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Title: A Fluttered Dovecote

Author: George Manville Fenn

Illustrator: Gordon Browne

Release date: July 27, 2011 [EBook #36873]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Nick Hodson of London, England

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George Manville Fenn

"A Fluttered Dovecote"

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### Chapter One.

#### Memory the First—Mamma Makes a Discovery.

Oh, dear!

You will excuse me for a moment? I must take another sheet of paper—I, Laura Bozerne, virgin and martyr, of Chester Square, Belgravia—for that last sheet was all spotted with tears, and when I applied my handkerchief, and then the blotting-paper, the glaze was gone and the ink ran.

*Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte*, the French say, but it is not true. However, I have made up my mind to write this history of my sufferings, so to begin.

Though what the world would call young—eighteen—I feel so old—ah! so old—and my life would fill volumes—thick volumes—with thrilling incidents; but a natural repugnance to publicity forces me to confine myself to the adventures of one single year, whose eventful hours were numbered, whose days were one chaos of excitement or rack of suspense. How are the scenes brought vividly before my mind's eye as I turn over the leaves of my poor blotted diary, and recognise a tear blister here, and recall the blistering; a smear there; or find the writing illegible from having been hastily closed when wet, on account of the prying advance of some myrmidon of tyranny when the blotting-paper was not at hand. Faces too familiar rise before me, to smile or frown, as my associations with them were grave or gay. Now I shudder—now I thrill with pleasure; now it is a frown that contracts my brow, now a smile curls my lip; while the tears, "Oh, ye tears!"—by the way, it is irrelevant, but I have the notes of a poem on tears, a subject not yet hackneyed, while it seems to me to be a theme that flows well—"tears, fears, leers, jeers," and so on.

Oh! if I had only possessed yellow hair and violet eyes, and determination, what I might have been! If I had only entered this great world as one of those delicious heroines, so masculine, so superior, that our authors vividly paint—although they might be engravings, they are so much alike. If I had but stood with flashing eyes a Lady Audley, a Mrs Armitage, the heroine of "Falkner Lyle," or any other of those charming creatures, I could have been happy in defying the whips and stings, and all that sort of thing; but now, alas! alack!—ah, what do I say?—my heart is torn, wrecked, crushed. Hope is dead and buried; while love—ah, me!

But I will not anticipate. I pen these lines solely to put forth my claims for the sympathy of my sex, which will, I am sure, with one heart, throb and bleed for my sorrows. That my readers may never need a similar expression of sympathy is the fond wish of a wrecked heart.

Yes, I am eighteen, and dwelling in a wilderness—Chester Square is where papa's residence (town residence) is situated. But it is a wilderness to me. The flowers coaxed by the gardener to grow in the square garden seem tame in colour and inodorous; the gate gives me a shudder as I pass through, when it grits with the dust in its hinges, and always loudly; while mischievous boys are constantly inserting small pebbles in the dusty lock to break the wards of the key. It is a wilderness to me; and though this heart may become crusted with bitterness, and too much hardened and callous, yet never, ah! never, will it be what it was a year ago. I am writing this with a bitter smile upon my lips, which I cannot convey to paper; but I have chosen the hardest and scratchiest pen I could find, I am using red ink, and there are again blurs and spots upon the paper where tears have removed the glaze—for I always like very highly glazed note.

I did think of writing this diary in my own life's current, but my reason told me that it would only be seen by the blackened and brutal printers; and therefore, as I said before, I am using red ink, and sitting writing by the front drawing-room window, where it is so much lighter, where the different passing vehicles can be seen, and the noise of

those horrid men saying "Ciss, ciss," in the mews at the back cannot be heard.

Ah! but one year ago, and I was happy! I recall it as if but yesterday. We were sitting at breakfast, and I remember thinking what a pity it was to be obliged to sit down, and crease and take the stiffening out of the clean muslin I wore, one that really seemed almost perfection as I came downstairs, when suddenly mamma—who was reading that horrid provincial paper—stopped papa just as he raised a spoonful of egg to his lips, and made him start so that he dropped a portion upon his beard.

"Excelsior!" exclaimed mamma. "Which is?" said papa, making the table-cloth all yellow.

"Only listen," said mamma, and she commenced reading an atrocious advertisement, while I was so astonished at the unwonted vivacity displayed, that I left off skimming the last number of *The World*, and listened as well while she read the following dreadful notice:—

"The Cedars, Allsham.—Educational Establishment for a limited number of young ladies"—(limited to all she could get). "Lady principal, Mrs Fortesquieu de Blount"—(an old wretch); "French, Monsieur de Tiraille; German, Fraülein Liebeskinden; Italian, Signor Pazzoletto; singing, Fraülein Liebeskinden, R.A.M., and Signor Pazzoletto, R.A.M." (the result of whose efforts was to make us poor victims sing in diphthongs or the union of vowels—Latin and Teutonic); "pianoforte, Fraülein Liebeskinden; dancing and deportment, Monsieur de Kittville; English, Mrs Fortesquieu de Blount, assisted by fully qualified teachers. This establishment combines the highest educational phases with the comforts of a home,"—(Now is it not as wicked to write stories as to say them? Of course it is; and as, according to the paper, their circulation was three thousand a week, and there are fifty-two weeks in a year, that wicked old tabby in that one case told just one hundred and six thousand fibs in the twelvemonth; while if I were to analyse the whole advertisement, *comme ça*, the amount would be horrible)—"Mrs Fortesquieu de Blount having made it her study to eliminate every failing point in the older systems of instructions and scholastic internal management, has formed the present institution upon a basis of the most firm, satisfactory, and lasting character." (Would you think it possible that mammams who pride themselves upon their keenness would be led away and believe such nonsense?) "The staff of assistants has been most carefully selected—the highest testimonials having in every case been considered of little avail, unless accompanied by tangible proof of long and arduous experience."

Such stuff! And then there was ever so much more—and there was quite a quarrel once about paying for the advertisement, it came to so much—about forks and spoons and towels, and advantages of situation in a sanitary point of view, and beauty of scenery, and references to bishops, priests, and deacons, deans and canons, two M.D.s and a Sir Somebody Something, Bart. I won't mention his name, for I'm sure he must be quite sufficiently ashamed of it by this time, almost as much so as those high and mighty peers who have been cured of their ailments for so many years by the quack medicines. But there, mamma read it all through, every bit, mumbling dreadfully, as she always has ever since she had those new teeth with the patent base.

"Well, but there isn't anything about excelsior," said papa.

"No, of course not," said mamma. "I meant that it was the very thing for Laura. Finishing, you know."

"Well, it does sound pretty good," said papa. "I don't care so long as it isn't Newnham or Girton, and wanting to ride astride horses."

"My dear!" said mamma.

"Well, that's what they're all aiming at now," cried papa. "We shall have you on horseback in Rotten Row next."

"My love!"

"I should do a bit of Banting first," continued papa, with one of those sneers against mamma's *embonpoint* which do make her so angry.

And then, after a great deal of talking and arguing, in which of course mamma must have it all her own way, and me not consulted a bit, they settled that mamma was to write to Allsham, and then if the letter in reply proved satisfactory, she was to go down at once and see the place. If she liked it, I was to spend a year there for a finishing course of education; for they would not call it—as I spitefully told papa they ought to—they would not call it sending me back to school; and it was too bad, after promising that the two years I passed in the convent at Guisnes should be the last.

Yes: too bad. I could not help it if my grammar was what papa called, in his slangy way, "horribly slack." I never did like that horrid parsing, and I'm sure it comes fast enough with reading. Soeur Celine never found fault with my French grammatical construction when I wrote letters to her, and I wrote one that very day; for it did seem such a horrid shame to treat me in so childish a way.

And while I was writing—or rather, while I was sitting at the window, thinking of what to say, and biting the end of my pen—who should come by but the new curate, Mr Saint Purre, of Saint Sympathetica's, and when he saw how mournful I looked, he raised his hat with such a sad smile, and passed on.

By the way, what an improvement it is, the adoption of the beard in the church. Mr Saint Purre's is one of the most beautiful black, glossy, silky beards ever seen; and I'm sure I thought so then, when I was writing about going back to school—a horrible, hateful place! How I bit my lips and shook my head! I could have cried with vexation, but I would not let a soul see it; for there are some things to which I could not stoop. In fact, after the first unavailing remonstrance, if it had been to send me to school for life, I would not have said another word.

For only think of what mamma said, and she must have told papa what she thought. Such dreadful ideas.

"You are becoming too fond of going to church, Laura," she said with a meaning look. "I'm afraid we did wrong in letting you go to the sisters."

"Absurd, mamma!" I cried. "No one can be too religious."

"Oh, yes, my dear, they can," said mamma, "when they begin to worship idols."

"What do you mean, mamma?" I cried, blushing, for there was a curious meaning in her tone.

"Never mind, my dear," she said, tightening her lips. "Your papa quite agreed with me that you wanted a change."

"But I don't, mamma," I pleaded.

"Oh yes you do, my dear," she continued, "you are getting wasted and wan, and too fond of morning services. What do you think papa said?"

"I don't know, mamma."

"He said, 'That would cure it.'"

She pronounced the last word as if it was spelt "ate," and I felt the blood rush to my cheeks, feeling speechless for a time, but I recovered soon after, as I told myself that most likely mamma had no *arrière-pensée*.

If it had been a ball, or a party, or fête, the time would have gone on drag, drag, dawdle, dawdle, for long enough. But because I was going back to school it must rush along like an express train. First, there were the answers back to mamma's letters, written upon such stiff thick paper that it broke all along the folds; scented, and with a twisty, twirly monogram-thing done in blue upon paper and envelope; while the writing—supposed to be Mrs de Blount's, though it was not, for I soon found that out, and that it was written, like all the particular letters, by Miss Furness—was of the finest and most delicate, so fine that it seemed as if it was never meant to be read, but only to be looked at, like a great many more ornamental things we see every day done up in the disguise of something useful.

Well, there were the letters answered, mamma had been, and declared to papa that she was perfectly satisfied, for everything was as it should be, and nothing seemed *outré*—that being a favourite word of mamma's, and one out of the six French expressions she remembers, while it tumbles into all sorts of places in conversation where it has no business.

I did tell her, though, it seemed *outré* to send me back to one of those terrible child prisons, crushing down my young elastic soul in so cruel a way; but she only smiled, and said that it was all for my good.

Then came the day all in a hurry; and I'm sure, if it was possible, that day had come out of its turn, and pushed and elbowed its way into the front on purpose to make me miserable.



But there it was, whether or no; and I'd been packing my boxes—first a dress, then a tear, then another dress, and then another tear, and so on, until they were full—John said too full, and that I must take something out or they would not lock. But there was not a single thing that I could possibly have done without, so Mary and Eliza both had to come and stand upon the lid, and then it would not go quite close, when mamma came fussing in to say how late it was, and she stood on it as well; so that there were three of them, like the Graces upon a square pedestal. But we managed to lock it then; and John was cording it with some new cord, only he left that one, because mamma said perhaps they had all better stand on the other box, in case it would not lock; while when they were busy about number two, if number one did not go off "bang," like a great wooden shell, and burst the lock off, when we had to be content with a strap.

Nobody minded my tears—not a bit; and there was the cab at the door at last, and the boxes lumbered down into the hall, and then bumped up, as if they wanted to break them, on to the roof of the cab; and mamma all the while in a regular knot trying to understand "Bradshaw" and the table of the Allsham and Funnleton Railway. Papa had gone to the City, and said good-bye directly after breakfast; and when mamma and I went out, the first thing mamma must do was to take out her little china tablets and pencil, and put down the cabman's number; if the odious, low wretch

did not actually wink at me—such insolence.

When we reached the station, if my blood did not quite boil when mamma would stop and haggle with the horrible tobaccoey wretch about sixpence of the fare, till there was quite a little crowd, when the money was paid, and the tears brought into my eyes by being told that the expenses of my education necessitated such parsimony; and that, too, at a time when I did not wish for a single fraction of a penny to go down to that dreadful woman at Allsham. But that was always the way; and some people are only too glad to make excuses and lay their meannesses upon some one else. Of course, I am quite aware that it is very shocking to speak of mamma in this manner; but then some allowance must be made for my wretched feelings, and besides, I don't mean any harm.

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## Chapter Two.

### Memory the Second—The Cedars, Allsham.

I sincerely hope the readers of all this do not expect to find any plot or exciting mystery; because, if they do, they will be most terribly disappointed, since I am not leading them into the realms of fiction. No lady is going to be poisoned; there is no mysterious murder; neither bigamy, trigamy, nor quadrigamy; in fact, not a single gamy in the book, though once bordering upon that happy state. Somebody does not turn out to be somebody else, and anybody is not kept out of his rightful property by a false heir, any more than a dreadfully good man's wife runs away from him with a very wicked *roué*, gets injured in a railway accident, and then comes back to be governess to her own children, while her husband does not know her again.

Oh, no! there is no excitement of that kind, nothing but a twelvemonth's romance of real life; the spreading of the clouds of sorrow where all was sunshine; the descent of a bitter blight, to eat into and canker a young rose-bud. But there, I won't be poetical, for I am not making an album.

I was too much out of humour, and too low-spirited, to be much amused with the country during my journey down; while as to reading the sort of circular thing about the Cedars and the plan of operations during the coming session, now about to commence, I could not get through the first paragraph; for every time I looked up, there was a dreadful foreign-looking man with his eyes fixed upon me, though he pretended to be reading one of those Windsor-soap-coloured paper-covered *Chemin-de-Fer* novels, by Daudet, that one buys on the French railways.

Of course we should not have been subjected to that annoyance—shall I call it so?—only mamma must throw the expenses of my education at my head, and more; and say it was necessary we should travel second-class, though I'm sure papa would have been terribly angry had he known.

I had my tatting with me, and took it out when I laid the circular aside; but it was always the same—look up when I would, there were his sharp, dark, French-looking eyes fixed upon me; while I declare if it did not seem that in working my pattern I was forming a little cotton-lace framework to so many bright, dark eyes, which kept on peering out at me, till the porter shouted out "'sham, All—sham," where the stranger also descended and watched us into the station fly.

Mamma said that if we came down second-class, we would go up to the Cedars in a decent form; and we did, certainly, in one of the nastiest, stably-smelling, dusty, jangling old flies I was ever in. The window would not stop up on the dusty side, while on the other it would not let down; and I told mamma we might just as well have brought the trunks with us, and not left them for the station people to send, for all the difference it would have made. But mamma knew best, of course, and it was no use for me to speak.

But I wish to be just; and I must say that the Cedars was a very pretty place to look at, just outside Allsham town; though of course its prettiness was only for an advertisement, and not to supply home comfort to the poor little prisoners within. We entered by a pair of large iron gates, where upon the pillars on either side were owls, with outstretched wings—put there, of course, to remind parents of the goddess Minerva; but we all used to say that they were likenesses of Mrs Blount and the Fraülein. There was a broad gravel sweep up to the portico, while in front was a beautiful velvet lawn with a couple of cedar trees, whose graceful branches swept the grass.

"Mrs and Miss Bozerne," said mamma to the footman, a nasty tall, thin, straggley young man, with red hair that would not brush smooth, and a freckly face, a horrible caricature of our John, in a drab coat and scarlet plushes, and such thin legs that I could not help a smile. But he was terribly thin altogether, and looked as if he had been a page-boy watered till he grew out of knowledge, and too fast; and he clung to the door in such a helpless way, when he let us in, that he seemed afraid to leave it again, lest he should fall.

"This way, ladies," he said, with a laugh-and-water sort of a smile; and he led us across a handsome hall, where there were four statues and a great celestial globe hanging from the ceiling—only the globe hanging; though I'm sure it would have been a charity and a release for some young people if a few of the muses had shared the fate of the globe—at all events, that four. First and foremost of all was Clio. I wish she had been hung upon a date tree!

"This way, ladies," said the tall creature, saving himself once more from tipping over by seizing the drawing-room door-handle, and then, as he turned and swung by it, sending the blood tingling into my cheeks by announcing—

"Mrs and Miss Bosom."

Any one with a heart beating beneath her own can fancy our feelings. Of course I am aware that some unfeeling, ribald men—I do not include thee, oh, Achille!—would have turned the wretch's blunder into a subject for jest; but thanks to the goddess of *Bonheur*, there was none of the race present, and Mrs Fortesquieu de Blount came mincing forward, smiling most benignly in her pet turban.

A dreadful old creature—I shall never forget her! Always dressed in black satin, a skin parting front, false teeth, and a thick gold chain hung over her shoulders; while the shocking old thing always thrust everything artificial that she wore right under your eyes, so that you could not fail to see how deceptive she was.



She was soon deep in conversation with mamma; while I looked wearily round the room, which was full to overflowing with all sorts of fancy work, so that you could not stir an inch without being hooked, or caught, or upsetting something. There were antimacassars, sofa-cushions, fire-screens, bead-mats, wool-mats, crochet-mats, coverings for the sofa, piano, and chimney-piece, candle-screens, curtains, ottomans, pen wipers—things enough, in short, to have set up a fancy fair. And, of course, I knew well enough what they all meant—presents from pupils who had been foolish enough to spend their money in buying the materials, and then working them up to ornament the old tabby's drawing-room.

Well, I don't care. It's the truth; she was a horrible old tabby, with nothing genuine or true about her, or I would not speak so disrespectfully. She did not care a bit for her pupils, more than to value them according to how much they brought her in per annum, so that the drawing-room boarders—there were no parlour boarders there, nothing so common—stood first in her estimation.

