in harness, he with his book, I with my illustrations for it, he burst out afresh.

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"She unintentionally let out where she lived: it is a little village on the coast of France. She must have returned."

"Well?" I said, suspending my work and pretending to extract a hair from the fine point of my drawing-pen.

"Well," he burst out, "the world is our oyster, and if we shirk opening it we can't hope to filch pearls!"

"That means?" I hinged expectantly.

"That means, in plain words, that I don't intend to give up the biggest pearl that God ever sent to make a man rich."

"You intend to follow her?" I questioned—needlessly, indeed, for his kindling eye contained a fire of decision and energy that for fourteen days, since the sorry one of her disappearance, had smouldered.

"Yes, follow her, make her love me by every art, divine or devilish—I don't care which, so long as she loves me—and keep her till the same grave closes over us."

And he went.

He had been absent but a week when I received the telegram announcing his intended return. I stood—with my back against the mantel, and hands warming themselves behind my sheltering coat-tails—eager to recognise his rampant mount of the stairs, to feel the clasp of his hand or its thump on my shoulder-blade, and hear his cheery "Congratulate me, old fellow!" that I knew must come. A cab stopped outside, and a key turned in the lock. Then a slow, heavy tread ascended. We met in the passage. There was no need for more than a glance at him to abridge the exuberance of welcome that had bubbled to my lips. I settled with the cabman, and in a cowardly fashion lingered unduly outside among the rugs and the travelling impedimenta. I felt somehow that he would prefer to come face to face with his home in silence. He drank a pretty stiff dose of brandy before sitting down, and moved the lamp away from his eyes.

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"Letters," I indicated.

"Bother letters! Open them or throw them in the fire."

I did neither, but transferred them to his bureau. Then, seeing he was disinclined for conversation, I relit my old briar pipe that had been suffered to go out, and lolled in an arm-chair

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facing the fender. Presently I surveyed him from the side of an eye. His chin was sunk on his chest, he was staring at his boots with the blank look of a gambler who has staked his last. There was something in his attitude that made me wish myself a dog or a woman, that I might lick, or croon, or croodle some softness into that stony mask. The silence was so long—so pregnant with unsyllabled anguish—that at last I closed a warm hand over his fingers as they clasped the arm-end of his chair.

"Well?"

"Well," he said, huskily, starting a little from his coma and poking a coal with the toe of his boot, "it's over."

"So I suppose; and the pearl was not——"

"Not for my handling," he interrupted. "I knew you'd think something hard of her, but you won't, you won't when I tell you——"

He stretched his hand to his glass and emptied it before continuing.

"It came about sooner than I intended—the horizon was so serene I wanted to lay-to for a bit—but it was no use. We were talking of something—I forget what—and I made a quotation. You know the chap who said, 'Show me a woman's clothes at different periods of her life and I will tell you her history?'"

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"Yes; I forget his name, but I think it was a Frenchman."

"Well, I quoted him. Pretended to a like perspicacity: it was a sneaking, cowardly ruse to know more of her."

"Had she told you nothing?"

"All this week I had known no more than what we both knew or surmised—that there was a secret panel somewhere."

"And in your tapping for hollows——?"

"The spring flew; yes, but not as you suppose. I pretended that a sight of even a few of her past dresses might suggest a fragmentary romance, though of course she was too young for histories such as were meant by the originator of the idea. She is only twenty-four," he parenthesised, "was married at nineteen; I learnt that."

"Well?"

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"She snapped at my offer—was almost ardent in her wish to test me.

"'I could show you the most important dresses I have worn in the last seven years,' she said. 'I used to clothe myself in gowns to match my moods at one time,' she added.

"I saw myself face to face with the last fence, and balked. I began backing out. There were soft places, I could not tell how deep or how soft, beyond, and I was nervous.

"'Come,' she urged, spurring with almost excited insistence, 'if you outline with the smallest correctness I will supply the lights and shades truthfully.'

"She said the last words with pathetic emphasis that frightened me.

"I determined to change the subject. Caught the little finger of her left hand and kissed it. Did I tell you she had never shaken hands with me with her right—that she had explained she kept it for secular and the other for sacred use? I kissed it, in the centre of her palm, and her body curled like a sensitive plant with the warmth of my lips. I blushed for having doubted her purity or her love."

He buried his head in his hands and seemed disinclined to reveal more. But after a long pause he began afresh.

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"I'm telling you everything—exactly as it happened—that you may reverence her. She's too clean and transparent to be clouded by vulgar doubt," he said, rather to himself than to me.

"She insisted on my accompanying her to a sparsely-furnished room," he went on. "The walls were fitted with hooks and slides to improvise a wardrobe.

"'I have kept some of my gowns since I was a girl,' she sighed.

"'Those, I suppose, that were episodic?' I affected to laugh to waive her seriousness.

"'Oh, the everyday ones were thrown away—worn out: these were most of them connected with'—she hesitated—'eventful occasions.'

"I again wavered—allusions to these eventful occasions seemed to portend grief to her and pain incidentally to me.

"I caught her wrist as it turned the handle of the wardrobe door, and remonstrated. 'I refuse to see them; I know nothing of clothes and I'm not a detective, I won't pry into your past secrets, either of sorrow or of joy.'

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"Her hand shook in my clasp.

"Don't stop me,' she cried, imperatively. 'Help me—I want you to know them.'

"So be it,' I said, and pushed back the door. Then she suddenly flung herself in front of it, between me and the row of dainty frocks and shimmering laces. She looked like Cassandra—in a soft, yellowy flannel gown with loose sleeves falling away from her pink arms that blushed with the heaving blood in her warm breasts—like Cassandra guarding the gate of a citadel, though her lips said in a tone richer than wine, sweeter than music, 'Kiss me first.'"

There was a long pause—Yeldham sat blankly staring at the coals, and I gazed intently into the mists of nicotine that curled upwards to the ceiling. Through them I could conjure a vision of her bronzed coronal and Aubrey's massive muscularity, and could picture her glowing arms around his neck—a convolvulus entwining a Gothic column.

"There are some kisses," he said presently, "that are worth the whole sum of human pleasure. Pleasure! Faugh!—a rotten word—belonging to those who only half live!" [Pg 193]

He handled a cigarette mechanically and lit it.

"Well," he continued, "the first dress was white. A virginal thing of simple gauze and flummery, with a frontage of puffings to make up for bust development. Quite a girl's dress. Women, you know, are less generous in the matter of—chiffon, don't they call it?—and more so in the matter of flesh. It was her debût dress—I supposed—but she contradicted.

"No,' she explained, 'not quite that. One's debût is a hazy affair: all excitement, wonder, blush, and clumsiness, with little or no enjoyment. Yet how many of us would give the long, grey end of life for that first night's dappling of peach bloom? It was the frock I wore on the evening I first met my husband.'

"She spoke his name with a dull accent of grief, and I buried myself amongst the flippery. Her kiss was moist on my lips, and I had no taste for allusions to the dead man.

"The next thing was a riding habit—torn across the skirt." [Pg 194]

"A cropper,' I remarked; 'and enjoyed, or this memento would scarcely be here?'

"That,' she allowed, sadly, 'is a natural inference—correct in this case, but not in all.' I glanced hurriedly along the line for relics of crape—but she resumed my enlightenment. 'This was a souvenir of a grand day's hunting and a broken ankle.'

"And someone?' I hinted.

"Yes; George—my husband—carried me home.'

"I turned abruptly to a party frock—the colour of a rose. There was a green patch on the right breast—the blurr of crushed flowers.

"No occasion to state what this means,' I snapped irritably. I was seized with a desire to close the wardrobe on these trophies of conquest.

"No,' she said, with a quiver of the lips, 'we were married soon after.'

"I threw myself into an arm-chair in the sulks, but she moved on to show another gown—a bed or invalid gown—worn and faded.

"An illness,' I said; 'you had no strength left for coquetry?'

"Puerperal fever,' she explained. 'My baby died, and my brain—it seemed to get paroxysms of depression and exaltation. Don't you think that a supernatural power ordains our moods, shifts the evenness of balance, makes us sometimes irresponsible?' [Pg 195]

"There was a lambent excitement in her manner, which was usually gentle, almost lethargic.

"We can't be responsible for our brains in illness, particularly fever. But you recovered?' I said, pointing to some fine azure drapery encrusted with Japanese gold.

"I recovered; yes, but I never wore that.'

"It belonged to someone you loved?'

"It was mine,' she said, 'and was worn by a woman I hated. She borrowed it one night after coming over in the rain; she used to attend me devotedly during my illness.'

"Yet you hated her?' I asked, taking my cue from the curl of her lip.

"Not then. In those days I thought men were true—George truest of all—and women good.'

"I smiled, but she was quite serious.

"In this way,' she explained, 'I imagined that if they sinned, it was either for sheer love or for bare life.' [Pg 196]

"I looked down at the gold storks on the heavy eastern silk, and said, 'And when did you change your opinion?'

"When I hung away this gown, and determined it should never touch me."

"This woman showed you a new type?"

"Yes," she replied, very simply, 'she neither loved nor starved.'

"For a long time the poor girl remained mute, staring at the ill-fated blue garment, and one of white cambric that hung the last on the hooks. I rose to put my arm round her, to break the skein of unpleasant associations, but she moved away, and said in a hard, almost defiant, voice:—

"There is one more; tell me its tale if you can, and if not——"

"She paused while I took the fine lace and lawn into my fingers; it seemed a summer dress, scarcely crushed; in front, however, and on the sleeve was a splash of dull red-brown.

"Paint?" I suggested, 'or blood. An accident, perhaps?' and in questioning I met her eyes.

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"Don't, don't!" I cried, 'don't speak!' I flung myself back in the chair, and covered my face to avoid the sight of hers—the expression of horror that was staring from it.

"I will, I must speak. Yes, blood; his blood. Oh!" she exclaimed, standing in front of me in that Cassandra-like attitude I had noticed before, 'I can see it now. George had gone to the country—so he had said—and I, to pass the time, dined with an uncle at Bignards. You know the room—the thousand lights and loaded tables, the chink of glass and glow of silver—the gay and brilliant company that is always there? We dined, and were leaving afterwards for the Opera. My uncle passed out first, and I was about to follow him, when, at a little table *a deux*, I saw George and her; George looking down, down into her eyes and her bosom, with a hot red flush in his cheeks, and a lifted wine-glass in his hand. I don't know what happened; I burst between them, flung the glass from his fingers, and then——'

"I thought she must scream, but only a gasp escaped her. She looked at something on the ground and added in an awed, strangely intense voice, 'He was dead!'"

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"The tone compelled me to her side; a torrent of agony seemed frozen at her lips.

"Hush! Hush!" I implored. 'Your brain was deranged: you had been ill——'

"I had recovered. Did you never read of the Reymond affair? I am that miserable woman. Lucky, some people have called me, because in France they are human and class such deeds as *crimes passionels*."

"My words I cannot remember. They were violent reiterations of love, assurances that I had read and recalled the catastrophe—the fatal result of a glass splint probing an artery—and had pitied her before I knew her. I protested, raved, threatened, vowed I had come with the one object of linking my life to hers, and that now, more than ever, my mind was fixed.

"But she remained cold, almost severe. 'You remember,' she said, 'how I fled from you to spare myself a Tantalus torture—a hungering for spiritual peace, a thirsting for rare devotion which you seemed to be offering with laden hands?'"

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"Your longings must have been slight!" I scoffed, ungenerously.

"Listen," she cried, still standing rigid, though the thrilling tone of her voice confessed her emotion. "The verdict of acquittal was merely a doom to perpetual remorse. "A life for a life," was cried to me from even the day-break cheeping of the birds. I thought to make atonement by fasting and prayer: I hoped for it in attending the stricken—walking hand-in-hand with disease. On stormy nights I fancied I might save some drowning soul from wreck; earn an innocent life at the cost of my own; I was ready—craving of God the hour and the opportunity, but it never came. I have knelt and starved, I have nursed the sick to health, I have rescued a child from the depths, and yet I live!"

"I clutched her gown, kissed it, abjured her to leave her theories of atonement with Heaven, and trust her future and its serenity to me. But she put me aside.