I felt so vexed that first day, sitting in the drawing-room, I could have pulled off the old thing's turban; and I'm sure that if I had the false front would have come with it. There she was, pointing out the different crayon-drawings upon the wall; and mamma, who cannot tell a decent sketch from a bad one, lifting up her hand and pretending to be in ecstasies.

Do you mean to tell me that they did not both know how they were deceiving one another? Stuff! Of course they did, and they both liked it. Mamma praised Mrs Blount, and Mrs Blount praised mamma and her "sweet child"; and I declare it was just like what the dreadful American man said in his horrid, low, clever book—that was so funny, and yet one felt ashamed at having laughed—where he writes to the newspaper editor to puff his show, and promises to return the favour by having all his printing done at his office; and papa read it so funnily, and called it "reciprocity of allaying the irritation of the dorsal region," which we said was much more refined than Mr Artemus Ward's way of putting it.

I was quite ashamed of mamma, that I was, for it did seem so little; and, oh! how out of patience I was! But there, that part of the interview came to an end, and a good thing too; for I knew well enough a great deal of it was to show off before me, for of course Mrs Blount had shown mamma the drawings and things before.



So then we were taken over the place, and introduced to the teachers and the pupils who had returned, and there really did seem to be some nice girls; but as for the teachers—of all the old, yellow, spectacled things I ever did see, they were the worst; while as for the German Fraülein, I don't know what to say bad enough to describe her, for I never before did see any one so hooked-nosed and parrotty.

Then we went upstairs to see the dormitories—there were no bedrooms—and afterwards returned to the drawing-room, where the lady principal kissed me on both cheeks and said I was most welcome to her establishment, and I declare I thought she meant to bite me, for her dreadful teeth went *snap*, though perhaps, like mamma's, they were

not well under control.

Then mamma had some sherry, and declared that she was more enchanted with the place than she had been at her last visit; and she hoped I should be very happy and very good, and make great progress in my studies. When Mrs Blount said she was quite certain that I should gratify my parents' wishes in every respect, and be a great credit to the establishment; and I knew she was wondering all the time how many silk dresses and how many bonnets I had brought, for everything about the place was show, show always, and I soon found out how the plainly-dressed girls were snubbed and kept in the background. As for Miss Grace Murray, the half-teacher, half-pupil, who had her education for the assistance she gave with the younger girls, I'm sure it was shameful—such a sweet, gentle, lovable girl as she was—shameful that she should have been so ill-treated. I speak without prejudice, for she never was any friend of mine, but always distrusted me, and more than once reported what I suppose she was right in calling flippant behaviour; but I could not help it. I was dreadfully wicked while at the Cedars.

At last the fly bore mamma away, and I wanted to go to my dormitory, to try and swallow down my horrible grief and vexation, which would show itself; while that horrible Mrs Blunt—I won't call her anything else, for her husband's name was spelt without the "o," and he was a painter and glazier in Tottenham Court Road—that horrible Mrs Blunt kept on saying that it was a very proper display of feeling, and did me great credit; and patting me on the back and calling me "my child," when all the time I could have boxed her ears.

There I was, then, really and truly once more at school, and all the time feeling so big, and old, and cross, and as if I was being insulted by everything that was said to me.

The last months I spent at Guisnes the sisters made pleasant for me by behaving with a kind of respect, and a sort of tacit acknowledgment that I was no longer a child; and, oh, how I look back now upon those quiet, retired days! Of course they were *too* quiet and *too* retired; but then anything seemed better than being brought down here; while as to religion, the sisters never troubled themselves about my not being the same as themselves, nor tried to make a convert of me, nor called me heretic, or any of that sort of thing. All the same it was quite dreadful to hear Aunt Priscilla go on at papa when I was at home for the vacation, telling him it was sinful to let me be at such a place, and that it was encouraging the sisters to inveigle me into taking the veil. That we should soon have the Papists overrunning the country, and relighting the fires in Smithfield, and all such stuff as that; while papa used very coolly to tell her that he most sincerely hoped that she would be the first martyr, for it would be a great blessing for her relatives.

That used to offend her terribly, and mamma too; but it served her right for making such a fuss—the place being really what they called a pension, and Protestant and Catholic young ladies were there together. Plenty of them were English, and the old sisters were the dearest, darlingest, quietest, lovablest creatures that ever lived, and I don't believe they would have roasted a fly, much more an Aunt Priscilla.

And there I was, then, though I could hardly believe it true, and was at school; and as I said before, I wanted to get up to my dormitory. I said "my," but it was not all mine; for there were two more beds in the room.

As soon as I got up there, and was once more alone, I threw myself down upon my couch, and had such a cry. It was a treat, that was; for I don't know anything more comforting than a good cry. There's something softening and calming to one's bruised and wounded feelings; just as if nature had placed a reservoir of tears ready to gently flood our eyes, and act as a balm in times of sore distress. It was so refreshing and nice; and as I lay there in the bedroom, with the window open, and the soft summer breeze making the great cedar trees sigh, and the dimity curtains gently move, I gazed up into the bright blue sky till a veil seemed to come over my eyes, and I went fast asleep.

There I was in the train once more, with the eyes of that foreign-looking man regularly boring holes through my lids, until it was quite painful; for, being asleep, of course I kept them closely shut. It was like a fit of the nightmare; and as to this description, if I thought for a moment that these lines would be read by man—save and except the tradesmen engaged in their production—I would never pen them. But as the editor and publisher will be careful to announce that they are for ladies only, I write in full.

First of all the eyes seemed to be quite small, but, oh! so piercing; while I can only compare the sensation to that of a couple of beautiful, bright, precious stone seals, making impressions upon the soft wax of my brain. And they did, too—such deeply-cut, sharp impressions as will never be effaced.

Well, as I seemed to be sitting in the train, the eyes appeared to come nearer, and nearer, and nearer, till I could bear it no longer; and I opened mine to find that my dream was a fact, and that there really were a pair of bright, piercing orbs close to mine, gazing earnestly at me, so that I felt that I must scream out; but as my lips parted to give utterance to a shrill cry, it was stayed, for two warm lips rested upon mine, to leave there a soft, tender kiss; and it seemed so strange that my dream should have been all true.

But there, it was not all true; though I was awake and there were a pair of beautiful eyes looking into mine, and the soft, red lips just leaving their impression; and as I was fighting hard to recover my scattered senses, a sweet voice whispered—

"Don't cry any more, dear, please."

I saw through it all, for the dear girl who had just spoken was Clara Fitzacre; but just behind, and staring hard at me with her great, round, saucer eyes, was a fat, stupid-looking girl, whose name I soon learned was Martha Smith—red-faced and sleepy, and without a word to say for herself. As for Clara, I felt to love her in a moment, she was so tender and gentle, and talked in such a consolatory strain.



"I'm so glad to find that you are to be in our room," said Clara, who was a tall, dark-haired, handsome girl. "We were afraid it would turn out to be some cross, frumpy, stuck-up body, weren't we, Patty?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said the odious thing, whose words all sounded fat and sticky. "I thought you said that you wouldn't have anybody else in our room. I wish it was tea-time."

"But I should not have said so if I had known who was coming," said Clara, turning very red. "But Patty has her wish, for it is tea-time; so sponge your poor eyes, and let me do your hair, and then we'll go down. You need not wait, Patty."

Patty Smith did not seem as if she wished to wait, for she gave a great, coarse yawn, for all the world like a butcher's daughter, and then went out of the room.

"She is so fat and stupid," said Clara, "that it has been quite miserable here; and I'm so glad that you've come, dear."

"I'm not," said I, dismally. "I don't like beginning school over again."

"But then we don't call this school," said Clara.

"But it is, all the same," I said. "Oh, no," said Clara, kindly; "we only consider that we are finishing our studies here, and there are such nice teachers."

"How can you say so!" I exclaimed indignantly. "I never saw such a set of ugly, old, cross-looking—"

"Ah, but you've only seen the lady teachers yet. You have not seen Monsieur Achille de Tiraille, and Signor Pazzoletto—such fine, handsome, gentlemanly men; and then there's that dear, good-tempered, funny little Monsieur de Kittville."

I could not help sighing as I thought of Mr Saint Purre, and his long, black, silky beard; and how nice it would have been to have knelt down and confessed all my troubles to him, and I'm sure I should have kept nothing back.

"All the young ladies are deeply in love with them," continued Clara, as she finished my hair; "so pray don't lose your heart, and make any one jealous."

"There is no fear for me," I said, with a deep sigh; and then, somehow or another, I began thinking of the church, and wondering what sort of a clergyman we should have, and whether there would be early services like there were at Saint Vestment's, and whether I should be allowed to attend them as I had been accustomed.

I sighed and shivered, while the tears filled my eyes; for it seemed that all the happy times of the past were gone for ever, and life was to be a great, dreary blank, full of horrible teachers and hard lessons. Though, now one comes to think of it, a life could not be a blank if it were full of anything, even though they were merely lessons.

I went down with Clara to tea, and managed to swallow a cup of the horribly weak stuff; but as to eating any of the coarse, thick bread-and-butter, I could not; though, had my heart been at rest, the sight of Patty Smith devouring the great, thick slices, as if she was absolutely ravenous, would have quite spoiled my repast. At first several of the pupils were very kind and attentive, but seeing how put out and upset I was, they left me alone till the meal was finished; while, though I could not eat, I could compare and think how different all this was from what I should have had at home, or at dinner parties, or where papa took me when we went out. For he was very good that way, and mamma did not always know how we had dined together at Richmond and Blackwall. Such nice dinners, too, as I had with him in Paris when he came to fetch me from the sisters. He said it was experience to see the capital, and certainly it was an experience that I greatly liked. There is such an air of gaiety about a *café*; and the ices—ah!

And from that to come down to thick bread-and-butter like a little child!

After tea I was summoned to attend Mrs Blunt in her study—as if the old thing ever did anything in the shape of study but how to make us uncomfortable, and how to make money—and upon entering the place, full of globes, and books, and drawings, I soon found that she had put her good temper away with the cake and wine, as a thing too scarce with her to be used every day.

The reason for my being summoned was that I might be examined as to my capabilities; and I found the lady principal sitting in state, supported by the Fraülein and two of the English teachers—Miss Furness and Miss Sloman.

I bit my lips as soon as I went in, for, I confess it freely, I meant to be revenged upon that horrible Mrs Blunt for tempting mamma with her advertisement; and I determined that if she was to be handsomely paid for my residence at the Cedars, the money should be well earned.

And now, once for all, let me say that I offer no excuse for my behaviour; while I freely confess to have been, all through my stay at the Cedars, very wicked, and shocking, and reprehensible.

"I think your mamma has come to a most sensible determination, Miss Bozerne," said Mrs Blunt, after half an hour's examination. "What do you think, ladies?"

"Oh, quite so," chorused the teachers.

"Really," said Mrs Blunt, "I cannot recall having had a young lady of your years so extremely backward."

Then she sat as if expecting that I should speak, for she played with her eyeglass, and occasionally took a glance at me; but I would not have said a word, no, not even if they had pinched me.

"But I think we can raise the standard of your acquirements, Miss Bozerne. What do you say, ladies?"

"Oh, quite so," chorused the satellites, as if they had said it hundreds of times before; and I feel sure that they had.

"And now," said Mrs Blunt, "we will close this rather unsatisfactory preliminary examination. Miss Bozerne, you may retire."

I was nearly at the door—glad to have it over, and to be able to be once more with my thoughts—when the old creature called me back.

"Not in that way, Miss Bozerne," she exclaimed, with a dignified, cold, contemptuous air, which made me want to slap her—"not in that way at the Cedars, Miss Bozerne. Perhaps, Miss Sloman, as the master of deportment is not here, you will show Miss Laura Bozerne the manner in which to leave a room.—Your education has been sadly neglected, my child."

This last she said to me with rather an air of pity, just as if I was only nine or ten years old; and, as a matter of course, being rather proud of my attainments, I felt dreadfully annoyed.

But my attention was now taken up by Miss Sloman, a dreadfully skinny old thing, in moustachios, who had risen from her seat, and began backing towards the door in an awkward way, like two clothes-props in a sheet, till she contrived to catch against a little gipsy work-table and upset it, when, cross as I felt, I could not refrain from laughing.



"Leave the room, Miss Bozerne," exclaimed Mrs Blunt, haughtily.

This to me! whose programme had been rushed at when I appeared at a dance, and not a vacant place left. Oh, dear! oh, dear! I feel the thrill of annoyance even now.

Of course I made my way out of the room to where Clara was waiting for me; and then we had a walk out in the grounds, with our arms round each other, just as if we had been friends for years; though you will agree it was only natural I should cling to the first lovable thing which presented itself to me in my then forlorn condition.

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## Chapter Three.

### Memory the Third—Infelicity. Again a Child.

The next day was wet and miserable; and waiting about, and feeling strange and uncomfortable, as I did, made matters ever so much worse.



We were all in the schoolroom; and first one and then another stiff-backed, new-smelling book was pushed before me, and the odour of them made me feel quite wretched, it was so different to what of late I had been accustomed. For don't, pray, think I dislike the smell of a new book—oh, no, not at all, I delight in it; but then it must be from Mudie's, or Smith's, or the Saint James's Square place, while as for these new books—one was that nasty, stupid old Miss Mangnall's "Questions," and another was Fenwick de Porquet's this, and another Fenwick de Porquet's that, and, soon after, Noehden's German Grammar, thrust before me with a grin by the Fraülein. At last, as if to drive me quite mad, as a very culmination of my miseries, I was set, with Clara Fitzacre and five more girls, to write an essay on "The tendencies towards folly of the present age."

"What shall I say about it, ma'am?" I said to Miss Furness, who gave me the paper.

"Say?" she exclaimed, as if quite astonished at such a question. "Why, give your own opinions upon the subject."

"Oh, shouldn't I like to write an essay, and give my own opinions upon you," I said to myself; while there I sat with the sheets of paper before me, biting and indenting the penholder, without the slightest idea how to begin.

I did think once of dividing the subject into three parts or heads, like Mr Saint Purre did his sermons; but there, nearly everybody I have heard in public does that, so it must be right. So I was almost determined to begin with a firstly, and then go on to a secondly, and then a thirdly; and when I felt quite determined, I wrote down the title, and under it "firstly." I allowed the whole of the first page for that head, put "secondly" at the beginning of the second page, and "thirdly" upon the next, which I meant to be the longest.

Then I turned back, and wondered what I had better say, and whether either of the girls would do it for me if I offered her a shilling.

"What shall I say next," I asked myself, and then corrected my question; for it ought to have been, "What shall I say first?" And then I exclaimed under my breath, "A nasty, stupid, spiteful old thing, to set me this to do, on purpose to annoy me!" just as I looked on one side and found the girl next me was nearly at the bottom of her sheet of paper, while I could do nothing but tap my white teeth with my pen.

I looked on the other side, where sat Miss Patty Smith, glaring horribly down at her blank paper, nibbling the end of her pen, and smelling dreadfully of peppermint; and her forehead was all wrinkled up, as if the big atlas were upon her head, and squeezing down the skin.

Just then I caught Clara's eye—for she was busy making a great deal of fuss with her blotting-paper, as if she had quite ended her task—when, upon seeing my miserable, hopeless look, she came round and sat down by me.

"Never mind the essay," she whispered; "say you had the headache. I dare say it will be correct, won't it? For it always used to give me the headache when I first came."

"Oh, yes," I said, with truth, "my head aches horribly."

"Of course it does, dear," said Clara; "so leave that rubbish. It will be dancing in about five minutes."

"I say," drawled Miss Smith to Clara, "what's tendencies towards folly? I'm sure I don't know."

"Patty Smith's," said Clara, in a sharp voice; and the great fat, stupid thing sat there, glaring at her with her big, round eyes, as much as to say, "What do you mean?"

Sure enough, five minutes had not elapsed before we were summoned to our places in the room devoted to dancing and calisthenic exercises; and, as a matter of course, I was all in a flutter to see the French dancing master, who would be, I felt sure, a noble-looking refugee—a count in disguise—and I felt quite ready to let him make a favourable impression; for one cannot help sympathising with political exiles, since one has had a Louis Napoleon here in difficulties. But there, I declare it was too bad; and I looked across at Clara, who had slipped on first, and was holding her handkerchief to her mouth to keep from laughing as she watched my astonished looks; for you never did see such a droll little man, and I felt ready to cry with vexation at the whole place.

There he stood—Monsieur de Kittville—the thinnest, funniest little man I ever saw off the stage. He seemed to have been made on purpose to take up as little room as possible in the world and he looked so droll and squeezey, one could not feel cross long in his presence. If I had not been in such terribly low spirits, I'm sure I must have laughed aloud at the funny, capering little fellow, as he skipped about, now here and now there—going through all the figures, and stopping every now and then to scrape through the tune upon his little fiddle.

But it would have been a shame to laugh, for he was so good and patient; and I know he could feel how some of the girls made fun of him, though he bore it all amiably and never said a word.



I know he must have thought me terribly stupid, for there was not one girl so awkward, and grumpy, and clumsy over the lesson. But think, although it was done kindly enough, what did I want with being pushed here, and poked there, and shouted at and called after in bad English, when I had been used to float round and round brilliantly-lighted rooms in dreamy waltzes and polkas, till day-break? And I declare the very thoughts of such scenes at a time like this were quite maddening.