"Oh, Aubrey, be merciful—spare me all you can, for I am like a pilgrim who faints in sight of the Great Road. I know now that it is not the pulse of life, but the colour and the scent of it that make one's sacrifice. I believe that every guilty soul must have his moment of high opportunity—of expiation, and this is mine. You are brave, you are great, you are generous. Shall you tempt me—and stay; or will you save me—and go?"

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Poor Yeldham's voice broke to a hoarse whisper, and I laid a sympathetic hand upon his knee.

"And you, Aubrey, you went?"

"I am here," he answered, with a groan that was more pitiful than tears.

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## For Love or Science?

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"This morn a throstle piped to me,

"Tis time that mates were wooed and won—  
The daffodils are on the lea."

There is always a store of benevolence and magnanimity in the heart that beats at an altitude of nearly four feet from the ground. Wit, wisdom, and energy may go pit-a-pat "at the double" on lower levels, but great soulèdness and probity only come to their perfection in a steadier region.

Beyond these last-quoted virtues Ralph Danby had few. He was rather lethargic and decidedly clumsy. His six-feet-three of flesh and blood was knotty with muscle, but, in the garments of the polite, the muscularity showed like adipose tissue and spoilt him. In feature he was pronounced perfect.

"Perfect as regenerate man can well be," raved a lady artist, who, before he had been in Hampstead a week, had implored him to pose for a painting of early Scandinavian classicism. He wore a Vandyke beard—not because he liked it, but to avoid the casualties of his native clumsiness, which made shaving as farcical as Heidelberg duelling—and permitted its amber waves to roam caressingly close to his chin with a negligence that was the more graceful because unstudied.

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At first, when it became known that young Dr Danby intended stepping into his father's practice, Hampstead resented it. Cabinet Councils of "tabbies," assembling over their postprandial Bohea, declared they would none of him. A retired Army doctor, forsooth! What would become of their nervous ailments, their specially feminine disorders? If they had the finger-ache, he would be bound to suggest amputation; if liver or neuralgia, he would insist on active employment—those were the only formulæ known to regimental sawbones, poor benighted things!

But when he came, when it saw the benign blue eyes and lordly physique of the new practitioner, the feline chorus changed its note, while neuralgia, *migraine*, and other indefinite and not unbecoming disorders became quite epidemical in his neighbourhood. Only a few daring persons ventured to harbour opinions in opposition to the *vox populi*, and those speedily argued themselves ignorant or prejudiced, or both.

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There existed perhaps but one person of his acquaintance who was absolutely indifferent to the impression created in his new surroundings—the one and only person for whose goodwill Ralph Danby had ever cared. He had known her at Gibraltar, a laughing, rosy bride, brought out by the senior Major, a man almost double her years. But that seemed ages ago. The Major had been gathered to his fathers, and Mrs Cameron, with her baby girl, to the great regret of the regiment, had returned to the vicinity, if not to the care, of her parents in Maida Vale.

It was this departure, though it would have surprised him had he been told so, that inspired Ralph Danby with the notion that Army doctoring was a bore. He came to the conclusion that real work was all he wanted. What a field was open in metropolitan life with its suffering and pain for a man's labours—a man who was otherwise good for nothing! And then the reward—the smiles of the relieved—that existed always, when other satisfaction failed.

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He realised he was down on his luck, but diagnosed no further, and sent in his papers. Farewell dinners followed, and the mess tried to carry him round the table at the risk of collective apoplexy (for he was a huge favourite in every sense of the word), then the *Peninsula* weighed anchor, and Gibraltar saw him no more.

It was some time, however, after taking over his new work that he ventured to call on Mrs Cameron. He respected her widowhood; he feared the renewal of his acquaintance might revive unhappy recollections; but he went at last.

He was pathetically nervous when introduced into the tiny drawing-room where Phœbe sat alone. But the moment he heard her rippling laughter he was reassured. The room was small, and Ralph was big and clumsy. In his advance one of those Algerian tables, so admirably constructed to bark the shins or bang the knees of unsuspecting mortals, gave way before him and scattered its *bric-à-brac* far and wide. This trifling incident served to put him on his old footing at once, and in fact to establish his identity, for Danby's reputation for wreckage had been universal as well as costly.

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"At it again, you see, Mrs Cameron!" exclaimed he, as he hastened to right the impediment. "Allow me. I am so sorry. Allow me!" he gasped, while grovelling with her on the floor in search of some errant trinket which had rolled into space. She "laughed a merry laugh and said a sweet say" of forgiveness, while he noted a transient blush on her downy cheek. He was not a vain man, but he harboured a tiny wonder whether it had been born at sight of him or of the mere exertion of stooping.

"I have a practice quite near here," he volunteered aloud. "It was the stooping," decided the inward mentor regretfully.

"How curious!"

He did not think it so, but agreed.

"It *is* strange. My father is old, and he was quite pleased to retire when he found me fit for the berth. I thought life at Gib awfully monotonous, and was glad enough to throw it up."

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He had not complained before Phœbe Cameron left, but the question of his sentiments did not

come under discussion. They talked of old friends a little scappily and with some constraint—so much had happened since they had met, and numerous recollections had to be skipped—until his hostess asked:—

"Would you like to see my wee Phœbe? She is growing wonderfully. She is nearly two years old now!"

Her voice sank with an inflexion of sorrow. The age of her child recalled the long blank which occupied the centre of her lifetime's sheet.

The big man's heart thrilled with pity. He longed to open his wide, protecting arms and fold the fragile creature to his breast; she seemed so sweet, so brave, yet so lonely.

But he answered bluntly enough:—

"Produce the youngster. I suppose she'll call me 'Dot Dandy' as the other kids used to!"

Phœbe was absent for a few moments, and then returned with a toddling article, half embroidery, half flesh, with cheeks like apples, and eyes wide with youthful criticism.

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"This is Doctor Danby," introduced her parent, lifting the child and placing her on the guest's capacious knee, though still supporting the tiny waist with an assuring hand.

He and the juvenile scanned each other carefully. The grey eyes, the bronze curls, and rosy mouth—they were the exact presentments of her mother. He stooped and kissed them one by one.

Before an outsider he would have been for ever compromised, but fond mammas can see nothing extraordinary in any affectionate demonstration towards their offspring!

"Who am I, Phœbe?" asked he, dwelling tenderly on the name shared alike by parent and child.

"Ow is Dot Dandy," was the lisped reply. "Mammy, is Dot Dandy nice?"

Mrs Cameron hurriedly lifted the loquacious imp from its impromptu perch. Again "Dot" noticed a delicious flush on the transparent cheek, and his heart leaped within him.

"Pooh!" sneered the inward mentor again, "the lassie is substantial—too substantial for any woman to carry without colouring!"

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"Mammy, is Dot Dandy nice?" clamoured Phœbe minor again.

Her mother took the precaution of ringing for the nurse before replying.

"Yes, darling. Very nice."

That time she *did* blush. Ralph could have sworn it!

How he reached home he never knew. The biggest men are the largest fools sometimes. His enormous heart drew its own pattern of her perfections, and coloured it with her beauty round and about. Her reflections of him never extended beyond the locality of her brain. He did not look half smart out of uniform—was awkward as ever, but kind-hearted, and her baby liked him! If it were ill, he would be the person to send for. But Phœbe must be taught not to chatter! Had it been anyone else but Dot—!

Danby's coachman, when not cogitating on the off-chances suggested by "straight tips" from stablemen in the mews, used to puzzle himself in the days which followed at the frequency of the doctor's visits to the tiny house in Maida Vale. He became conversant with the pattern of the window curtains, and began to cultivate a lively interest in the headgear of the "superior young person" who wheeled Miss Cameron's go-cart. As a reward of his attentions, the "superior young person," whose encyclopædic qualities were unbounded, certified to a fact he had long suspected, that there was absolutely no sickness in the establishment!

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But Ralph Danby was happily unconscious of the delicate supervision of man and maid, and pursued the even tenor of his way in a delightful state of beatitude till one day he overstepped the bounds of public thoroughfare and found himself face to face with a warning to trespassers. In fact, he made an ass of himself and proposed.

Without rhyme or reason he placed his six-foot-three of cumbersome manhood at the disposal of a woman from whom he afterwards confessed he had never received the smallest encouragement. She had certainly never objected to his continual presence, but, to those who have known each other in a garrison town where daily meetings and calls are common, visits are not noted with the same importance as metropolitan formalities of like description.

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Mrs Cameron had not yet returned to society, and consequently cultivated few acquaintances. Her intimates called as frequently as Ralph, whose arrival was never objectless. Sometimes there was a doll to be delivered to Phœbe minor; occasionally he produced tickets for some lecture on infancy or education; now and then he brought music which he especially wished to hear (he could recognise "God Save the Queen" if played at the end of a programme); and once he had ventured to offer flowers! But the quick march came to an abrupt halt through his own folly. Because one morning he found her with a complexion more like a rose petal than usual, because the birds made a perfect din of song outside, and the spring sun seemed to pour through every crack and cranny and say, "Winter is past," he thought her heart must be as love-flushed as his

own. Always downright—blunt some people said—he invaded where angels might have feared to tread.

"Mrs Cameron—Phœbe—I love you. Will you marry me? Will you let me make you happy again?" [Pg 211]

Two dove-grey eyes blinked wide with amazement; then, seeing the reality of his emotion, she stepped back a pace, and seemed to freeze as she stood.

The birds sounded discordantly; the sunshine lost all its warmth—it was but a winter gleam after all; the rose-bloom of her cheek changed to deadly pallor. Big man as he was, he grew giddy as he looked. He knew at once the magnitude of his vanity and his mistake, and cursed himself for having spoken.

"Doctor Danby, I—I—you do me honour. I thank you very much, but oh! why did you spoil our friendship with such folly?"

"Folly? To love you? I have never done a wiser thing in my life!"

"Pray do not speak of love. You know—you must know—that word to me is dead for ever!"

"But some day, in the future, you might——"

"My future, Doctor Danby, belongs to my child. I shall never allow any interest to come before my love for her. Will you understand this, and forgive and forget to-day as though it had never been?" [Pg 212]

He was not a really vain man, or her frigid words, her rejection of his love, would have sent him from the house angered and mortified, never to return. But he was large-souled and childishly tender of heart, and thought, even in his disappointment, that, in her unprotected state, she might at times have need of him.

Because his demand had exceeded his deserts, and because he had received a merited snub for his rashness, there was no reason, he argued, that she should be deprived the right of using him as her friend.

He smiled a sickly assent and extended his hand.

"Good-bye, and I may come and see you sometimes still? It is not as if there were anyone else ——"

Mrs Cameron interrupted hurriedly.

"Please do, and we will never reopen this subject again!"

"Never again!" swore poor Danby as he left the house—and he meant it.

In his own sanctum he coned over every speech of hers and found the interview had been bald to desolation. Not one green blade of sympathy even had she given to cheer the dreary wilderness of his life. She had wished to keep him as her friend, certainly; but that in itself was a dubious compliment. Had she cared for him ever so little, and felt bound by duty for her child's sake to sacrifice love, she would have avoided painful chances of meeting. [Pg 213]

"She has evidently no fear of falling in love with me," groaned Ralph to himself. "I am not even sufficiently interesting to be dangerous."

This rankled for some time. He continued on his daily rounds, endeavouring, if possible, to avoid passing through the street in which his frosty idol dwelt. With dreary, lustreless eyes he received the blandishments of the feminine throng which had elevated him to popularity; with tired, joyless heart he buried himself in his lonely home after the treadmill hours were over. Only some exceptional case of suffering or technical interest had power to rouse him. He was but happy when ministering to the physical pain of others; if possible, he would have shared it. In mental trouble the absolute prick and smart of bodily injury seems a welcome inconvenience, for at least it admits of hope, the continued hope of recovery, to give impetus to life. He was neither mawkish nor sentimental—his years of scientific training had pruned such tendencies; but the inborn sympathy with his fellow-men which had prompted him to the choice of medicine as a career permeated every tissue of his medical knowledge and supplemented a powerful element of healing peculiarly its own. He had been ever ready to throw heart and soul into any case of interest or alarm, but now his patients found him more than ever devoted. They did not know that in their service alone the heart's blood of the man was kept from anæsthesia. For nearly a month Ralph Danby avoided the house in Mervan Street; then with the inconsistency symbolic of great minds, he decided to go there at once. He counselled himself that half a loaf was better than no bread, and came rightly to the conclusion that if he intended calling again, the more he postponed the ordeal the more impossible would be the resumption of the old relations which had existed so happily before he had made a fool of himself. [Pg 214]