Finished! I felt as if I should be regularly finished long before the year had expired; and, after the short season of gaiety I had enjoyed in London, I would far rather have gone back to Guisnes and spent my days with dear old Soeur Charité in the convent. After all, I fancy papa was right when he said it was only a quiet advertising dodge—he will say such vulgar things, that he picks up in the City—and that it was not a genuine convent at all. I mean one of those places we used to read about, where they built the sisters up in walls, and all that sort of thing. But there: things do grow so dreadfully matter-of-fact, and so I found it; for here was I feeling, not so dreadfully young, but so horribly old, to be back at school.

The place seemed so stupid; the lessons seemed stupid; girls, teachers, everything seemed stupid. There were regular times for this, and regular times for that, and one could not do a single thing as one liked. If I went upstairs to brush my hair, and sat down before the glass, there would be a horrible, cracked voice crying, “Miss Bozerne, young ladies are not allowed in the dormitories out of hours;” and then I had to go down.

For the old wretch hated me because I was young and handsome, I am sure. Yes: I was handsome then, I believe; before all these terrible troubles came upon me, and made me look so old—ah! so old. And, oh! it was dreadful, having one’s time turned into a yard measure, and doled out to one in quarter-inches for this and half-inches for that, and not have a single scrap to do just what one liked with. Perhaps I could have borne it the better if I had not been used to do just as I liked at home. For mamma very seldom interfered; and I’m sure I was as good as could be always, till they nearly drove me out of my mind with this horrible school.

For it was a school, and nothing else but a school; and as they all ill-used me, and trod upon me like a worm in the path, why, of course I turned and annoyed them all I could at the Cedars, and persisted in calling it school. Finishing establishment—pah! Young ladies, indeed—fah! Why, didn’t I get to know about Miss Hicks being the grocer’s daughter, and being paid for in sugar? And wasn’t Patty Smith the butcher’s girl? Why, she really smelt of meat, and her hair always looked like that of those horrible butcher-boys in London, who never wear caps, but make their heads so shiny and matty with fat. Patty was just like them; and I declare the nasty thing might have eaten pomatum, she used such a quantity. Why, she used to leave the marks of her head right through her nightcap on to the pillow; and I once had the nasty thing put on my bed by mistake, when if it didn’t smell like the crust of Mrs Blunt’s apple-dumplings, and set me against them more than ever.

Dear, sensitive reader, did you ever eat finishing establishment “*poudings aux pommes*” as Mrs Blunt used to call them?—that is to say school apple-dumplings, or as we used to call them “pasty wasters.” If you never did, never do; for they are horrible. Ours used to be nasty, wet, slimy, splashy things, that slipped about in the great blue dish. And one did slide right off once on to the cloth, when the servant was putting it upon the table; and then the horrible thing collapsed in a most disgusting way, and had to be scraped up with a spoon. Ugh! such a mess! I declare I felt as if I was one of a herd of little pigs, about to be fed; and I told Clara so, when she burst out laughing, and Miss Furness ordered her to leave the table. If they would only have boiled the dreadful dumplings in basins, it would not have mattered so much; but I could see plainly enough that they were only tied up loosely in cloths, so that the water came in to make them wet and pappy; while they were always made in a hurry, and the crust would be in one place half-an-inch, and in another three inches thick; and I always had the thick mass upon my plate. Then, too, they used to be made of nasty, viciously acid apples, with horrible cores that never used to be half cut out, and would get upon your palate and then would not come off again. Oh, dear! would I not rather have been a hermit on bread and water and sweet herbs than have lived upon Mrs Blunt’s greasy mutton—always half done—and pasty wasters!

The living was quite enough to upset you, without anything else, and it used to make me quite angry, for one always

knew what was for dinner, and it was always the same every week. It would have been very good if it had been nicely cooked, no doubt, but then it was not; and I believe by having things nasty there used to be quite a saving in the expenditure. "Unlimited," Mrs Blunt told mamma the supplies were for the young ladies; but only let one of the juniors do what poor little Oliver Twist did—ask for more—and just see what a look the resident teacher at the head of the table would give her. It was a great chance if she would ask again. But there, I must tell you about our living. Coffee for breakfast that always tasted like Patty Smith's Spanish liquorice wine that she used to keep in a bottle in her pocket—a nasty toad! Thick bread-and-butter—all crumby and dab, as if the servant would not take the trouble to spread the butter properly. For tea there was what papa used to tease mamma by calling "a mild infusion," though there was no comparison between our tea and Allsham tea, for mamma always bought hers at the Stores, and Allsham tea was from Miss Hicks's father's; and when we turned up our noses at it, and found fault, she said it was her pa's strong family Congou, only there was so little put in the pot; while if they used not to sweeten the horrible pinky-looking stuff with a treacley-brown sugar; and as for the milk—we do hear of cows kicking over the milking pail, and I'm sure if the bluey-looking stuff poured into our tea had been shown to any decent cow, and she had been told that it was milk, she would have kicked it over in an instant.

And, oh! those dinners at the Cedars! On Sundays we had beef—cold beef—boiled one week, roast the next. On Mondays we had a preparation of brown slime with lumps of beef in it, and a spiky vandyke of toast round the dish, which was called "hash," with an afterpiece of "mosh posh" pudding—Clara christened it so—and that was plain boiled rice, with a white paste to pour over it out of a butter boat, while the rice itself always tasted of soapsuds. Tuesday was roast shoulder of mutton day. Wednesday, stewed steak—such dreadful stuff!—which appeared in two phases, one hard and leathery, the other rag and tattery. Thursday, cold roast beef always—when they might just as well have let us have it hot—and pasty wasters, made of those horrible apples, which seemed to last all the year round, except midsummer vacation time, when the stock would be exhausted; but by the time the holidays were over, the new ones came in off the trees—the new crops—and, of course, more sour, and vicious, and bitter than ever. We used to call them vinegar pippins; and I declare if that Patty Smith would not beg them of the cook, and lie in bed and crunch them, while my teeth would be quite set on edge with only listening to her.

Heigho! I declare if it isn't almost as hard work to get through this description of the eatables and drinkables at the Cedars as it was in reality. Let me see, where was I? Oh, at Thursday! Then on Fridays it was shoulder of mutton again, with the gravy full of sixpences; and, as for fat—oh! they used to be so horribly fat, that I'm sure the poor sheep must have lived in a state of bilious headache all their lives, until the butcher mercifully killed them; while—only fancy, at a finishing establishment!—if that odious Patty Smith did not give Clara and me the horrors one night by an account of how her father's man—I must do her the credit of saying that she had no stuck-up pride in her, and never spoke of her "esteemed parent" as anything but father; for only fancy a "papa," with a greasy red face, cutting steaks, or chopping at a great wooden block, and crying "What-d'yer-buy—buy—buy?" Let's see—oh! of how her father's man killed the sheep; and I declare it was quite dreadful; and I said spitefully to Clara afterwards that I should write by the next post and tell mamma how nicely my finishing education was progressing, for I knew already how they killed sheep. Well, there is only one more day's fare to describe—Saturday's, and that is soon done, for it was precisely the same as we had on the Wednesday, only the former used mostly to be the tattery days and the latter the hard ones.



Now, of course, I am aware that I am writing this in a very desultory manner; but after Mrs Blunt's rules and regulations, what can you expect? I am writing to ease my mind, and therefore I must write just as I think; and as this is entirely my own, I intend so to do, and those may find fault who like. I did mean to go through the different adventures and impressions of every day; but I have given up that idea, because the days have managed to run one into the other, and got themselves confused into a light and shady sad-coloured web, like Miss Furness's scrimpy silk dress that she wore on Sundays—a dreadful antique thing, like rhubarb shot with magnesia; for the nasty old puss always seemed to buy her things to give her the aspect of having been washed out, though with her dreadfully sharp features and cheesy-looking hair—which she called auburn—I believe it would have been impossible to make her look nice.

Whenever there was a lecture, or a missionary meeting, or any public affair that Mrs Blunt thought suitable, we used all to be marched off, two and two; while the teachers used to sit behind us and Mrs Blunt before, when she would always begin conversing in a strident voice, that every one could hear in the room, before the business of the evening began—talking upon some French or German author, a translation of whose works she had read, quite aloud, for every one to hear—and hers was one of those voices that will penetrate—when people would, of course, take notice, and attention be drawn to the school. Of course there were some who could see through the artificial old

thing; but for the most part they were ready to believe in her, and think her clever.

Then the Misses Bellperret's young ladies would be there too, if it was a lecture, ranged on the other side of the Town Hall. Theirs was the dissenting school—one which Mrs Blunt would not condescend to mention. It used to be such fun when the lecture was over, and we had waited for the principal part of the people to leave, so that the school could go out in a compact body. Mrs Blunt used to want us to go first, and the Misses Bellperret used to want their young ladies to go first. Neither would give way; so we were mixed up altogether, greatly to Mrs Blunt's disgust and our delight in both schools; for really, you know, I think it comes natural for young ladies to like to see their teachers put out of temper.

But always after one of these entertainments, as Mrs Blunt called them—when, as a rule, the only entertainment was the fun afterwards—there used to be a lecture in Mrs B.'s study for some one who was charged with unladylike behaviour in turning her head to look on the other side, or at the young gentlemen of the grammar-school—fancy, you know, thin boys in jackets, and with big feet and hands, and a bit of fluff under their noses—big boys with squeaky, gruff, half-broken voices, who were caned and looked sheepish; and, I declare, at last there would be so many of these lectures for looking about, that it used to make the young ladies worse, putting things into their heads that they would never have thought of before. Not that I mean to say that was the case with me, for I must confess to having been dreadfully wicked out of real spite and annoyance.

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## Chapter Four.

### Memory the Fourth—A Terrible Surprise.

I don't know what I should have done if it had not fallen to my lot to meet with a girl like Clara Fitzacre, who displayed quite a friendly feeling towards me, making me her confidante to such an extent that I soon found out that she was most desperately—there, I cannot say what, but that a sympathy existed between her and the Italian master, Signor Pazzoletto.

“Such a divinely handsome man, dear,” said Clara one night, as we lay talking in bed, with the moon streaming her rays like a silver cascade through the window; while Patty Smith played an accompaniment upon her dreadful pug-nose. And then, of course, I wanted to hear all; but I fancy Clara thought Patty was only pretending to be asleep, for she said no more that night, but the next day during lessons she asked me to walk with her in the garden directly they were over, and of course I did, when she began again,—

“Such a divinely handsome man, dear! Dark complexion and aquiline features. He is a count by rights, only he has exiled himself from Italy on account of internal troubles.”

I did not believe it a bit, for I thought it more likely that he was some poor foreigner whom Mrs Blunt had managed to engage cheaply; so when Clara spoke of internal troubles, I said, spitefully,—“Ah, that's what mamma talks about when she has the spasms and wants papa to get her the brandy. Was the Signor a smuggler, and had the troubles anything to do with brandy?”

“Oh, no, dear,” said Clara, innocently, “it was something about politics; but you should hear him sing ‘*Il balen*’ and ‘*Ah, che la morte*’. It quite brings the tears into my eyes. But I am getting on with my Italian so famously.”

“So it seems,” I said, maliciously; “but does he know that you call him your Italian?”

“Now, don't be such a wicked old quiz,” said Clara. “You know what I mean—my Italian lessons. We have nearly gone through ‘*I Miei Prigioni*’, and it does seem so romantic. You might almost fancy he was Silvio Pellico himself. I hope you will like him.”

“No, you don't,” I said, mockingly. “I'm sure I do,” said Clara; “I said *like*, didn't I?”

I was about to reply with some sharp saying, but just then I began thinking about the Reverend Theodore Saint Purre and his sad, patient face, and that seemed to stop me.

“But I know whom you will like,” said Clara. “Just stop till some one comes—you'll see.”

“And who may that be, you little goose?” I cried, contemptuously.

“Monsieur Achille de Tiraille, young ladies,” squeaked Miss Furness. “I hope the exercises are ready.”

Clara looked at me with her handsome eyes twinkling, and then we hurried in, or rather Clara hurried me in; and we went into the classroom. Almost directly after, the French master was introduced by Miss Sloman, who frowned at me, and motioned to me to remain standing. I had risen when he entered, and then resumed my seat; for I believe Miss Sloman took a dislike to me from the first, because I laughed upon the day when she upset the little table while performing her act of deportment.

But I thought no more of Miss Sloman just then, for I knew that Clara's eyes were upon me, and I could feel the hot blood flushing up in my cheeks and tingling in my forehead; while I knew too—nay, I could feel, that another pair of eyes were upon me, eyes that I had seen in the railway carriage, at the station, in my dreams; and I quite shivered as Miss Sloman led me up to the front of a chair where some one was sitting, and I heard her cracked-bell voice say,—

“The new pupil, Monsieur Achille: Miss Bozerne.”

I could have bitten my lips with anger for being so startled and taken aback before the dark foreign gentleman of

whom I have before spoken.

Oh, me! sinner that I am, I cannot tell much about that dreadful afternoon. I have only some recollection of stumbling through a page of *Télémaque* in a most abominable manner, so badly that I could have cried—I, too, who would not condescend to make use of Mr Moy Thomas as a translator, but read and revelled in "*Les Misérables*" and doated on that Don Juan of a Gilliat in "*Les Travailleurs de Mer*" though I never could quite understand how he could sit still and be drowned, for the water always seems to pop you up so when you're bathing; but, then, perhaps it is different when one is going to drown oneself, and in spite of the horrors which followed I never quite made up my mind to do that.

There I was, all through that lesson—I, with my pure French accent and fluent speech, condemned to go on blundering through a page of poor old *Télémaque*, after having almost worshipped that dear old Dumas, and fallen in love with Bussy, and Chicot, and Athos, and Porthos, and Aramis, and D'Artagnan, and I don't know how many more—but stop; let me see. No, I did not like Porthos of the big baldric, for he was a great booby; but as for Chicot—there, I must consider. I can't help it; I wandered then—I wandered all the time I was at Mrs Blunt's, wandered from duty and everything. But was I not prisoned like a poor dove, and was it not likely that I should beat my breast against the bars in my efforts to escape? Ah, well! I am safe at home once more, writing and revelling in tears—patient, penitent, and at peace; but as I recall that afternoon, it seems one wild vision of burning eyes, till I was walking in the garden with Clara and that stupid Patty Smith.

"Don't be afraid to talk," whispered Clara, who saw how *distracte* I was; "she's only a child, though she is so big."

I did not reply, but I recalled her own silence on the previous night.

"You won't tell tales, will you, Patty?" said Clara.

"No," said Patty, sleepily; "I never do, do I? But I shall, though," with a grin lighting up her fat face—"I shall, though, if you don't do the exercise for me that horrid Frenchman has left. I can't do it, and I sha'n't, and I won't, so now then."

And then the great, stupid thing made a grimace like a rude child.

It was enough to make one slap her, to hear such language; for I'm sure Monsieur de Tiraille was so quiet and gentlemanly, and—and—well, he was not handsome, but with such eyes. I can't find a word to describe them, for picturesque won't do. And then, too, he spoke such excellent English.

I suppose I must have looked quite angrily at Patty, for just then Clara pinched my arm.

"I thought so," said she, laughing; "you won't make me jealous, dear, about the Signor, now, will you, you dear, handsome girl? I declare I was quite frightened about you at first."

"Don't talk such nonsense," I said, though I could not help feeling flattered. "Whatever can you mean?"

"Oh, nothing at all," said Clara, laughing. "You can't know what I mean. But come and sit down here, the seat is dry now. Are not flowers sweet after the rain?"

So we went and sat down under the hawthorn; and then Clara, who had been at the Cedars two years, began to talk about Monsieur Achilles, who was also a refugee, and who was obliged to stay over here on account of the French President; and a great deal more she told me, but I could not pay much attention, for my thoughts would keep carrying me away, so that I was constantly going over the French lesson again and again, and thinking of how stupid I must have looked, and all on in that way, when it did not matter the least bit in the world; and so I kept telling myself.

"There!" exclaimed Clara, all at once; "I never did know so tiresome a girl. Isn't she, Patty, tiresome beyond all reason?"

But Patty was picking and eating the sour gooseberries—a nasty pig!—and took not the slightest notice of the question.

"It is tiresome," said Clara again; "for I've been talking to you for the last half-hour, about what I am sure you would have liked to know, and I don't believe that you heard hardly a word; for you kept on saying 'um!' and 'ah,' and 'yes'; and now there's the tea-bell ringing. But I am glad that you have come, for I did want a companion so badly. Patty is so big and so stupid; and all the other girls seem to pair off when they sleep in the same rooms. And, besides, when we are both thinking—that is, both—both—you know. There, don't look like that! How droll it is of you to pretend to be so innocent, when you know all the while what I mean!"

I could not help laughing and squeezing Clara's hand as I went in; for somehow I did not feel quite so dumpy and low-spirited as I did a few hours before; and, as I sat over the thick bread-and-butter they gave us—though we were what, in more common schools, they would have called parlour boarders—I began to have a good look about me, and to take a little more notice of both pupils and teachers, giving an eye, too, at Mrs Fortesquieu de Blount.

Only to think of the artfulness of that woman, giving herself such a grand name, and the stupidity of people themselves to be so taken in. But so it was; for I feel sure it was nothing else but the "Fortesquieu de Blount" which made mamma decide upon sending me to the Cedars. And there I sat, wondering how it would be possible for me to manage to get through a whole year, when I declare if I did not begin to sigh terribly. It was the coming back to all this sort of thing, after fancying it was quite done with; while the being marched out two and two, as we had been that day, all round the town and along the best walks, for a perambulating advertisement of the Cedars, Allsham, was terrible to me. It seemed so like making a little girl of me once more, when I was so old that I could feel a red spot

burning in each cheek when I went out; and I told Clara of them, but she said they were caused by pasty wasters and French lessons, and not by annoyance; while, when I looked angrily round at her, she laughed.