On the doorstep he trembled—absolutely trembled (he who, in Egypt, had bandaged wound after wound, while bullets peppered the air with their metal hail)—but once in her presence, her serene composure was infectious, he was himself again, and almost forgot his last unhappy visit and the miserable interregnum of mental nothingness from which he had suffered. He might have been uneasy or constrained, but her calm suavity left him no opportunity. About her manner there was no spark of vanity, no simpering nor restraint—she was merely a well-bred young hostess entertaining an intimate friend. [Pg 215]



In novels heroines are credited with the exhibition of complex emotions on the smallest provocation, but women of breeding in the nineteenth century are too good actresses to hang their hearts on their sleeves without exceptional cause. So Ralph Danby's little brougham came and went as of yore, and only in the solitary evenings, when reason unprejudiced criticised his actions, did he realise that again was he building a palace of Eros, and again its foundation was nothing but sand!

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One evening, in the midst of his mental accusations, came a note:—

Please come soon. Phœbe seems very ill.—P. C.

He hailed a hansom and was off in a moment.

The child was asleep in her crib, and Mrs Cameron watched uneasily by her side. The flushed face, hurrying pulse, the dry skin, and spasmodic breathing showed signs of fever. There were cases of diphtheria about, and he looked grave. But he decided to cause no unnecessary anxiety, and promised to return later. Then there was no concealing it; great care, he said, must be exercised, as the child was young and not over-strong. He put his opinion in that form to avoid being an alarmist, though the symptoms of the disease were unfavourable, and he dreaded the worst. But his own hope was so great that it tempered his report with consolation, for he had not the heart to warn Phœbe's mother of his fears.

After hours of anxious watching he could not but own to himself that no progress was made, and that the crisis must be awaited with dread. Should he tell her? Dared he? In front of him lay the probably dying little creature that was first in her life—before himself, before anything. Should she perish, there would be no barrier in the world between them; Mrs Cameron would have no duty but to herself!

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A warm flush underlay his features—not the flush of pride or of satisfaction; it was the dye of shame for thoughts which placed himself and his egoistic desires before the life of the innocent being whose fate seemed to lie in his hands. It lasted not a moment, for he rose and left the house with a face quite ashen grey, whence all the light and fire of youth had faded. He was not long absent, for he had secured a passing hansom and paid a doubled fare for doubled speed.

He found Mrs Cameron alone with the child, while the nurse, worn out and weary, dozed in an adjacent room. Little Phœbe, who, earlier in the day, had been restless to a frightful degree, flinging about her waxen, chubby arms distractedly in the effort to gain breath, now lay almost motionless. Her mother, little experienced in any phase of illness, imagined that some slight improvement had taken place, but Ralph Danby knew better. The dull bluish pallor of the hitherto rosy skin; the rapid pulsation and agonised breathing; the feeble, sad croak that could not develop force enough for a cry—all told him there was no time to be lost.

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He hastily opened the case for which he had journeyed home, and produced a small silver tube.

Mrs Cameron watched his movements with anxiety.

"What are you going to do?"

She was standing near the crib, midway between it and a table whereon he had deposited the case. As her eyes met his she read, by an extraordinary intuition which comes to most of us when reason fails, that he purposed some extreme course of action.

"What are you going to do?" she reiterated, somewhat sharply.

"I must give our little patient relief—instant relief—by means of this," he answered, hastily. She seemed to be wasting time with questions when every moment was precious. Still she stood motionless in front of him.

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"How?" she persisted, in a voice so hollow that he could scarcely recognise it.

"I cannot explain now. You must trust me."

"How?" she cried, imperatively. "I will know." A light was dawning on her. She was recalling a case of which she had read in some old paper where the doctor lost his life to save the patient.

Danby frowned slightly, and his face looked worn and old. He was unaccustomed to be doubted or to have his authority questioned.

"If you will know, I shall insert this in the throat," he replied, deliberately advancing towards the cot, "and remove the mucus by suction."

"But you might catch the disease?"

"Possibly."

"You might—you might die?"

"Well?"

He was bending towards the child, and gently rubbing the tube with his handkerchief. With a sudden movement she flung herself between him and the crib, and placed her outstretched palms against his broad chest.

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"You—shall—not!"

Her agonised touch, the expression of her wild, troubled eyes, made Dot's heart thump within him, but his face showed no sign.

With seeming severity he clasped her wrists and drew her to the adjoining dressing-room.

"It is a matter of life and death—your child's. I dared not tell you how serious—I hoped to save you alarm. Now there is no time to spare."

With that he returned to the room, closed the door, and locked it, leaving her in a passion of tears on the other side. Then he rang for the nurse, and proceeded.

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Though at first his very soul seemed shaken with suppressed emotion, in a few seconds the sight of the infant's sufferings, its near approach to suffocation, overwhelmed all remembrance of his own personality, and restored the equilibrium. One thought of the woman, and his frame had throbbled and shivered like the forest trees in March; another, the greater, nobler thought of his science, his sacred mission at the hands of his Maker, and the trembling fingers grew steady.

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With accuracy and judgment he inserted the shining channel into the windpipe of the sufferer; with patience and deliberation he held the end of the instrument in his mouth and sucked!

And all the while from the inner room came the sound of sobs—the passionate wail of the woman who had betrayed herself, who stood self-accused of neglecting her child. He heard the grievous sound as he strained the poisonous mucus from the tiny throat and breathed the death-laden air into his lungs. He knew that he swayed on the bridge between life and eternity; that possibly—nay, probably—he should never hear the sweet enchantment of her voice again; that if he should die it must be without so much as a pressure from her hand; and yet the great heart never wavered, but beat evenly like the pulse of some grand cathedral clock, which, spite of marriage chime or funeral knell, pursues its steadfast purpose for ever.