It would not have mattered so much if the teachers had been nice, pleasant, lady-like bodies, and would have been friendly and kind; but they would not, for the sole aim of their lives seemed to be to make the pupils uncomfortable, and find fault; and the longer I was there the more I found this out, which was, as a matter of course, only natural. If we were out walking—now we were walking too fast, so that the younger pupils could not keep up with us; or else we were said to crawl so that they were treading on our heels; and do what we would, try how we would, at home or abroad, we were constantly wrong. Then over the lessons they were always snapping and catching us up and worrying, till it was quite miserable. As to that Miss Furness, I believe honestly that nothing annoyed her more than a lesson being said perfectly, and so depriving her of the chance of finding fault.

Now pray why is it that people engaged in teaching must always be sour and disappointed-looking, and ready to treat those who are their pupils as if they were so many enemies? I suppose that it is caused by the great pressure of knowledge leaving room for nothing mild and amiable. Of course Patty Smith was very stupid; but it was enough to make the poor, fat, pudgy thing ten times more stupid to hear how they scolded her for not doing her exercises. I declare it was quite a charity to do them for her, as it was not in her nature to have done them herself. There she would sit, with her forehead all wrinkled up, and her thick brows quarrelling, while her poor eyes were nearly shut; and I'm sure her understanding was quite shut up, so that nothing could go either in or out.

Oh! I used to be so vexed, and could at any time have pulled off that horrid Mrs Blunt's best cap when she used to bring in her visitors, and then parade them through the place, displaying us all, and calling up first one and then another, as if to show off what papa would call our points.

The vicar of Allsham used to be the principal and most constant visitor; and he always made a point of taking great interest in everything, and talking to us, asking us Scripture questions; coming on a Monday—a dreadful old creature—so as to ask us about the sermon which he preached on the previous morning. They were all such terrible sermons that no one could understand—all about heresies, and ites, and saints with hard names; and he had a bad habit of seeing how many parentheses he could put inside one another, like the lemons from the bazaars, till you were really quite lost, and did not know which was the original, or what it all meant; and I'm sure sometimes he did not know where he had got to, and that was why he stopped for quite two minutes blowing his nose so loudly. I'm afraid I told him very, very wicked stories sometimes when he questioned me; while if he asked me once whether I had been confirmed, he asked me twenty times.



I'm sure I was not so very wicked before I went down to Allsham; but I quite shudder now when I think of what a wretch I grew, nicknaming people and making fun of serious subjects; and oh, dear! I'm afraid to talk about them almost.

The vicar sat in his pew in the nave in the afternoon, and let the curate do all the service; and I used to feel as if I could box his ears, for he would stand at the end of his seat, half facing round, and then, in his little, fat, round, important way, go on gabbling through the service, as if he wasn't satisfied with the way the curate was reading it, and must take it all out of his mouth. He upset the poor young man terribly, and the clerk too; so that the three of them used to tie the service up in a knot, or make a clumsy trio of it, with the school children tripping up their heels by way of chorus.

Then, too, the old gentleman would be so loud, and would not mind his points, and would read the responses in the same fierce, defiant way in which he said the Creed in the morning, just as if he was determined that everybody should hear how he believed. And when the curate was preaching, he has folded his arms and stared at the poor young fellow, now shaking his head, and now blowing his nose; while the curate would turn hot, and keep looking down at him as much as to say, "May I advance that?" or "Won't that do, sir?" till it was quite pitiful.

The vicar used to bring his two daughters with him to the Cedars, to pat, and condescend, and patronise, and advise: two dreadful creatures that Clara called the giraffes, they were so tall and thin, and hook-nosed, and quite a pair in appearance. They dressed exactly alike, in white crape long shawls and lace bonnets in summer; and hooked on to their father, one on each arm, as the fat, red-faced, little old gentleman used to come up the gravel walk, he was just like a chubby old angel, with a pair of tall, scraggy, half-open wings.

But though the two old frights were so much alike in appearance, they never agreed upon any point; and the parishioners had a sad time of it with first one and then the other. They were always leaving books for the poor people's reading, and both had their peculiar ideas upon the subject of what was suitable. They considered that they knew exactly what every one ought to read, and what every one else ought to read was just the very reverse of what they ought to read themselves. But there, they do not stand alone in that way, as publishers well know when they bring out so many works of a kind that they are sure customers will buy—not to read, but to give away—very good books, of course.



It was all very well to call them the giraffes, and that did very well for their height; but as soon as I found out how one was all for one way, and the other immediately opposed to her sister, declaring she was all wrong, I christened them—the Doxies—Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy. It was very dreadful—wasn't it?—and unladylike, and so on; but it did seem to fit, and all the girls took it up and enjoyed it; only that odious Celia Blang must tell Miss Furness, and Miss Furness must tell Mrs Blunt, and then of course there was a terrible hubbub, and I was told that it was profane in one sense, bad taste in another, and disgusting language in another; for the word "doxy" was one that no lady should ever bring her lips to utter. When if I did not make worse of it—I mean in my own conscience—by telling a most outrageous story, and saying I was sorry, when I wasn't a bit.

Oh, the visitors! I was sick of them; for it was just as if we girls were kept to show. I used to call the place Mrs Blunt's Menagerie, and got into a scrape about that; for everything I said was carried to the principal—not that I cared, only it made me tell those stories, and say I was sorry when I was not.

The curate and his poor unfortunate wife came sometimes. A curious-looking couple they were, too, who seemed as if they had found matrimony a mistake, and did not approve of it; for they always talked in a quiet, subdued way, and walked as far apart from one another as they could.

The curate had not much to say for himself; but he made the best he could of it, and stretched his words out a tremendous length, saying pa-a-ast and la-a-ast; so that when he said the word everlasting in the service, it was perfectly terrible, and you stared at him in dismay, as if there really never would be an end to it.

We used to ask one another, when he had gone, what he had been talking about; but we never knew—only one had two or three long-stretched-out words here, and a few more there. But it did not matter; and I think we liked him better than his master, the vicar. As for his wife, she had a little lesson by heart, and she said it every time she came, with a sickly smile, as she smoothed one side at a time of her golden locks, which always looked rough; and hers were really golden locks—about eight-carat gold, I should say, like Patty Smith's trumpery locket; for they showed the red coppery alloy very strongly—too strongly for my taste, which favours pale gold.

Pray do not for a moment imagine that I mean any vulgar play upon words, and am alluding to any vegetable in connection with the redness of the Mrs Curate's hair; for she was a very decent sort of woman, if she would not always have asked me how I was, and how was mamma, and how was papa, and how I liked Allsham, and whether I did not think Mrs de Blount a pattern of deportment. And then, as a matter of course, I was obliged to tell another story; so what good could come to me from the visits of our vicar and his followers?

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## Chapter Five.

### Memory the Fifth—I Get into Difficulties.

I declare my progress with my narrative seems for all the world like papa carving a pigeon-pie at a picnic: there were the claws sticking out all in a bunch at the top, as much as to say there were plenty of pigeons inside; but when he cut into it, there was just the same result as the readers must find with this work—nothing but disappointing bits of

steak, very hard and tiresome. But I can assure you, like our cook at home, that all the pigeons were put in, and if you persevere you will be as successful as papa was at last, though I must own that pigeon is rather an unsatisfactory thing for a hungry person.

Heigho! what a life did I live at the Cedars: sigh, sigh, sigh, morning, noon, and night. I don't know what I should have done if it had not been for the garden, which was very nice, and the gardener always very civil. The place was well kept up—of course for an advertisement; and when I was alone in the garden, which was not often, I used to talk to the old man or one of his underlings, while they told me of their troubles. It is very singular, but though I thought the place looked particularly nice, I learnt from the old man that it was like every garden I had seen before, nothing to what it might be if there were hands enough to keep it in order. I spoke to papa about that singular coincidence, and he laughed, and said that it was a problem that had never yet been solved:—how many men it would take to keep a garden in thorough order.

There was one spot I always favoured during the early days of my stay. It was situated on the north side of the house, where there was a dense, shady horse-chestnut, and beneath it a fountain in the midst of rockery—a fountain that never played, for the place was too oppressive and dull; but a few tears would occasionally trickle over the stones, where the leaves grew long and pallid, and the blossoms of such flowers as bloomed here were mournful, and sad, and colourless. It seemed just the spot to sit and sigh as I bent over the ferns growing from between the lumps of stone; for you never could go, even on the hottest days without finding some flower or another with a tear in its eye.

I hope no one will laugh at this latter conceit, and call it poetical or trivial; for if I like to write in a sad strain, and so express my meaning when I allude to dew-wet petals, where is the harm?



But to descend to everyday life. I talked a great deal just now about the different visitors we had, and the behaviour of our vicar in the church; and really it was a very nice little church, though I did not like the manners of some of the people who frequented it.

Allsham being a small country town, as a matter of course it possessed several grandees, some among whom figured upon Mrs Blunt's circular; and it used to be so annoying to see about half-a-dozen of these big people cluster outside the porch in the churchyard, morning and afternoon, to converse, apparently, though it always seemed to me that they stood there to be bowed to by the tradesmen and mechanics. They never entered the church themselves until the clergyman was in the reading-desk, and the soft introductory voluntary was being played on the organ by the Fraülein, who performed in the afternoon, the organist in the morning. Then the grandees would come marching in slowly and pompously as a flock of geese one after another into a barn, proceeding majestically to their pews; when they would look into their hats for a few moments, seat themselves, and then stare round, as much as to say, "We are here now. You may begin."

It used to annoy me from its regularity and the noise their boots made while the clergyman was praying; for they might just as well have come in a minute sooner; but then it was the custom at Allsham, and I was but a visitor.

I did not get into any trouble until I had been there a month, when Madame Blunt must give me an imposition of a hundred lines for laughing at her, when I'm sure no one could have helped it, try ever so hard. In the schoolroom there was a large, flat, boarded thing, about a foot high, all covered with red drugget; and upon this used to stand Mrs Blunt's table and chair, so that she was a great deal higher than anyone else, and could easily look over the room. Then so sure as she began to sit down upon this dais, as she used to call it, there was a great deal of fuss and arranging of skirts, and settling of herself into her chair, which she would then give two or three pushes back, and then fidget forward; and altogether she would make more bother than one feels disposed to make sometimes upon being asked to play before company, when the music-stool requires so much arranging.

Now, upon the day in question she had come in with her head all on one side, and pulling a sad long face, pretending the while to be very poorly, because she was half-an-hour late, and we had been waiting for the lesson she was down in the table to give. Then, as we had often had it before, and knew perfectly well what was coming, she suddenly caught sight of the clock.

"Dear me, Miss Sloman! Bless my heart, that clock is very much too fast," she would exclaim. "It cannot be nearly so late as that."

"I think it is quite right, Mrs de Blount," Miss Sloman would say, twitching her moustache.

"Oh, dear me, no, Miss Sloman; nothing like right. My pendule is quite different."



Of course we girls nudged one another—that is not a nice word, but kicked or elbowed seems worse; and then, thinking I did not know, Clara whispered to me that her ladyship always went on like that when she was down late of a morning. But I had noticed it several times before; while there it was, always the same tale, and the silly old ostrich never once saw that we could see her when she had run her stupid old head in the sand.

Well, according to rule, she came in, found fault with the clock, but took care not to have it altered to match her gimcrack French affair in her bedroom, which she always called her pendule. Then she climbed on to the dais; and, as usual, she must be very particular about the arrangement of the folds of her satin dress, which was one of the company or parent-seeing robes, now taken into everyday use.

“Look out,” whispered Clara to me.

“What for?” I said, in the same low tone.

But instead of answering she pretended to be puzzled with something in her lesson, and got up to go and ask Miss Furness what it meant.

All this while Mrs Blunt was getting up and sitting down, and rustling about like an old hen in a dust-bath, to get herself in position; when quite suddenly there was a sharp scream and a crash; and, on jumping up, I could see the lady principal upon the floor behind the dais where she had pulled over the table, and the ink was trickling down upon her neck.

Of course, any lady in her senses would have got up directly, and tried to repair the mischief; but not she: for there she lay groaning as if in terrible pain, as Miss Furness and Miss Sloman, one at either hand, were trying to raise her, the Fraülein the while dragging off the table, and exclaiming in German; but not the slightest impression was made upon the recumbent mass—which seems to me the neatest way of saying “lying-down lump.”

Clara ran out of the room, holding her handkerchief to her mouth, but pretending all the while to be frightened out of her wits; and then what a fuss there was getting the fallen one into her seat again—but not on the dais—bathing her face, chafing her hands, sprinkling her with *Eau de Cologne*, holding salts to her nose; and it was just as she was groaning the loudest and sighing her worst that Clara came back, and began to look in her droll, comical way at me.

I had not seen through the trick at first; but all at once I recalled that wicked girl’s “Look out!” when it flashed through my mind in an instant that she had moved back the chair and table upon the dais, so that at the first good push back of her chair the poor woman fell down; and so, what with the thoughts of the wicked trick, and Mrs Blunt’s long-drawn face, and Clara’s droll eyes peering at me so saucily, I could not help it, but burst out into a loud laugh.

Talk of smelling-salts, and bathing, and chafing, why, they were as nothing in comparison with that laugh. Poor Mrs Blunt! I dare say she did hurt herself, for she was stout and heavy; but she was well again in an instant, and looked at me in a horribly furious manner. But I did not care—not a bit; and I could not help it, for it was not my fault I could see though, that she thought that it was, as she burst out,—

“Miss Bozerne!”

“Such unladylike behaviour,” chimed in Miss Furness.

“So cruel!” exclaimed Miss Sloman.

“Ach ten!” ejaculated the Fraülein; while I caught sight of Miss Murray looking quite pained at me.

“I did not think that a young lady in my establishment would have been guilty of such atrocious conduct,” exclaimed Mrs Blunt furiously.

“No, indeed,” said Miss Furness.

“Something entirely new,” exclaimed Miss Sloman, tossing her pretty head.

And there stood poor Miss Bozerne—poor me—feeling so red and ear tingling; for though I said that I did not care, I did, and very much too; but nothing should have made me confess that I knew the cause of the accident; and though all the while I was sure that dreadful Mrs Blunt thought I had moved her chair, I bore it, determined not to betray Clara, little thinking the while that the time would come when, upon a much more serious occasion, I should be dependent upon her generosity. But it really did seem too bad of the tiresome thing, who was holding down her head, and thoroughly enjoying the whole scene; and no doubt it was excellent fun for her, but it was very hard upon poor me.

“Leave the room, Miss Bozerne, and retire to your dormitory,” exclaimed Mrs Blunt at last, in a very awful tone of voice, and putting on every scrap of dignity she could command.

I felt just as if I should have liked to have said “I won’t;” but I controlled myself, and, making a sweeping curtsey, I went out, feeling very spiteful. And then, when I was upstairs and had received my hundred-line French imposition, I commenced work by writing a cross letter to mamma, and telling her that I would not stay in the nasty school any longer; and declaring that if she did not come soon and fetch me, I should run away.

But though it was a very smartly-written, satirical letter, I tore it up afterwards; for something seemed to whisper to me that—that—well, that—But if those who have read so far into my confessions will have patience, and quietly keep on reading leaf after leaf, trying the while to sympathise with me, no doubt they will form a judgment for themselves of the reason which prevented me from sending the letter to mamma, and made me try to put up with the miseries of that select establishment for young ladies—the Cedars, Allsham.

## Chapter Six.

### Memory the Sixth—Germs that Bud.

One long, weary, dreadful drag, but somehow or another time slipped away; though I shudder now when I recall that during that lapse of time I was growing more and more wicked every day; and matters were slowly progressing towards the dire hour when my happiness was wrecked for ever—buoyant bark though it was—upon the shoals and quicksands surrounding the fair land of love and joy.

It would, perhaps, look particular, or I would repeat that last musical sentence, which seems to describe so aptly my feelings. But to resume. One could not help liking French lessons when one had such a teacher; and, oh, how I used to work to get my exercises perfect! Clara began to laugh and tease, but then I could fight her with her own weapons. I did not mind her beginning to say the verb *aimer*, because I always used to retaliate with something Italian, and she was beaten directly; for any one with half an eye could see why she was so fond of that especial study.



How the monster with the short, crisp beard used to stare at me! Just as he did at the very first, when mamma was with me; and for a long time I used to fancy that every teacher and pupil must see how his eyes were directed at me, though I suppose really there was nothing for any one to see. But, oh, what a battle I used to have when lessons were over, and I had settled down into a quiet, dreamy way. Then would come the face of the Reverend Theodore Saint Purre, our curate in town, to look at me reproachfully, so sadly that I used to have many a good cry; and I hardly knew how to bear it. And certainly before I left London, I used to think a great deal of Mr Saint Purre; and I'm sure no young lady was more regular at church than I was. I was there every morning at eight, at the prayers, when really it was such a job in the cold weather to get up and be dressed—nicely dressed—in time. Then, I never missed one Wednesday or Friday, nor a saint's day; and as to Sundays, I went three times as a matter of course. Of course papa was, as you know, wicked enough to hint that so much going to church did not constitute true religion, and he did not believe in it. Wasn't it shocking? I did ask myself once, though, whether I should have gone so often if there had been a different curate.

I must own that I certainly did think a great deal of Theodore Saint Purre before I left London, as I said before; but then it was not my wish to leave—I was forced away, and I had not dreamed of the noble exile then: the tender chords of sympathy for others' sorrows had not then been touched. I had not learned to pity one who was driven by a cruel tyrant from home and estate to gain his bread upon a cold shore by imparting the "*langue douce*" of his "*chère patrie*." I had not then seen the stern but handsome refugee—so handsome as, after all, I am compelled to think him; so interesting even in the little errors of pronunciation of our tongue. I always thought French a great bother until I heard him speak it, and then I grew to quite idolise the bright, sparkling idioms. Shakespeare was, of course, soon banished to make way for Molière; and then after reading to him, Monsieur Achille would perhaps say a few words of praise, every one of which would make my face tingle so that I felt red right up to the roots of my hair.

But the Cedars was, after all, a dreadfully tiresome place, and seemed made up of aggravation. What was the use of having a lawn for tennis, with the nets all so ostentatiously displayed, as if the young ladies could always enjoy a little recreation there, when, so sure as one had a racquet in hand and any one began to serve, squeak, screech, or croak came the voice of Miss Furness, Miss Sloman, or the Fraülein, to announce some new lesson, when, of course, we had to go in? I declare if I did not, over and over again, say that vulgar, wicked word that I had learned of papa, and tried so hard to break myself of, though it seemed of not the slightest use, and the more I tried the metre it would keep forcing itself into my mind—I declare if I did not, over and over again say "Jigger the lessons!"

What it meant, I never knew; and to be candid, I have always been afraid to ask for fear of its being unladylike and strange.

I used to get up every morning sighing and declaring that I would not stay, till I took hold of the books to prepare my French exercises, when somehow I glided into a better frame of mind; for they seemed to cheer me up, and render the place a little less distasteful. I know very well now that my conduct afterwards was very sad, and that I can offer no defence; but when there is any scandal, and things that were untrue have been said, of course I feel bound to speak up; and, whether out of place or not, I mean to say here that, whether it was to tease me, or whether she meant it, all that Clara hinted was untrue.

Why is it that girls delight so much in making the course of—I mean have such a strong desire to hint, and laugh, and look as if saying, "I know."

I never once wrote Monsieur Achille's name upon my blotting-paper, for I would not have been guilty of such bold, outrageous conduct; but the tiresome creature would persist in saying that I did, and, as a matter of course, it was of no use to try and stop her. But I could not help feeling how shocking it was, and how wrong for Monsieur Achille to take advantage of his position as a teacher to behave as he did. He must have been very badly taught himself; and

yet it did seem so sweet when one was banished in this way from home, joined to him, as it were, by those before-mentioned chords of sympathy—to him, another exile from home; and it was such nonsense to say Mrs Blunt's establishment embraced all the comforts of a home, when one never saw a single comfort: if it did, they must have been embraced so tightly that they were all smothered—it seemed so sweet to have one to take an interest in every word and look, as Monsieur Achille soon showed that he did. And we had no pets—neither bird nor dog; and what could I do but set to loving something?

I may be wrong, but it seems to me only natural that we should have something on which to bestow our love; and if that is taken away upon which one wishes to bestow it, why it must gush over upon some other object. Of course, I loved Clara; but, then, she loved something else, and one did not get a fair exchange for one's affection; and I wanted a great deal of devotion to comfort me then, and make up for what I was suffering. So at last, giving way the least, little, tiniest morsel at a time, I began to feel that I should some day love Monsieur Achille very passionately; and—oh, how wicked!—I was first quite sure of it at church one Sunday, when that dreadful curate was preaching at the old vicar, and Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy were saying it over to themselves with their eyes shut, and one's heart was out in the green fields and woods and far away, and as wicked as a heart can be.

Oh, yes, wicked—wicked—wicked as could be—dreadfully wicked! But it was all mamma's fault. I had many a good cry about it, but I could not help it all; and after walking two and two to church together, like little girls—it did seem such a relief to have some one in the building who did not look upon one as a child. For there *he* used to sit, Sunday after Sunday, behaving so hypocritically, for all the while he was a Roman Catholic; only he came to church to please Mrs Blunt, though I sometimes fancy it was to please himself as well. But it was upon this one Sunday that I seemed to notice it so particularly. Just for want of something better to do, I suppose, I had been taking the greatest of pains with myself; and I must have looked nice, or else Clara would not have stood and clapped her hands when I was ready. Then we went off, and no sooner were we well outside the great iron gates than there just before us we could see Monsieur Achille and the Signor, arm in arm, going towards the church, and having evidently just before been taking a walk in the bright, free, green fields from which I was prisoned. I saw them look very hard towards us when they turned round, and Clara whispered that she knew why they had come, and where they were going; for previous to this, I suppose, they had very seldom been in the church—at least, we had never hardly seen them.

But it was plain enough where they were going, for they went in just before us; and as they stood in the porch waiting for the pew-opener, the Signor commenced crossing himself just as if it were a regular Roman Catholic chapel, till I saw Monsieur Achille pinch his arm and whisper something, so that he dropped his hand to his side and looked quite horrified. Then I saw Monsieur Achille whisper to the pew-opener, and they disappeared within the great swing, red-baize doors, and we went upstairs to fill the long pews in the gallery.

It was only natural that we should look round the church after being comfortably seated, when there, in one of the sideway seats were the two masters, casting an eye up towards us every now and then, and looking so hard that I felt quite ashamed, and was afraid it would be observed; but I soon remembered that our three Graces were sitting in the pew behind, and I knew they felt sure that the glances were directed at them. Poor things! And then it was that I had that thought come into my head, forcing its way in as if to make its abode there, although I shut my eyes tightly, and determined not to think of anything of the kind.

People take opiates for pains bodily; but why, oh! why do not Savoury and Moore, or Godfrey and Cooke, or somebody or another bring out an opiate for pains mental? What would I not have given that day to have lulled the excitement of my feelings, and to have attended quietly to my duties as I ought?

Tiresome, tiresome, tiresome!—oh, how tiresome it was, day after day, to go back to all the old school ways and habits—writing exercises, learning lessons, saying them, and being corrected and snubbed; heard to read, one's emphasis here, there, and everywhere found fault with, when I'm sure I read far better than those who heard me. Then my writing was not in accordance with Mrs Blunt's ideas of penmanship.

There were no novels to read; no *Times*, with its mysterious advertisements, that seem to mean such a deal; no morning concerts, no walks or rides—only exercise, two and two, as walking advertisements of the Cedars. I declare at last, in spite of the French lessons—or perhaps partly owing to the whirl within me, and the dreadfully worried state I was in—I grew quite low-spirited, and could not eat, and used to sit and mope, and I could see that I was getting paler and paler every day.

This sort of thing, though, would not do for Mrs Blunt, who saw in it the probable loss of a pupil and plenty of pounds a year; and one morning there was a summons for me to go into the drawing-room, where I found Mrs Blunt and a gentleman in black—so prim, so white-handkerchiefed and gold-sealed! All his grey hair was brushed up into a point, like an ice-mountain on the top of his head; while, whenever he spoke, his words came rolling out like great sugar-coated pills—so soft, so sweet, so smooth, you might have taken him for a great mechanical bon-bon box, and the hand he gently waved for the spring that set him in motion. I knew well enough that he was a doctor, as soon as I went in, and that he had been sent for to see me.



“Miss Bozerne, Dr Boole,” said Mrs Blunt.

And then, after ever so much bowing and saluting, there was the horrid old wretch, screwing his face up, and wagging his head, and peeping at me out of his half-shut eyes; and he felt my pulse and told me to put out my tongue. While directly after he drew in a long breath and pinched his lips together, as if he knew all about my complaint, and could see through it in a moment. But he did not know that I was mentally delivering him a homily upon hypocrisy, of which dreadful stuff it seemed to me there was an abundance at Allsham, it being about the place like an epidemic—or I suppose I ought to say it was in the place like an epidemic. And I must confess I had caught the complaint very badly, though Dr Boole was no use for that, seeing that he could not cure himself. Oh! if everybody troubled with hypocrisy would only call in the doctor, what a fortune each medical man would soon make!

Well, the doctor left hold of my wrist, after putting it down gently, as if it were something breakable, and put his gold eyeglasses up for another inspection.

Was not my appetite rather failing? Did I not have a strong inclination to sigh? Did I not feel low-spirited, and wake of a morning unrefreshed?

Why, of course I did. And so would any one who had been treated as I had, and so I felt disposed to tell him; but it would have been of little use. So I let them say and think what they liked; and when the interview was over, the doctor rose and walked out of the room, bowing in a way that must have delighted Mrs Blunt’s ideas of deportment; for he had written something upon a half-sheet of note-paper, and left orders that the prescription should be immediately made up.

“Of course,” said Mrs Blunt, “I shall write to your dear mamma by the next post, Miss Bozerne; but she need be under no concern, for the kindness of a home will be bestowed upon you. And now you had better return to the pursuance of your course of studies.”

I took the extremely polite hint; but I did not take the medicine when it was sent in. What did I want with medicine? Why, it was absurd. I used to pour it out into the glass, and then take it to the open window and throw it as far out as I could, so as to make a shower of fine physic fall upon the grass and pathway—such small drops that no one could see it had been thrown out. And, after all, I’m sure it was only a little bitter water, coloured and scented, and labelled to look important.

At the doctor’s next visit I was horribly afraid that he would ask me whether I had taken the medicine; and sure enough he did, only Mrs Blunt directly said “Yes,” and he was satisfied, and said I was much better, though he did not quite like my flushed, feverish-looking face. So he wrote another prescription for that, when I was only colouring up on account of being asked about his nasty stuff.

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## Chapter Seven.

### Memory the Seventh—French with a Master.

That dreadful man had pronounced me to be decidedly better, and had been and gone for the last time, while I felt quite sorry as I thought of the expense, and of how it would figure in the account along with the books and extras. The creature had rubbed his hands and smiled, and congratulated me upon my improved looks and rapid return to health. But really I did feel decidedly better, though it was not his doing; and if any prescription at all had done me good, it was a tiny one written in French. And now, somehow, I did seem to find the Cedars a little more bearable, and my spirits were brighter and better; but not one drop of the odious medicine had I taken.

Clara had more than once seen me throw it away, and had said “Oh!” and “My!” and “What a shame!” but I had thrown it away all the same, except twice or three times when I got Patty Smith to take it for me, which she did willingly, upon my promising to do her exercises; and I really think she would have taken quarts of the odious stuff on the same conditions, for she could eat and drink almost anything, and I believe that she was all digestive apparatus instead of brains. Pasty wasters, fat, sour gooseberries, vinegar pippins, it was all the same to her; and she used to be always having great dry seed-cakes sent to her from home, to sit voraciously devouring at night when we went to bed; and then out of generosity, when I had helped her with her exercises—which I often did as I grew more contented—she would cut me off wedges of the nasty, branny stuff with her scissors, which was a lucky thing for the

sparrows, who used to feast upon seed-cake crumbs from morning to night, for I never ate any.

And now I began to pay more attention to the lessons: singing with the Signor or the Fraülein, who had one of the most croaky voices I ever heard, though she was certainly a most brilliant pianiste. Her name was Gretchen, but we used to call her Clarionette, for that seemed to suit best with her horrid, reedy, croaky voice. Then, too, I used to practise hard with my instrumental music; but such a jangly piano we had for practice, though there was a splendid Collard in the drawing-room that it was quite a treat to touch. But only fancy working up Brinley Richards, or Vincent Wallace, or Czerny upon a horrible skeleton-keyed piano that would rattle like old bones, while it was always out of tune, had a dumb note somewhere, and was not even of full compass. Then I tried hard to take to the dancing, and to poor little Monsieur de Kittville—droll little man!—who always seemed to have two more arms than belonged to him; and there they were, tight in his coat sleeves, and hung out, one on each side, as if he did not know where to put them; and he a master of deportment!

I had quite taken the turn now, and was trying to bear it all, and put up with everything as well as I could, even with the horribly regular meals which we used to sit down to at a table where all the knives and forks were cripples—some loose in their handles, some were cracked, some were bent, and others looked over their shoulders. One horrid thing came out one day, and peppered my dinner with rosiny dust; and there it was—a fork—sticking upright in a piece of tough stewed steak, although two of the prongs were bent; and when some of the girls tittered, Miss Furness said that I ought to have known better, and that such behaviour was most unladylike and unbecoming.

But there, she was naturally an unpleasant, crabby old thing, and never hardly opened her lips to speak without saying words that were all crooked and full of corners. She once told Celia Blang—the pupil she petted, and who used to tell her tales—that she had been considered very handsome, and was called the “flower of the village;” but if she was, they must have meant the flower of the vinegar plant—for it is impossible to conceive a more acid old creature. In church, too, it was enough to make one turn round and slap her; for if she did not copy from the vicar, and take to repeating the responses out quite terribly loud, and before the officiating priest, so as to make believe how devout she was, when it really seemed to me that it was only to make herself conspicuous. And then, to see the way in which the vain old thing used to dress her thin, straggley hair! I do not laugh at people because their hair is not luxuriant or is turning grey, but at their vanity, which I am sure deserves it; and anybody is welcome to laugh at mine.



As for Miss Furness’s hair, there was a bit of false here and another bit there, and so different in shade and texture to her own that it was quite shocking to see how artificial she looked; while, to make matters ten times worse, she could not wear her hair plain, but in that old-fashioned Eugenie style, stretching the skin of her face out so tightly that her red nose shone, and she was continually on the grin. And yet I’ve caught her standing before the glass in the drawing-room, to simper and smile at herself, as if she were a goddess of beauty.

After a time the Eugenie style was dismissed to make way for a great pad; when, very soon, her light silk dress was all over pomatumy marks between the shoulders, though she rubbed it well with bread-crumbs every night. I was so annoyed that I curled my hair all round, and next day wore it hanging in ringlets; and this was the day upon which I received the prescription written in French, which did me so much good. It was French lesson day, and while my exercise was being corrected and I was trying to translate, I felt something pressed into my hand; and somehow or another—though I knew how horribly wicked it was—I had not the heart to refuse it, but blushed, and trembled, and stood there with my face suffused, blundering through the translation, until the lesson was ended, and without daring to look at the giver, I rushed away upstairs and devoured those two or three lines hastily scribbled upon a piece of exercise paper.

No! never, never, never will I divulge what they were! Enough that I say how they made my cheeks burn, my heart throb, and the whole place turn into an abode of bliss. Why, I could have kissed Mrs Blunt and all the teachers that evening; and when, at tea-time, as I sat thoughtful and almost happy—I think that I was quite happy for a little while—Miss Furness said something spiteful and cross, I really don’t think I minded it a bit.

It did not last long—that very bright rose-colour medium; but there was something of it henceforth to make lessons easy, and the time to pass less dolefully. I did not answer the first note, nor the second, nor yet the third; but I suppose he must have seen that I was not displeased, or he would not have written so many times; but at last I did dare to give him a look, which brought note after note for me to devour again and again in solitude. I quite tremble now I write, when I think of the daring I displayed in receiving them; but I was brave then, and exultant over my

conquest in holding for slave that noble-looking French refugee, whose private history must, I felt, be such a romance, that I quite felt as if I grew taller with importance.

Every note I received was written in his own sweet, sparkling, champagne-like language; and, oh! what progress I made in the tongue, though I am afraid I did not deserve all the praise he bestowed upon me.

Times and times he used to pray for an interview, that I would meet him somewhere—anywhere; but of course I could not yield to any such request, but told him to be content with the replies I gave him to his notes. But still, plan after plan would he propose, and all of them so dreadfully imprudent, and wild, and chivalrous, that nothing could be like it. I know that he would have been a knight or a cavalier had he lived earlier; while as to his looks!—ah, me! I fear that there must be truth in mesmerism, for I felt from the first that he had some terrible power over me, and could—what shall I say?—there, I cannot think of a better simile—turn me, as it were, round his finger; and that is really not an elegant expression. But then, he was so calm, so pensive-looking, and noble, that he might have been taken for one of Byron's heroes—Lara, or Manfred, or the Giaour. Either or all of these must have been exactly like him; while to find out that I, Laura Bozerne, was the sole object of his worship—Oh! it was thrilling.

I do not know how the time went then, for to me there seemed to be only one measurement, and that was the space between Monsieur Achille's lessons. As to the scoldings that I was constantly receiving, I did not heed them now in the least; for my being was filled by one sole thought, while the shadowy, reproachful face of Theodore Saint Purre grew more faint day by day. It must have been weeks—I cannot tell; months, perhaps—after my entrance as pupil at the Cedars that I retired on some excuse one afternoon to my dormitory, with a little, sharp, three-cornered note, and tremblingly anxious I tore it open, and read its contents.

And those contents? I would not even hint at them, if it were not that they are so necessary to the progress of my confessions.

He said that he had implored me again and again to meet him, and yet I was relentless and cruel; and now he had come to the determination to wait night by night under the great elm-trees by the side wall, when, even if I would not meet him, he would still have the satisfaction of stilling the beatings of his aching heart by folding his arms about it, leaning against some solitary, rugged trunk, and gazing upon the casket which contained his treasure. I might join him, or I might leave him to his bitter solitude; but there he would be, night after night, as a guardian to watch over my safety.

It was a beautiful note, and no amount of translating could do it justice; for after the glowing French in which it was written, our language seems cold and blank.