At last the work was over, and its reward, the free respiration of the little sufferer, was assured. Then a feeling of dizziness crept over his brain, and he hastened home, but not before summoning his partner to relieve him.

[Pg 222]

When Doctor Davis arrived, he learnt from the nurse and Mrs Cameron what had taken place. He was a practical, prosaic person, cumbered with a delicate wife and up-growing children, and censured Danby's conduct as foolhardy in the extreme.

"Is he bound to catch it?" asked Phœbe, with concern.

"Most certainly," replied the physician, scowling. He liked Ralph, and thought him much too sound a fellow to be lost through idiocy. "I believe there have been cases to the contrary—some solitary exceptions."

"But even then," pursued she, anxiously, "he need not die? He will recover?"

"Ten to one against it," said the doctor, bluntly, quite unconscious that the ghastly pallor of his questioner was due to more than weary watching by her child.

But Danby did recover. His magnificent constitution pulled him through in a manner little short of the miraculous. Perhaps hope had some occult healing power unknown to those who watched and tended him.

[Pg 223]

At the end of six weeks the burly "Dot" was himself again, and once more made his way to the little house in Mervan Street in glad expectation. A terrible disappointment awaited him. Phœbe major was not at home! Phœbe minor, however, executed gleeful saltations in honour of his arrival.

"How is 'oo, Dot Dandy? Twite, twite well? Phœbe pray Dod every day make Dot well!"

The big man stooped and kissed the tiny prattler, and thus avoided the necessity for speech. His heart seemed to have risen in his throat, and made a huge lump there.

Hurriedly taking his departure, he determined to call another day, but though he went again and again, it was with no better luck. Then he understood that Mrs Cameron's repeated absences were not the result of accident, but of design. She had been kind in her daily inquiries after him, but now that he had recovered, she was decided they should not meet.

A few days later the child had a feverish cold, and to his chagrin he heard that Doctor Davis had been sent for. That made it quite evident he was not wanted. He made no effort to go, but smarted under the sense of injury. His better reason argued that as she had intentionally broken with him, she could not demand his attendance on the infant without risk of unavoidable meeting. But why had she so behaved? Had he not saved her child, the light of her life, the aim of her future? Had he not determined studiously to forget her accidental show of anxiety for him, prompted by ignorance of the child's immediate danger? Why had she asked after him daily? Why had little knots of flowers been left by bairn and nurse, and why, ah, why! had the wee lips uttered a prayer for him?

[Pg 224]

"Perhaps the child had acted of her own impulse," sighed his modesty.

"Perhaps she had been so taught," panted his hope.

At last he determined to end the estrangement or let friendship perish in the attempt. He wanted nothing but her forgiveness; that he felt he deserved.

He knew every afternoon at five the nurse was relieved by Mrs Cameron, who watched in the nursery while the babe slept. That hour, therefore, was chosen for his visit. He mounted the stairs two at a time and rapped at the familiar door. There was no answer. He turned the handle and entered. [Pg 225]

Phœbe major sat at the open window idle. She was reading the picture promise of the clouds. Phœbe minor in a cot slept rosily in the far corner of the room.

"Good afternoon," he whispered softly, in order not to disturb the little slumberer.

Mrs Cameron extended a hand, but no smile greeted him. She scarcely turned from her study of the skies. Poor Danby's heart felt sore and heavy laden. He asked a few trivialities regarding the invalid's health, and each query received an appropriate reply—nothing more.

He had taken a seat facing hers by the window, but even then only a profile view of the face he loved was accorded him.

At length he could endure no longer.

"Mrs Cameron, I regret having come instead of Davis. He was engaged. I had no idea I should be so unwelcome. Have I offended you irremediably?" [Pg 226]

"No. Yes!" she corrected.

"How?"

He bent forward to induce her gaze to rest on him, but was foiled.

"If you will not tell me, how can I make amends? Was it because I locked you from your own room?"

"No."

He noticed the tight grasp of her soft fingers against the window-sill. She was not as callous as she wished to appear.

"Was it because I treated the child without your leave?"

"No."

Her frame shook slightly, and two crystal drops which she was too proud to wipe away stood in her eyes.

Very gently he covered her hand with his own great one; very softly he whispered in a voice he could scarcely steady:—

"Was it because I seemed ungrateful for the little love you offered me?"

The two tears rolled down her cheeks and dropped upon his wrist. With quivering mouth she strove to frame what her face confessed would be a lie. [Pg 227]

He no longer hesitated, but caught her to his breast and crushed the naughty falsehood with his lips.

How long the operation would have lasted it is impossible to guess, for two shining eyes set in slumber-flushed cheeks peered suddenly from the distant cot, and a prattling voice, unabashed and lusty, shouted:—

"Tiss me too—Dot Dandy!"

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## Romance of the Coulisses.

[Pg 228]

"Menez moi dit ma belle  
A la rive fidele  
Ou l'on aime toujours."

The difficulty of apprehending the female character is well-nigh insurmountable. Woman has been called chameleon, weathercock, enigma; but an enigma has a solution which may be reached by patience or accident, a weathercock will confess the bent of the wind for however short a space, and the colour of a chameleon can be periodically proved by its dietary. But woman—she is a reiterating question, an argument sans crux, a volume with uncut leaves dotted about through the most exciting chapters. Without the right clue you must dip and skip, now pricked, now irritated, till you approach a frenzy bordering on madness. For you like to know the sort of creature you are dealing with—a painter especially, since his fame hangs on his

Betty? you say—do we not all know her? Does not her dimpled face peer out of the weekly papers, and do not their columns expose and magnify every little detail of her life—her fads, her fancies, and her follies? Cannot we see her night after night whisking her mazy skirts in the limelight, and opening the carnation folds of her lips to patter enchanting nonsense and pout promises brittle as pie crust? Dear little Betty! How her twinkling feet make merry, light as sea-foam frothing on shells; how our pulses throb and dance in pace with hers; how our ears dote on the fragile, cooing tones of her dainty voice as it coquettes with banalities, flirts with the very bars of melody that silly men have tried to make witty and pretty. But the prettiness and wittiness are Betty's; do we not all know that? Do we not know that the shiver of the violins is only quaint when Betty shudders at the whisper of a kiss, that the cyclone of strings and wind fades exquisitely, "like a rose in aromatic pain," simply because Betty, our whimsical dear, chooses to sigh for having shuddered? And when at last she cries, to think she sighs for that at which she shuddered, we all clap our hands to splitting—not, oh, not at the music, but in wild collective rapture over the vagaries of our Betty!