What could I do? I could not go, and yet it was impossible to resist the appeal. How could I rest upon my pillow, knowing him to be alone in the garden watching, with weary, waiting eyes, for my coming?—for him to be there hour after hour, till the cold dawn was breaking, and then to turn away, with Tennyson, slightly altered, upon his lips,—

*"She cometh not, he said."*

It was too much! I fought as I had fought before, over and over again, thinking of how it would be wicked, wrong, imprudent, unmaidenly. Oh, what dozens of adjectives I did slap my poor face with that afternoon, vowing again and again that I would not heed his note. But it was unbearable; and at last, with flushed cheeks and throbbing pulses, I plunged the note beneath the front of my dress, exclaiming,—

"Come what may, I will be there!"

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## Chapter Eight.

### Memory the Eighth—One of my Sins.

A day had passed—a long, long, dreary day, and a weary, weary night—during which I kept on starting up from sleep to think that I heard a voice whispering the word "Come!"

Come, come, come—ah! the number of times I seemed to hear that word, and sat up in bed, pressing my hair from my ears to listen, to lie down again with a sigh—for it was only fancy. How could I go? What could I do? I dare not try to meet him, even though I had vowed that I would. I kept calling myself coward, but that was of no use, for I only owned to it and made no reply; though towards morning, after I had been picturing to myself his weary form leaning watchingly against a tree for hours, and then seemed to see him slowly going disappointed away, I made another vow that, come another night, spite of cowardice and anything else, I would go.

And then, while I lay thinking of how shocking it would be, and all that sort of thing, I dropped off asleep to be awakened by a curious buzzing noise, which was Patty Smith humming a tune—like some horrible great bluebottle—as she was dressing, for the bell had rung some time before.

And now the next night had come. It was so hot that I could scarcely breathe, and the tiresome moon would shine so dreadfully bright that it was like a great, round eye peering between the edge of the blind and the window-frame to watch my proceedings. Clara was soon in bed, and breathing hard; while as for Patty Smith, she snored to that degree that I quite shivered. It must have been her snoring that made me shiver, for as to what I was about to venture, now that I could feel my mind fully made up, I was quite bold, though my heart would beat so loudly that it went "thump, thump," under the heavy clothes. I had hurried upstairs first, and was lying in bed quite dressed, though I lay wondering whether those two would notice that my clothes were not there by the bedside. I thought it would never be twelve o'clock, and I tried to think what Achille would be doing. It was so romantic, now that I had

passed the first feeling of dread, and seemed so much nicer than sitting up in bed in the dark to have a supper of cakes, sweets, and apples, as we used to at the old school when I was young. Ah, yes, when I was young!—for I felt old now. In another hour I should be down in the side walk, where the wall skirted the road. But suppose I were heard upon the stairs, or opening the side door, or Clara should wake, or—

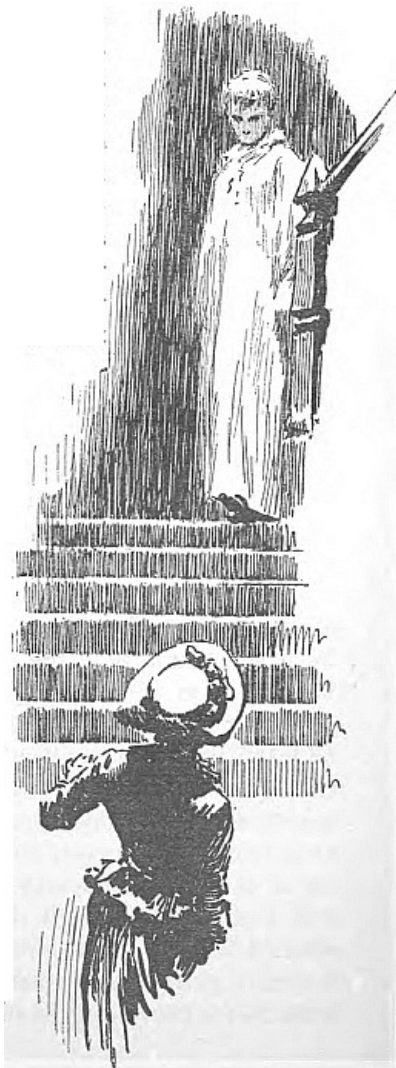
“Oh, you goose!” I exclaimed at last; “pray don’t go if you are so much afraid.”

But really it was enough to make any maiden’s heart beat.

I had changed his note about from place to place, for I could not part with it, and I sighed at the very idea of locking it up in my box with the others; but I had it now, and I could feel the sharp corner prick every time I moved. I knew it every word by heart, down even to where it said, “Thine for ever;” and as I whispered it over to myself, I grew more and more excited, and longed for the time to slip by faster.

At last, when it seemed as though it would never come, I heard the church clock faintly striking twelve; and then I shivered again horribly with that dreadful Patty’s snoring, for it was not likely I should have any foolish fancies about witching hours of midnight, or anything of that kind; and then I softly glided out of bed, and stood quite still for nearly five minutes, when, all remaining quiet, and the breathing of Clara and Patty sounding regular, I stepped on one side of the bright pathway made by the moonbeams, made my way to the door, and gently turned the handle.

I never knew that door to be so noisy before, and I now really trembled; for, as the tiresome thing creaked, I could hear either Clara or Patty turn in bed, and I stopped quite short, expecting every moment to hear my name pronounced. But no—all was silence and snore. I gently closed the door after me, and stood in the dark passage, with my heart almost failing; for I hardly dared stir a step farther, knowing, as I did, that in the next room slept the Fraülein, while the other two Graces were only a few steps farther down the passage. Somebody was breathing so hard that it was almost a snore, and it was not Patty Smith now; and more than once I was for going back, but I stole on at last, and reached the great staircase, where the moon was shining right through the skylight, and making queer shadows upon the wall. But I glided down, and was nearly at the bottom, when, looking up, I felt almost ready to sink—for, in the full glare of the moonlight, there stood a tall figure gazing down at me.



I did not shriek, nor turn to run away, for I had self-command enough to govern the emotions struggling for exit; though I wonder that I did not go mad with fear from the terror which came upon me, as I saw the tall, white figure come slowly gliding down—nearer, nearer, nearer; now in the moonlight, now in the deep shade. Oh, it was fearful! And, after all, to be candid, I believe the reason I did not scream out was because I could not; for my mouth felt hot and parched, and at times my head seemed quite to swim.

As I stood on one of the landings, and backed away from the coming figure, I felt the door of the little room where we hung our garden hats and mantles give way behind me, when I backed slowly in, pushed the door softly to, and then

crept tremblingly into a corner, drawing a large shawl before me, but not without knocking down a hat from one of the pegs, to fall with, oh! such a noise, seeing that it was only straw. There I stood, almost without breathing, hoping that I had not been seen, and that the figure, whatever it was, would go by.

Every second seemed turned into a minute, and at last I began to revive; for I felt that, whatever the figure was, it had passed on; and I drew a long breath of relief, thinking now that I must gain my own room at any cost, and the sooner the better, for of course any meeting was quite impossible. I was just going to sigh deeply for poor Achille, when I felt, as it were, frozen again; for the door began to glide slowly open, rustling softly over the carpet—for everything sounded so horribly distinct—and there at last stood the tall white figure, while, as I felt ready to die, I heard my name pronounced, in a low whisper, twice,—

“Laura! Laura!”

For a moment or two I could not reply, when the call was repeated; and, irresistibly attracted, I went slowly forward from my hiding-place, to feel myself caught by the arm by Clara, who had been watching me.

“You cruel, wicked girl!” I exclaimed in a whisper. “How could you frighten me so?”

“Serve you right, too, you wicked, deceitful thing,” she said. “Why could you not trust me? But I don’t care. I know. I can see through you. I know where you are going.”

“That you do not,” I said, boldly; for I felt cross now the fright was over, and I could have boxed the tiresome creature’s ears.

“You’d better not talk so loudly,” she said with a sneer; “that is, if you do not want Lady Blunt to hear your voice.”

“There,” I said, spitefully, “I thought you did not know.”

“Under the tall elms by the garden wall,” whispered Clara, laughing, and translating one of the sentences in the very note I had in my breast; and then I remembered that I had left it for about a quarter of an hour in my morning-dress pocket, before I ran up after changing and fetched it down; though I never should have thought she would have been so treacherous as to read it. But there, she had me in her power, and however much I might have felt disposed to resent her conduct, I could do nothing then, so—

“Hush!” I said, imploringly. “Pray, do not tell, dear!”

“Ah,” said the nasty, treacherous thing, “then you ought to have told me, and trusted me with your secret. But did you think that I was blind, Laura Bozerne, and couldn’t see what was going on? And you never to respond to my confidence, when I always trusted you from the very first. I did think that we were friends.”

“Oh, pray don’t talk so,” I exclaimed; “nor make so much noise, or we shall be heard.” For it was not I who spoke loudly now.

“Well, and suppose we are,” she said, coolly. “I can give a good account of my conduct, I think, Miss Bozerne.”

“Oh, pray don’t talk like that, dear,” I said—“pray, don’t.” And then, feeling that all dissimulation was quite useless, I cast off the reserve, and exclaimed, catching her by both hands—“Oh, do help me, there’s a darling; for he has been waiting for two nights.”

“Yes, I dare say he has,” said the deceitful creature; “but I don’t mean to be mixed up with such goings on.”

A nasty thing!—when I found out afterwards that she had more than once been guilty of the same trick; and all the while professing to have placed such confidence in me. If I had been free to act, I should have boxed the odious thing’s ears; but what could I do then, but crave and pray and promise, and beg of her to be my friend, till she said she would, and forgave me, as she called it; and then I watched her go slowly upstairs till she was out of sight; for whatever she might do in the future, she declared that she would not help me that night.

And there I stood, in a state of trembling indecision, not knowing what to do—whether to go after her, or steal down to the side door; and at last I did the latter, if only out of pure pity for poor Achille, and began slowly to unfasten the bolts.

The nasty things went so hard that I broke my nails over them, while I turned all hot and damp in the face when the cross bar slipped from my fingers, and made such a bang that I felt sure it must have been heard upstairs. And there I stood listening and trembling, and expecting every moment to hear a door open and the sound of voices. It was only the romantic excitement, or else sheer pity, which kept me from hurrying back to my own room, to bury my sorrows in my soft pillow.

I waited quite five minutes, and then tied my handkerchief over my hat, and raised the latch. The next moment I stood outside in the deep shadow, with the water-butt on my right and the wash-house door on my left; and then, with beating heart, I glided from shrub to shrub, till I reached the wall, beneath whose shadow I made my way to the path that runs under the tall elms, where the wall was covered with ivy.

In spite of my fluttering heart, and the knowledge I possessed of how I was committing myself, I could not help noticing how truly beautiful everything looked—the silvery sweet light, glancing through the trees; the deep shadows; and, again, the bright spots where the moon shone through the openings. And timid though I was, I could not help recalling Romeo and Juliet, thinking what a time this was for a love-tale, and regretting that there were no balconies at the Cedars. Then I paused, in the shade of one of the deepest trees, holding my hand to my side to restrain the beating of my heart, as I listened for his footstep.



"I'll only stay with him one minute," I said to myself, "and then run in again, like the wind."

A minute passed: no footstep. Two minutes, five, ten; and then I stole to the end of the walk. But there was no one; and I began to tremble with fear first, and then with excitement, and lastly with indignation; for it seemed to me that I was deceived.

"The poor fellow must have gone back in despair, believing that I should not come. Ah! he does not know me," I muttered at last.

"Perhaps I am too soon," I thought a few minutes later, "and he may yet come."

For I would not let the horrible feeling of disappointment get the upper hand. And then I crept closer to the wall, and waited, looking out from an opening between the trees at the moonlit house, and wondering whether Clara was yet awake.

All was still as possible. Not a sigh of the night wind, nor a footstep, nor even the rustle of a leaf; when all at once I nearly screamed, for there was a sharp cough just above my head. And as my heart began to beat more and more tumultuously than ever, there was a rustling in the ivy on the top of the wall, and a dark figure leaped to the ground, where I should have fallen had it not caught me in its arms.



I shut my eyes, as I shivered, half in fear and half with pleasure; and then I let my forehead rest upon my hands against his manly breast—for even in those moments of bliss the big buttons on his coat hurt my nose. And thus we stood for some few moments, each waiting for the other to speak; when he said, in a whisper,—“Better now?”

“Oh, yes,” I replied; “but I must leave thee now. Achille, *à demain*.”

“Eh?” he said, with a huskiness of tone which I attributed to emotion.

“I must leave thee now,” I said. “How did you get out?” he whispered. “By the side door,” I said, trembling; for an undefined feeling of dread was creeping over me.

“Any chance of a taste of anything?” he whispered.

“Good heavens!” I ejaculated, opening my eyes to their widest extent, “who are you?”

And I should have turned and fled, but that he held me tightly by the wrist.

“Well, perhaps, it don’t matter who I am, and never mind about my number,” said the wretch. “I’m a pleeceman, that’s what I am, county constabulary. Will that soot yer?”

“Oh, pray release me!” I said, “oh, let me go!” I gasped; for I thought he might not understand the first, these low men are so ignorant. “Pray go to Monsieur de Tiraille, and he will reward you.”

“That’s him as I ketched atop of the wall, I suppose,” said the creature. “My, how he did cut when I showed him the

bull's-eye! Thought it was a cracking case, my dear; but I'm up to a thing or two, and won't split. But I say, my dear, how's Ann? And so you took me for him, did you? Well, I ain't surprised."



And then if the wretch didn't try to draw me nearer to him: but I started back, horrified.

"Well, just as you like, you know," exclaimed the ruffian. "But, I say, you'll let me drink your health, you know, won't you?"

"Oh, yes," I exclaimed, interpreting his speech into meaning "Give me a shilling," which I did, and he loosed my arm.

"That's right," he said. "I thought you were a good sort. Feel better, don't you?"

"Oh, yes," I exclaimed. "Please let me go now."

"Let you go," he said; "to be sure. I was just going to offer you my advice, that you'd better step in before the old gal misses you. He won't come again to-night now, I scared him too much; so ta-ta, my dear—I won't spoil sport next time."

And then, almost before the wretch's words had left his lips, I fled, nor ceased running until I reached the side door, which I entered, closed, and fastened again; and then glided upstairs to my room, where Patty still snored and Clara watched; but my acts seemed all mechanical, and I can only well recollect one, and that was my throwing myself upon her breast, and bursting into tears.

At last I was once more in bed, my heart still beating tumultuously; and directly after Clara crept in to my side, when it was of no use, I could not keep it in, for it did seem so kind and sympathising of her, though I believe it was only to satisfy her curiosity. So I had a thorough good cry in her arms, and told her of all the terrors of that dreadful night; when instead of, as I expected, trying to console me, the nasty thing had the heart to say,—

"Well, dear, it's all very fine; but I should not like to be you!"

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## Chapter Nine.

### Memory the Ninth—A Guilty Conscience.

I suppose it comes natural to people to feel sleepy at night; for I did not mention it before, but I had terribly hard work to keep awake on that night when I had such a horrible adventure, while soon after telling that unfeeling Clara all about it I fell asleep, and they had such a task to wake me when the bell rang. But I'm sure any one might have pitied my feelings upon that terrible morning. When I was thoroughly awake it was just as if there was a weight upon my mind, and for some time I could not make out what was the matter.

Then came, with a rush, the recollection of my adventure, so that I first of all turned crimson with shame, and then as white as a dreadful marble statue. For somehow things do look so very different of a night to what they do by broad daylight, and I do believe that, after all, one of the greatest of missionary efforts would be a more general diffusion of

gas and electric lights; for I'm sure if people are all made like me, we should not have been half so wicked if we had two suns instead of a sun and a moon, and that last half her time making no shine at all. I believe it's night that makes most people wicked; for fancy me going to meet Achille under the elms in broad daylight! Why, the idea is preposterous!

But oh! how bad, and wicked, and ashamed, and repentant, and conscience-smitten I did feel. It was dreadful only to think of it, for months after. It seemed so horrible to me, how that I had rested my head against the buttons of that shockingly low wretch of a policeman's coat and not known the difference; while what Achille would have thought had he but known, I could not—nay I dare not—think.

Then there was that Clara looking at me with such a dreadful mocking smile, that I felt as if I could have turned her into stone—for she was oozing all over with triumph; and yet all the time I was so angry with myself, for I knew that I was completely in her power, as well as in that of the constable—a low wretch!—who might say anything, and perhaps tell the servants. And, by the way, who was Ann, that he had asked me about?

"Why," I exclaimed, trembling, "it must be Sarah Ann, the housemaid; and I shall never dare to look her in the face again. Oh, Laura Bozerne," I said, "how you have lowered yourself!"

I had a quiet cry, and was a little better.

But I felt very guilty when I went down, and every time I was addressed I gave quite a start, and stared as if expecting that whoever spoke knew my secret; while during lessons, when a message came from Mrs Blunt that she wanted to see me in the study, I felt as if I should have gone through the floor; and on turning my eyes to Clara, expecting sympathy, there she was actually laughing at me.

"If this is being in love," I said to myself, "I mean very soon to be out of it again;" and then I stood trembling and hesitating, afraid to stir.

"Did you hear the lady principal's summons, Miss Bozerne?" said that starchy Miss Furness, in her most dignified style.

I turned round, and made her a most elaborate De Kittville obeisance, and I saw the old frump toss her head; for I know she always hated me because I happened to be nice-looking—mind, I don't say I was nice-looking, for I am merely writing down now what people said who were foolish enough to think so. Achille once said I was—but there, I will not be vain.

So I crossed the hall, then to the study door, and stood with my hand raised to take hold of the white china handle; but just then I heard Mrs Blunt give one of her little short, sharp, pecking coughs, such as she gave when muttering to herself to make up a scolding for some one. No sooner did I hear that cough than I dropped my hand down to my side, and stood hesitating upon the mat, afraid to enter; for who could help feeling a coward under such circumstances, I should like to know? It was very dreadful; and though I kept telling myself that I was not a bit afraid of Mrs Blunt, yet somehow I seemed to be just then. However, I kept trying to make up my mind to bear it all, and to ask her pardon, and to promise that it should not occur again if she would not write to mamma; but my tiresome mind would not be made up, but kept running about from one thing to another, till I declare I almost felt ready to faint.

"Oh, Achille, Achille!" I murmured, "I must give you up. What I suffer for your sake! *Oh, mon pauvre coeur!*"

I felt better after that, for it seemed that I was to return to my old quiet state of suffering; and the determination not to run any more risks began to nerve me to bear the present suffering; almost as much as the rustle of the Fraülein's silk dress upon the stairs. And of course I would not allow her to see me waiting at the door, and afraid to go in; so I tapped, and entered.

There sat the lady principal, writing a letter, and frowning dreadfully—though she always did that when there was a pen in her hand; and as she just looked up when I entered, she motioned me to a chair with the feather end of the bead and silk adorned quill she held.

"Take a seat, Miss Bozerne," she muttered, between her patent minerals, as we used to call them; and there I was, sitting upon thorns, metaphorically and really—for the chair I took had the seat all worked in roses and briars and cactus, while there was that tiresome old thing with the little glass dew-drop knobs at the end of the sprays in her cap, nodding and dancing about every time she came to a hard word.

"She is writing home, I know," I said to myself, "and then she means to take me back; for it must all be found out—and, oh dear! oh dear! what shall I do?"

The scene there would be at home came up before me like a vision, and I fancied I could hear papa storming, though he is not very particular, and his rage is soon over, just like a storm, and he is all sunshine after. But mamma. Ah! how she would go on, and tell me that I had been sent down to cure me of my *penchant* for the curate, to descend so low as a policeman.

"Just like a common cook in an area!" I seemed to hear her say. But it was only Mrs Blunt mumbling to herself as she sat writing.

And then I half felt as if I should like to run away altogether; and next I thought that if some one had been there all ready with a fly or a post-chaise, I would have gone with him anywhere.

Directly after I gave such a jump, for there was the crunching of a step upon the gravel sweep, and I felt the blood all

flush up in my face again; for it was his step—his, and it seemed that he was to be brought in, and we were to be confronted, and there would be quite a *dénouement*; but then I felt as brave as could be, for was not he close at hand to take my part? And I felt ready to say things that I could not have uttered, and to hear scoldings that would have killed me five minutes before.

I was just feeling ready to sink through the carpet when the old wretch raised her head.

“Ah! there’s Monsieur Achille,” she cried in a decisive tone, and now I felt as if it must be coming. But no, the tiresome old thing still kept me upon the thorns of suspense; while I heard the front door squeak and his step in the hall, the opening and closing of a door, and I felt as if I could have rushed to meet him and tell him of the horrible state of fear that I had been in; besides which, I knew that he would have a *corrected exercise* to return me, and I was burning to see what he would say.

“And now, Miss Bozerne,” said Mrs Blunt, laying down her pen, and crossing her hands upon the table, so as to show her rings, while she spoke in the most stately of ways—“and now Miss Bozerne, I have a crow to—er—er—I have, that is to say, a few words to speak to you concerning something that has lately, very lately, come to my ears; and you know, my dear, that I have extremely long ears for this sort of thing.”

And then she tried to draw herself up, and look august; but the vulgar old thing only made herself more common and obtrusive, while I began to tremble in the most agitated manner.

“Miss Furness tells me, Miss Bozerne—” she continued.

“Oh, how came she to know, I wonder?” I thought to myself.

“Miss Furness tells me,” she said again, “of various little acts of insubordination, and want of attention to lessons and the instruction she endeavours to impart—to impart, Miss Bozerne; and you must understand that in my absence the lady assistants of my establishment are to have the same deference shown them as I insist upon having paid to myself.”

And then she went on for ever so long about delegated authority, and a great deal more of it, until she had worked herself into a regular knot, with her speech all tangled; when she sent me away to the French lesson. And how can I describe my feelings! I don’t remember who that was that put iron bands round his heart to keep it from breaking with sorrow, while they all went off, crack! crack! one after another afterwards, from joy; but I felt when I left Mrs Blunt’s room, precisely as that somebody must have felt at that time.

To have seen the dignified salute which was exchanged, no one could have thought it possible that a note had ever passed between Monsieur Achille and poor me. When I took my seat at the bottom of that long table, being the last arrival, not a look, not a glance—only a very sharp reprimand, which brought the tears in my eyes, because my exercise was not better; while my translation of English into French was declared to be *affreux*.

Oh! it did seem so hard, after what I had risked for him the night before; but I soon fired up, as I saw Miss Furness looking quite pleased and triumphant; for I’m sure the old thing was as jealous as could be, and watched me closely, and all because I would not creep to her, and flatter and fawn, like Celia Blang. So I would not show how wounded I was, nor yet look at Achille when he went away, and there was no communication at all between us that day.

I felt very much hurt and put out, for that Miss Furness spared no pains to show her dislike to me; and she must have had some suspicion of me, for during many lessons I never had an opportunity of enjoying further communication with dear Achille than a long look. Miss Sloman, as I have said before, had always hated me; but she was too much of a nobody to mind. However, I would not notice Miss Furness’s cantankerousness, for I really did not mind a bit about her having told Mrs Blunt, so delighted was I to feel that the other matter had not been found out; and I went on just the same as usual, and really worked hard with my studies.

One morning—I can’t say when, for though I have tried I really can’t recollect, and the time, names, and things are so mixed up together—however, it was a fine morning, and we were going for one of those dreary morning two-and-two walks, crawling in and out of the Allsham lanes like a horrible Adam-tempting serpent. I had taken great pains with my dress, for I thought it possible that we might pass Achille’s lodging; and, as I fancied he had been unnecessarily angry and cool with me at the last lesson, I wished him to feel a little pain in return, for I was determined not to give him a single look. Mamma had just sent me down one of the prettiest straw-coloured flowery bonnets imaginable—a perfect zephyr, nothing of it at all hardly—and it matched capitally with my new silk; while the zebra parasol seemed quite to act as a relief. So I put them on with new straw-kid gloves, took the parasol, and then—call it vanity if you like—I stopped and had one last, triumphant glance in the mirror that hangs at one end of the long passage before I went down.

Mrs Blunt was going with us that day; and, in spite of the late scolding I had received, she was quite smiling and pleasant with me, and I saw her bestow one or two satisfied glances upon my attire—for she never found fault with her pupils for dressing too well. But I did not take pains with myself so as to please her, and act as show-card for her nasty old establishment; so I would not look pleased, but pretended that I had not yet got over the scolding, and was dreadfully mortified, as I went and took my place beside Clara.

As we were the two tallest girls, we always went first, and had our orders to walk slowly, once more, on account of half-a-dozen children who came last with the teachers and Mrs Blunt herself, and so we filed out of the gates and along the winding, green lane.

No one could help feeling happy and light-hearted upon such a beautiful bright morning, especially as we turned through the fields, and went across towards the river. The trees were all green, and the grass shining with flowers, birds singing, the sky above a splendid azure, and all around looking quite lovely; while the soft, delicious air fanned

one's cheek, so that I could not help agreeing with Clara when, after a long silence, she heaved a deep sigh, and said,  
—

"Oh, how delightful it is to feel young and be in love."

Though, after all, I was not so sure about the last part, for I did not feel half satisfied concerning my *affaire de coeur*, and was strolling somewhat listlessly along, when Clara pinched my arm.

"Here they come," she whispered.

And sure enough, there were Achille and the Signor coming towards us; when, I could not help it, all my ill-humour seemed to dart out of my eyes in a moment, and I could do nothing but sigh, and feel that I was a hopeless captive.

As I said before, I could not help it, and was obliged to close my eyes, when a horrible jerk brought me to myself; when there, if Clara had not let me step right into the ditch beside the path—a dreadful stinging-nettley place—instead of quietly guiding me, when she might have known that my eyes were shut; while before I could extricate myself, if Achille was not at my side, helping me out and squeezing my hand, so that really, out of self-defence, I was obliged to return the pressure.

"Miss Bozerne!" exclaimed Lady Blunt, pressing up to me, "how could you?"

I did not know, so I could not reply; while there were Miss Furness and the Fraülein—fat, hook-nosed old owl—looking as spiteful as could be.

"She did it on purpose," I heard Miss Furness whisper; while the Fraülein nodded her head ever so many times, so that she looked like a bird pecking with a hooked beak.

"Mademoiselle is not hurt, *I hope?*" said Achille, in his silkiest, smoothest tones; and there was so much feeling in the way he spoke, that I quite forgave him.

"Oh, no, not at all, Monsieur Achille," said Lady Blunt.

And then, after a great deal of bowing, we all fell into our places again.

"Won't there be a scolding for this!" whispered Clara. "We shall both have impositions."

"I don't care," I said, recklessly. "I should not mind if I slipped again."

"Slipped!" said Clara, satirically; "that was a pretty slip, certainly. I never saw so clumsy a one, but it answered capitally."

"What do you mean?" I said, innocently.

"Oh, of course, you don't know, dear," said Clara, growing more and more satirical. "But there, never mind, I have both the notes."

"What notes?" I ejaculated, with my heart beginning to beat—oh, so fast!

"Now, don't be a little stupid," said Clara, "when you know all the time. The Signor dropped them into my parasol, as I held it down half shut, and there they are—for I have not dared to take them out yet."

And there, sure enough, were two tiny brown paper squares, looking for all the world like packets of garden seeds, so as not to catch any one's eye when they were delivered—tied up, too, with little bits of string, so as not to be in the least like what they were. Though, really, it was too bad to try and make out that the whole thing was planned, and that I had slipped on purpose. Now, was it not?

"Why, what dear, lovable ingenuity," I could not help exclaiming. "And is one for you then, dear?"

"And why not, pray?" exclaimed Clara; "why should not I have notes as well as somebody, who has her meetings as well?"

"I'm sure I don't," I exclaimed. "How can you say so? Why, you know I did not meet him."

"Not your fault, my dear," said Clara, sarcastically. "But there, I'm not complaining; but when I am so open and confidential, I'm sure you need not be so close."

"Now, did you not promise to forget all that?" I said.

"Well, yes, so I did," she replied; "and I won't say any more about it. But this was clever, wasn't it; and I'm sure I give you every credit for managing that slip so well."

"Indeed—indeed—indeed—indeed!" I said, "it was an accident."

But it was no use whatever; and the more I protested, the more the tiresome thing would not believe me; till I grew so cross I could have pinched her, only that I could not afford to quarrel just then.

By means of changing parasols, I obtained possession of my note; and then, how long the time did seem before we received our orders to turn back! But I learnt, though, from Clara, that Achille had made quite a confidante of the Signor, and that they were both planning together for us to have a long meeting.

"But how do you get to know all this?" I said.

"Do you suppose, miss, that no one else but you can manage to pass and receive notes so cleverly?" she replied.

I could not make any answer, for somehow or another Clara generally managed to get the better of me.

What would I not have given to have been alone for one five minutes beneath the deep green shady trees, for it seemed ages since I had had a letter from Achille. But it was of no use to wish; and I'm sure that it was quite three-quarters of an hour before Clara and I were up in our bedroom together, trying to get rid of Patty Smith.

She was such a stupid girl, and the more you gave her hints to go the more she would persist in stopping, for she was as obstinate as she was stupid; and I'm sure, if that's true about the metempsychosis, Patty Smith, in time to come, will turn into a lady donkey, like those grey ones that are led round Chester Square of a morning, and are owned by one of the purveyors of asses' milk. We tried all we could to get rid of her, but it was of no use; and at last, when we were ready to cry with vexation, and about to give it up and go down to dinner without reading our notes, some one called out—

"A letter for Miss Smith."

And then away ran the tiresome thing, and we were quite alone.

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## Chapter Ten.

### Memory the Tenth—The Language of Love.

The first thing that Clara and I did was to tear up the brown paper wrappers into tiny little bits, all but where the directions were written, and those we chewed up quite small, to throw out of the window with the other pieces. And oh, how nasty brown paper is to chew!—all tarry and bitter, like cold sailors must be when they eat one another in those dreadful boats that have not enough provisions, and when there's "water, water everywhere, and not a drop to drink." Then I tore open the tiny note, and Clara did the same; and I had just read two lines, when I *felt* that I was watched, and looking up, there stood that horrid Miss Furness, just like some basilisk, or gorgon, or cockatrice, or dreadful thing of that kind.

Of course Miss Furness couldn't have been a cockatrice, but we were so badly taught at that wretched Mrs Blunt's, that I have not the most remote idea what is the feminine of the extinct fabulous creature, and henatrice sounds so horribly-absurd. Anyhow, she was a wretch—a nasty despicable, hateful, horrible wretch, whom it could not be a sin to hate.

"The bell has rung for dinner, young ladies," she said, with her eyes devouring my note.

How I did tremble! but I knew that if I was not careful I should betray poor Achille; while, fortunately, Clara had been sitting so that she was not visible from the door, and had time to slip her note into her pocket, while she pretended to have one of her boots off.

For a moment or two I was so scared that I did not know what to do. If I tried to hide the note, I knew that she would suspect that there was something wrong, while she would have been well aware whether there was a letter for me from home, since she always had the opening of the bag. What could I do? For a moment, I was about to crumple the paper up in my hand; but fortunately I restrained myself, and holding the paper boldly in my hand, I pretended that I had been writing out the aliquot parts of a shilling; and, as I doubled the note up slowly, I went on saying,—

"Coming directly, ma'am—one farthing is one forty-eighth; one halfpenny is one twenty-some-thingth—oh, fourth. Oh, dear! oh, dear! how hard it is, to be sure."

"You seem to have grown very industrious, Miss Bozerne," said Miss Furness, looking very doubtfully at the paper; and I was afraid that she would smell it, for it was quite strong of that same scent that Achille always used.

"Yes, isn't she?" said Clara, coming to the rescue; "but I do not think it will last, ma'am."

I could have hugged her for that; for I knew that the tiresome old thing suspected something to be wrong, and was mixing it up with the morning's adventure. But nothing more was said, and we descended to dinner, and there I was with that note burning in my pocket, and not a chance could I get to read it; for so sure as I tried to be alone, go where I would, there was that Miss Furness's favourite, Celia Blang, after me to see what I was doing.

At last, during the afternoon lessons, I could bear it no longer; so I went and sat down by the side of Clara.

"What does he say, dear?" I whispered.

"Wants me to meet him to-night," she wrote on her slate, and rubbed it out directly. For we actually used common slates—noughts-and-crosses slates—just like charity-school children. But I had my revenge, for I dropped and cracked no less than ten of the nasty things, though I am afraid papa had to pay.

And then again she wrote, "What does he say, dear?"

"I have not had a chance to see yet," I dolefully replied. "There's the raging Furnace watching me, so pray don't look up. She suspects something, and I can't move without being spied."

"Poor old darling!" wrote Clara on her slate.

"I'm going to trust you, my dear," I said. "When I push my Nugent's Dictionary over to you, take it quietly, for my note will be inside. And I want you to take it, and go away somewhere and read it, and then come and tell me what he says; for the old thing is so suspicious, and keeps looking in my direction—and I dare not attempt it myself."

So I managed to pass the note to Clara, who left the room; and then I wrote down the aliquot parts of a pound, and folded it ready so as to pull out next time. I saw Miss Furness watching me; and there I sat, with my cheeks burning, and wondering what was in my note, and whether, after all, I had done foolishly. For was Clara to be trusted?

"But she is so mixed up with it herself," I thought, "she dare not play me false."

So there I sat on and on, pretending to be studious, and wondering what kept Clara so long, would have gone after her, only I knew that Miss Furness was keeping an eye upon me; and sometimes I half thought that she must know something about the night when I went down to the elms; but directly after I felt that she did not, or she would have told my Lady Blunt directly. But the fact of the matter was, she felt suspicious about the note, and all because I was so clumsy in trying to throw dust in her eyes.

Five minutes—ten minutes—a quarter of an hour had passed, and still no Clara. Then another quarter of an hour, and still she did not come. "Whatever shall I do?" I thought to myself—"surely she is not deceiving me?" And then, just as my spirits were regularly boiling over, heated as they were by impatience and vexation, in she came, with the note in her hand; and I saw her laugh maliciously, and cross over to Patty Smith.

"Oh," I said to myself, "I shall die of shame."

And I'm sure no one can tell what agony I suffered while the creature was reading something to Patty, when they both had a hearty laugh; after which Clara began to double the note up, as, with eyes flashing fire, I sat watching that deceitful creature, not daring to move from my seat.

"Miss Fitzacre, bring me that piece of paper you have in your hand," squeaked Miss Furness, who had been watching her like a cat does a mouse.

Oh, if I could but have screamed out, or fainted, or seized the paper, and fled away! But I could not move, only sit suffering—suffering horribly, while Clara gave me another of her malicious smiles, as she crossed sulkily over to Miss Griffin's table, drew the paper from her pocket, laid it down, and then our *chère* institutrice laid a paper-weight upon it, for she had a soul far above curiosity, while Clara came and sat down by me—poor me, who trembled so with fear and rage that my teeth almost chattered; for I could think of nothing else but Mrs Blunt and the Furness reading poor Achille's note.