In this way I thought I knew her every trick and wile and whim, till I came to paint her picture, till one after another my charcoal lines were flicked from the canvas, and I succumbed to that paralysing sense of total defeat which is almost always the punishment of swollen ambition. What was wrong? I asked myself. What had I missed? The pose, the expression, the throb of motion? Weeks passed—then I worked again, made a new study, and consulted my cousin Laura. She knew something of dancing, and was at that time practising ballet steps, a necessary accompaniment—so she had been told—to her debût in comic opera.

"The face is perfection," she said. "The little droop in the left eye—she must have been born winking—and the upward curve at the corner of the lip, they couldn't be improved."

I shook my head. Laura's verdict was unsatisfactory. The human mind so often demands an opinion when it really wants a looking-glass.

"Perhaps if I could get more action—more of the warmth which goes with action——?"

"It would affect the flesh tint, certainly. You should see me pirouetting at Dupres'—a peony isn't in it."

"I should like to see you," I said, jumping at a probable solution of my difficulties, "particularly in daylight. One gets better to the core of——"

"With women," Laura interrupted, "it's safest to reject the core."

"Cynic. You admit the downiest have the hardest hearts—like peaches, eh?"

"I didn't mean to be cynical. You can avoid the hard part. It is better than choosing the human plantains that have none: smooth, soapy, insipid things, they clog in no time."

"But pears eat straight through—sweet to the pip," I said, gazing quizzically at my latest sketch. "Betty is a pear."

Laura laughed generously.

"Foolish boy, keep your illusions. You can clean your brushes in them. Degas saw wonderful things in his models—things hidden from the vulgar eye."

"I am glad you mentioned Degas. I mean to see more than this Betty of the Ballet. Take me to your class."

"Oh, I don't dance in the class. I have a private lesson when the girls are gone. You can come this afternoon at four."

We made a long journey on the top of an omnibus to a hole somewhere in Lambeth. Squalor appeared to grope under railway arches, and penury to moan through flapping fragments of clothing that swung at intervals along the narrow paths, behind rows of second-hand furniture and groups of dishevelled infants.

"A choice locality," I growled.

"Cheap," exclaimed Laura. "When you put your shoulder to the wheel you mustn't mind greasing your jacket."

She was a plucky girl—glad, like many others, to grasp the only opportunity of self-support. My uncle, a Cheshire parson, had died peacefully, leaving four girls and six boys with bucolic appetites to the charge of Providence.

"Here we are at last," my cousin said, leaping down with agility, and hardly stopping the omnibus for her exit.

We alighted almost in front of a quaint building which looked like an excrescence—a wart—on the visage of a dilapidated chapel. Laura led the way up a garden in size somewhat larger than a postage-stamp, where two heartseases, sole invaders of the desolate gravel, tried to blink golden eyes through a canopy of dust. The door was opened by a youth who mingled an air of proprietorship with the aspect of a waiter at a third-rate café. He waved a hand to rooms, or

rather cabins, on the right, through which Laura led me. Cabin the first contained a dining table and a fossil piano utilised as shelf for sundries and sideboard; cabin the second, apparently a sleeping chamber, held a bed, dressing table, and a diminutive bracket on which might have stood a hand basin; while cabin the third—little more than a wooden box papered with promiscuous remnants of a decorator's stock—stored a plank upraised by volunteer legs enlisted from haphazard sources, a basin, a bottle of cloudy water, and a cracked wall mirror.

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There Laura slipped off her walking shoes, and announced her intention to make a change of toilette.

I forthwith escaped through the further door, and found myself in a large, bare room, facing a middle-aged man, who was evidently the dancing master, M. Dupres.

I explained my presence and my interest in the ballet.

"I am accompanying my cousin, Miss Lorimer"—this was the stage name by which she was known—"in order to paint the pose of one of my sitters. I want more vibrating actuality, and hope to sketch it here."

"Mais certainement—of course. Ze beauty of ze human form is never so fine as when it moves to my vish. You will see."

Laura entered in a short, fan-pleated frock with black silk knickerbockers, and lacy frills shrouding the knees. Her silken hose and shiny pumps make her already graceful as she chasséd by way of experiment across the bare boards from the orange-toothed piano at one end to the camp chairs at the other. The ballet-master made his way to a small conservatory—a hospital for effete bulbs and straggling, deformed geraniums—and snatching up a watering-can laid the dust which already began to thicken the air.

[Pg 235]

Then operations began. To me they were deeply interesting, because Betty's face and form were continually before my eyes, and the one thing wanting to make my work a chef-d'œuvre was, I hoped, on the verge of discovery. Laura placed herself in an attitude, glanced at her instructor, who had armed himself with a fiddle, and with its first tones commenced a series of evolutions. Sketch-book in hand, I followed her movements, now noting a six-step shuffle straight a-down the length of the boards; now sketching the action of her arms, which, balancing that of the feet, swayed inversely with every bend of the knees. Then came an etherealised milkmaid step that might have been termed an arm akimbo gallop had not the two wrists been pressed abnormally forward against the waist, with their pink palms glowing outwards. In this pose poor Laura's limbs looked obdurate as sawdust, while Betty's had bent like wax to the will of the modeller. Meanwhile, the fiddle fluttered, and the master now and then exemplified the grace of any particular attitude he desired. You could observe his beautiful build, the symmetry of every movement, despite the impediment of two gouty-looking feet encased in cloth-covered boots of original design. His features were certainly distinguished, and the trimness of his prematurely blanched hair made a curious contrast to the general dilapidation of the surroundings. His poses, one quickly following the other, were all picturesque. With every turn of the head, or bend of a knee, or stretch of an arm, some fresh revelation of physical equipoise delighted the eye.

[Pg 236]

Laura went through various new movements of a Spanish Carmen-like fandango with head uplifted and a bravura pout of the chin, after which we preceded her through the dressing-room, where she was left to readjust her walking dress. A sense of disappointment weighed on me. All these attitudes, all these evolutions I had seen in their perfection through the medium of Betty. No grace of motion could equal hers, no actuality portrayed by another could be half as exquisite as even the baldest reminiscence of her.

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On the wall of the little bed-chamber where M. Dupres courteously accompanied me were many photographs, faded but still recognisable, of himself dressed in tights or other theatrical frippery. He took evident pleasure in watching my appreciation of the curious attitudes in which—to show off in their fullest perfection the lithe muscles and magnificent symmetry of his agile frame—he had been portrayed.

"You must have danced a great deal?" I questioned, seeing that some remark was required of me.

"Danced!" he said, lifting his eyes to the smudgy ceiling. "Yes, it is feefteen year ago, but I remember it like jesterday. All overe in vone moment; a coup de fouet ve call it."

I begged for an explanation.

"I vas ze first—ze very first. One leap into ze air I could do—so high," he said, lifting his hand descriptively; "a leap zat no vone would dare—my fortune vas made. Pupils came from all ze countries to learn from me some leetle 'pas,' but zere vas no time. Zen, vone night zere came a king to see me—me, ze king of ze dance—ah! I may say zat now it is all gone! I danced; ze air vas no lighter zan I ... ze people shouted, zey called, zey encored. Again I danced, high, high, higher, and zen—crack!"

[Pg 238]

He brought his two hands together with a sharp click. His face was convulsed with emotion, and presently he took a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped the damp from his brow.

"Yes," he continued, "it is feefteen year—but to me it is to-day. Zere—in my leg was a break"—he pointed to the place a little above his ankle and below the calf. "You could put a fingere into it—that vone muscle vas my fortune—it vas gone—split in vone moment."

His sad eyes stared blankly out from the cracked unclean window as though reviewing a vast panorama of his early years.

"How sad; terrible! Is this a common accident?" I inquired of him.

"Common? Yes, ze coup de fouet; but zis vas vorse. For long I lay in bed, my brain made mad to know zat all vas overe, zat all vas lost. Zey offered me half vage to teach, but no—not vere I had been ze first—ze very first. I left England and my friends, I hoped for evere." [Pg 239]

"Was that not foolish?" I asked, viewing the greasy curtains and other surrounding evidences of poverty.

"Voolish? Ah, ve are all vools when ve love. I had loved: she vas almost mine, but she vas too young, a child dancer of feefteen summers. So sveet, so beautiful. She learnt from me my art, every jeste, every perfection. She vould have been my wife, my queen—but after zis, I ran. When my senses came I knew that I could be no more rich—only a poor dead dog in her vay. For zis I fled ze country. I came back after feefteen year, no longer ze great Salvador, but plain M. Dupres—back to hear of Betty—"

"Betty!" I echoed.

"Yes, the first dancer in London—my leetle Betty—you have zeen her?" And he lifted a hand to a portrait over his pillow. [Pg 240]

I recognised with dismay the child face—the merry smile at the corner of the lip.

"This is the very woman I am trying to paint."

"Sapristi!" he exclaimed, and again wiped his brow. "You vill keep my zecret? Ze years of zacrafice, let them not be known to her." His face was wrinkled and livid with anxiety.

"Your confidence is sacred; I am honoured by it," I said, extending a hand, for Laura just then opened the door upon us.

She laughed whimsically at my almost emotional leave-taking of a total stranger, and chaffed me about it when we got outside.

"I have much to be grateful for to him—to you," I said. "My picture is almost achieved. I may be worthy to follow at the heels of Degas yet."

When Betty next came to the studio she thought my painting was completed, and skipped about in front of the canvas with the genuine joy of gratified vanity.

"Why didn't you tell me it was done, and I needn't have got into these," she said, lifting the hem of her gauze skirt to her lips—a fascinating trick which, to use her own expression, invariably "brought down the house." [Pg 241]

I looked at the laughing row of white teeth and thought of Dupres.

"You still want a touch or two. Just get into position for one moment."

"You'll spoil me," she warned, jumping to her place on the "throne," and shooting out an ankle that would have unhinged Diogenes.

"Nothing could spoil you," I said gallantly, and a paint tube levelled in the direction of my head was the reward of my politeness.

"You don't aim as well as you dance. How did you learn—at a training school, or where?"

"To dance? Bah! training schools can't teach the fine poetry of movement. They knock the prose into you, but—but the poetry I learnt from—O—a man who was great in his day."

"Salvador?" I ventured.

She blushed faintly.

"How did you know?"

"You gave the cue. Salvador was the greatest name I could think of——" [Pg 242]

"You know something of dancing, then?"

"Very little. I have heard he had an accident or something that affected his career."

"Yes; it turned his head. He was to have married me, but, like all men, he was ungrateful. He changed—changed quite suddenly."

"How so?"

"I nursed him night and day. He had no mother, no sister, and I thought I could be all the world to him. Little girls are romantic, and he was too ill to know. Before he recovered consciousness I sent an old woman to attend him; but one fine day, when well enough, he bolted."

"Where?"

"Lord knows!" (Betty's language was not Johnsonian.) "Do you think I was going to crawl after

him and grovel—?"

"There is no grovelling where love levels."

"But it didn't level," she said, angrily, as though the reproach stung—"it didn't level. I would have chucked my whole future for him: I would now, while he... O, don't talk of it," she exclaimed huskily, whisking the back of her hand across her eyes: "I tell myself it was all for the best."

[Pg 243]

The tone implied a query, but I made no answer. There were heart thrills in the air, and my brush, pregnant with their subtle rhythm, was travailling fast.

"Why don't you say it was?" she persisted. "You know that love—real love—is worse than handcuffs."

"A cloying treacle to the wings of independence!—eh? Keats would have been glad of the treacle nevertheless."

"Perhaps. Wouldn't we just drown in it if we could?... But, after all, I should have been a fat lump of domesticity by now," she laughed, straightening her lithe limbs and resuming her conventional smile.

In a moment she had become the world's Betty again—bewitching, coy, insouciant Betty.

But a tear-drop still clung to her eyelashes.

THE END

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