I did not know how to be angry enough with myself, for being so simple as to trust Clara; and I'm sure I should not, only I fancied her truthful and worthy; but now, I could have killed her—I could, I was so enraged.

"You horribly treacherous, deceitful thing!" I whispered; "when, too, I trusted you so fully."

"Why, what is the matter?" she said, quite innocently.

"Don't look at me like that," I whispered. "How could you be so false?"

"Oh, that's what you mean, is it?" she said. "Serve you right for not trusting me fully from the first, as I did you."

"Worthy of trust, are you not?" I said angrily.

"Will you be quite open with me for the future, then?" she said.

"Open!" I hissed back. "I'll go to Mrs Blunt, and tell everything, I will—everything; and won't spare myself a bit, so that you may be punished, you wicked, good-for-nothing, bad-behaved, deceitful and treacherous thing, you!"

"Take breath now, my darling," she said, tauntingly.

"Breath," I said—"I wish I had none. I wish I was dead, I do." And I could not help a bit of a sob coming.

"Poor Achille!" she whispered. "What would he do then?"

"Oh, don't talk to me—don't," I said, bending down my burning face over a book, not a word in which could I see.

"It did tease you, then, did it?" said Clara, laughing.

"Tease me, you heartless thing you," I said. "Hold your tongue, do! I'll never forgive you—never, Clara!"

"Less talking there," said Miss Furness—the Griffin.

"Ugh! you nasty old claw-puss," said Clara, in an undertone.

After a few minutes' silence, I began again. "I did not give you credit for it, Clara," I said. "Thought you were not going to speak to me any more," she said.

"Oh, it's too bad," I whispered; "but you will be sorry for it some day."

"No, I sha'n't, you little goose you. It was not your note at all," she said. "I only did it to tease you, and serve you out

for trying to deceive me, who have always tried to be a friend to you from the very first.”

“Oh, my own, dear, darling Clara,” I cried, in a whisper, “is this true? Then I’ll never, never do anything without you again, and tell you everything; and am not cross a bit.”

“But I am,” she cried; “see what names you have been calling me.”

“Ah, but see how agonising it was, dear,” I whispered. “Only think of what you made me suffer. I declare I shall burst out into a fit of hysterical crying directly.”

“No, no, don’t do that,” said Clara. “Then make haste, and tell me what he said, so as to change my thoughts.”

“Guess,” said Clara, sliding my own dear little note into my hand once again.

“Oh, pray, pray tell me,” I whispered. “Don’t, whatever you do, don’t tease me any more. I shall die if you do.”

“No, don’t,” she said, mockingly, “for poor Achille’s sake.”

“I would not serve you so, Clara,” I said, humbly, the tears the while gathering in my eyes.

And then she began to tell me that the note was very long, and stated how he had been interrupted by the policeman, and had not ventured since; but that he and the Signor had arranged to come that night, and they would be under the end of the conservatory at eleven, if we could contrive to meet them there.

“And of course we can,” said Clara. “How they must have been plotting together!”

“But we never can manage it,” I whispered, with a strange fluttering coming over my heart.

“I can, I can,” whispered Clara, squeezing my hand; “but be careful, for here comes the Griffin, and she’s as suspicious as can be.”

We were supposed to be busy preparing lessons all this time; for this was one of the afternoons devoted to private study, two of which we had every week, instead of what Mrs Blunt called the vulgar institution of half-holidays.

“If I have to speak again about this incessant talking, Miss Fitzacre, your conduct will be reported to the lady principal,” said Miss Furness. “And as for you, Miss Bozerne, be kind enough to take a seat in another part of the room. There is a chair vacant by Miss Blang.”

Miss Furness did not hear what Clara said in an undertone, or she would have hurried off posthaste to make her report. But as she did not, she returned to her seat, and soon after we were summoned to our tea—I mean anti-nervous infusion.

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## Chapter Eleven.

### Memory the Eleventh—A Catastrophe.

I used to get quite vexed with the tiresome old place, even if it was pretty, and you could sit at your open window and hear the nightingales singing; and even though some other bird had made me hear its singing, too, and found its way right to my poor heart. There was so much tiresome formality and niggling; and if one spoke in a way not according to rule, there was a fine or imposition, or something of that kind. We never went to bed, we never got up—we retired to rest, and arose from slumber; we were summoned to our lessons, dinner was always announced, we pursued or resumed our studies, we promenaded daily, or else took recreation in the garden; and did everything, in short, in such a horrible, stiff, starchy way, that we all seemed to be in a constant state of crackle; and every variation was looked upon as so much rumpling, while I’m sure our *lady* principal could not have been more vulgar if she had tried.

The meeting appointed in the last chapter was repeated again and again at the end of the conservatory; for we had only to slip down into the drawing-room quietly, open the shutters, pass through the French window in among the geraniums, draw the shutters after us or not, and then raise one of the sash windows at the end, where we could stand and talk. For the gentlemen never once came in, for fear that their footsteps should show upon the beautiful, clean, white stones. One meeting was so much like another, that it is hardly worth while to describe them; while no incident worthy of notice occurred until one night. And oh! how well can I recall everything in connection with that disastrous occasion!

We had been for a walk that evening, and I had been most terribly scandalised by the encounter we had had with a policeman. We were just outside the town, when all at once I felt my cheeks flush, as they always do now at the sight of a constable; for there was one coming along the road in front, and something seemed to whisper that we had met before. It was misery and ruin to be recognised, and I set my teeth hard, and tried not to see him; but do what I would, my eyes seemed determined to turn towards the wretch; and they did, too, just as we were passing, and it was he—and the odious creature knew me directly, and pushed his tongue into his cheek in the most vulgar way imaginable. Clara saw it, and gave me a push with her elbow; but, fortunately, I do not think any one else saw the dreadful fellow.

We had to hurry back, too, for a storm came on, and the big drops were plashing heavily upon our parasols before we reached the Cedars; while just as we were safely housed, the lightning flashed and the thunder rolled incessantly.



I was not afraid of the storm, for I was humming over the "Tempest of the Heart," and wondering whether it would be over soon enough to allow of our assignation being kept; while I grew quite nervous and fidgety as the evening wore on. However, the rain ceased at last, and the thunder only muttered in the distance, where the pale summer lightning was glancing; and when at last we retired to our rooms, and looked out of the open window, the fresh scent which came up from the garden was delicious. The moon shone, but with a pale, misty, and sobered light; while the distant lightning, which played fitfully at intervals, seem to make the scene quite sublime.

After sitting looking out for a while, we closed the windows with a sigh, for we knew we should be reported to Mrs Blunt if our lights were not out; and then, as we had often done before, we pretended to undress, listening all the while to the senseless prattle of Patty Smith, which seemed to us quite childish and nonsensical.

"I wonder your mars," she said, "don't send you each a cake sometimes. It would be so nice if they did; and I always do give you a piece of mine."

"There, don't talk so, pray, Patty," I said, after listening to her hungry chatter for ever so long.

"Pray be quiet, and I will give you a shilling to buy a cake."

"No, you won't," said Patty. "Yes, I will indeed," I said, "if you will be a good girl, and go to sleep."

"Give it me now, then," said the stupid thing. And I did give her one, and if she did not actually take it, though I believe she was quite as old as Clara or I; but all the while so dreadfully childish, anyone, from her ways, would have taken her for nine or ten—that is, if they could have shut their eyes to her size. However, at last she fell asleep, and we sat waiting for the trysting-hour, "Do you know," said Clara, in a whisper, "I begin to get tired of spoiling one's night's rest for the sake of meeting them. It was all very well at first, but it's only the same thing over and over again. I know all about beautiful Italy now, and its lakes and vineyards, and the old tyrant Austrian days, and the Pope, and patriotism, and prisons, and all that sort of thing; while he seems to like to talk about that more than about you know what, and one can't help getting a little too much of it sometimes."

"Oh, for shame, Clara!" I said; "how can you talk so? It is not loyal. What would some one say if he knew?"

"I don't know, and I don't—"

"Oh, hush! you sha'n't say so," I exclaimed; "for you do care—you know you do."

And then I sat silent and thinking for some time; for it was as though something began to ask me whether I also was not a little tired of hearing about "*ma patrie*" and "*la belle France*" and whether I liked a man any the better for being a patriot, and mixed up with plots for restoring the Orleans family, and who made a vow to spit—*cracher*—on Gambetta's grave.

I should not have thought anything of the kind if it had not been for those words of Clara, and I soon crushed it down; for I was not going to harbour any such cruel, faithless thoughts as that I had told Achille again and again that I loved him very dearly; and of course I did, and there was an end of it. But still, though I bit my lips very hard, and tried not to think of such things, it did seem tiresome, I must own, to have to sit up waiting so long; and, like Clara, I did begin to long for a change. If we could have met pleasantly by day, or had a quiet evening walk, and all on like that, it would have been different; but, after the first flush of the excitement and romance, it began to grow a little tame.

"Heigh—ho!—ha!—hum!" said Clara, interrupting my reverie by a terrible yawn, so that had it been daylight I'm sure any one might have seen down her throat, for she never attempted to put her hand before her mouth.

But I could not tell her of it; since I had only the minute before been yawning so terribly myself that I was quite ashamed. For really there seemed to be so little romance about it.

"Let's go to bed in real earnest," said Clara. "I'm sure I will, if you'll agree."

"For shame!" I exclaimed. "What would they say?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Clara; "they've disappointed us before now."

"But then they could not help it," I replied.

"No, nor I can't help it now," said Clara; "for I'm so sleepy."

"But it would look so," I said, repressing another yawn; for I, too, was dreadfully tired.

"I don't care," said Clara. "I don't want to hear about the revolution to-night, and what Garibaldi once did. I don't care. Red shirts are becoming, but one gets tired of hearing about them. It is such dull work, all four of us being together, and watching every movement. It isn't as if we were alone."

"I do declare I'm quite ashamed of you," I said. "Why, it would not be prudent for us to go alone."

"Oh, no, of course not," said Clara, mockingly. "Nobody you know ever went down to the elms all alone by herself."

"But you knew of it," I said.

"No thanks to you, miss, if I did; so come, now," replied Clara.

I saw that it was of no use to dispute with her, so I let the matter drop; and then, opening the window, I leaned out, when I heard voices whispering in what seemed to be the shrubbery, just beyond the conservatory cistern; and,

withdrawing my head, I hastily told Clara.

"Why, they are soon to-night," she whispered, as, carefully closing the window, I then opened the door, and we stood at the top of the great staircase, after going on tiptoe past the Fraülein's room.

We listened patiently for some time, as we stood hand in hand; while neither of us now seemed disposed to yawn. Then we quickly and quietly descended; but before we reached the bottom I recollected that I had left our door open, and it would be a great chance if some one did not hear Patty snoring.

"Go back and shut it, there's a dear," I said, in a whisper.

"No, you go, dear," said Clara. "I'll wait for you."

But I did not like going alone; neither did she. So we went together and shut it; and at last we stood listening at the foot of the stairs, for I half fancied I heard the click of a door-handle. But it was not repeated; and feeling sure that it was only fancy, we quietly unlocked the drawing-room door, glided in, closed it after us, and then unfastened the shutters of the French window, when we stood in the conservatory, at the end of which was the sash, giving, as Achille called it, upon the rain water tank—whose very broad edge was covered with ivy, upon which they used to climb from the low terrace wall that ran down to the little fountain of which I have spoken before, and then stand in the empty cistern.

"I always put on my old sings when I come, *chère* Laure," poor Achille used to say to me, which of course was not very complimentary; but, then, all his estates had been confiscated, and my Lady Blunt was too fond of money to part with much for her teachers.

When we peeped out of our window there was no one there; so we pulled up the sash very gently, and stood waiting till, in each of our cases, Romeo came.

It had turned out a lovely night, rather dark, for the moon had sunk into a bank of vapour in the far west, while the varied scents of nature seemed sweeter than ever; but one could not help thinking how wet the gentlemen would get amongst the ivy, and I quite shivered as I thought about the great cistern being quite full with the heavy rain. For if they did not recollect this, as they had generally stood upon the lead bottom, how shocking would be the result!

Once again I fancied that I heard a slight noise; but this time it was from the leads by the back staircase window; and upon whispering to Clara, she called me a stupid, nervous thing, and I heard it no more; but directly after, the rustling we heard told who were coming.

Five minutes passed and there was more rustling amongst the leaves—an ejaculation in French—an expression in Italian—and a loud splash, as if a leg had fallen into the water; while directly after we could see them quite plainly, crawling along like two great tom-cats upon the edge of the lead cistern, till they were close under the window, in dreadfully awkward positions; for the big cistern had never had water in before all through the summer, on account of a little leak, and now—though, doubtless, the great place would be quite empty next day, it was brimful in consequence of the storm.

Yes, I remember perfectly fancying that they looked like cats, and I felt ashamed of myself for thinking so disrespectfully of them, and determined to be extra kind to Achille so as to mentally apologise—poor fellow! Of course they could not stand up to their waistcoats in soft water, so they had to stay on the edge, and, as we found out afterwards, they did come off so black—oh, so terribly black!—upon us, just as if we had had visits from the sweeps.

It was poor Achille who put his leg in the tank; and every time he moved I could hear the water make such a funny noise in his boot, just as if it was half full; and, oh, poor fellow, he was obliged to move every minute, and hold on by the window-sill as he knelt there, or else he would have had to stand up, and, being so much higher than where we were, I should have had to talk to his knees. It was just as bad for the poor Signor and Clara; and I certainly should have been imprudent enough to have asked them in, if I had not known how Achille would have dripped on the stones, and so betrayed us.

I could not help thinking about what Clara had said that evening, and it really did seem so tiresome; for there we all four were, if anything more close together than ever, and it grew thoroughly puzzling sometimes to know who was meant when Pazzoletto whispered "*Cava mia*," or "*Bellissima*," or "*Fanciullina*," or "*Carissima*," or Achille murmured "*Mon amie*," "*Ma petite*," or "*Beaux yeux*," and I often started, and so did Clara, at such times.

But there, who could expect to enjoy the roses of love without the thorns? And yet, I don't know how it was, there seemed to be something wrong altogether that night; for I heard Clara gape twice, and I had to cover my mouth to stay more than one yawn, while I'm sure the gentlemen both wanted to go; though, of course, I could make plenty of excuses for poor Achille—he must have been so wet and uncomfortable—though I did offer to lend him my handkerchief to wipe away some of the water.

I should think that we had been carrying on a whispered conversation for about a quarter of an hour, when all at once I exclaimed in a deep whisper—

"Hush!—what was that?" We all started; for as I spoke, startled by the click as of a window fastening, there was the sound of an opening sash. A light flashed out above our heads, and shone upon the skylight, the leads, and the back staircase window, when if there, quite plain, was not a policeman standing by a figure at the latter. Then there was a hurrying scramble, and the shutting of a sash; and we could hear voices, while we all stood in the shade, silent as mice, and trembling so that the gentlemen had to hold us tightly.

"Von sbirro veseet de maiden," said the Signor, in a whisper.

"Oh! what shall we do?" gasped Clara.

"*Taisez!*" hissed Achille, who seemed to come out nobly in the great trouble—" *taisez*, and all shall be well; my faith, yes—it is so."

"They will us not see," whispered the Signor.

"*Mais non!*" ejaculated Achille. "But that police? What of him? We must wait."

"Oh, yes," I said, "pray do not move. It is one of the servants who has been discovered. I am sure that we shall be safe if we keep quite still."

But the words were no sooner out of my mouth than there was a burst of light through the half-closed shutters behind us, a buzz of voices, and Lady Blunt, the four teachers, and several of the pupils, hurried into the drawing-room; and then, seeing the partly closed shutters, stood for a moment as if afraid to come any further.

I darted from *pauvre* Achille, giving him a sharp jerk at the same moment; and, as my elbow crashed through a pane of glass, and I slipped behind the great green blind in the corner, I heard an exclamation in French. There was a great splash, followed by a noise as of some large body snorting and floundering in the great tank; and my blood ran cold, as I wanted to run out, but felt chained to the spot where I was concealed.

"I have murdered him, I know!" I gasped.

At the very same moment there was a fearful scream from poor Clara, as the light of half-a-dozen candles shone upon her smutty face, where there was the mark of a hand all down one cheek. And, frightened though I was, I seemed to notice everything, as if my senses were all sharpened; and, at one and the same time, I saw my own trouble, Clara, and my poor Achille drowning in the great tank.



Poor Clara covered her face in an instant, and a loud rustling of the ivy on the edge of the cistern, the sound of a body falling, and then came retreating feet along the gravel.



"Escaped," I muttered; and then a sigh came with a great gasp, as I exclaimed, "Oh! if Clara will only not betray me, I shall be safe, too."

But, oh, what a tableau was there!—night-caps, dressing-gowns, flannel garments, every token of hurried half-dressing; while the light from candle after candle streamed down upon poor Clara, prone upon the white stones of the conservatory.

"Good heavens!" I heard Mrs Blunt exclaim, "that it should have come to this!—that my establishment should be debased by the presence of such a creature. Abandoned, lost girl, what will become of you?"

Oh, how my poor teeth did chatter!

"Dreadful!" squeaked Miss Furness.

"Shocking!" echoed Miss Sloman.

"*Ach ten, bad madchen*" croaked the Fraülein; while Miss Murray and the pupils present sighed in concert.

"Lost one!" began Mrs Blunt again.

Crish! crash! crash! came the sound of breaking glass upon the leads; the girls shrieked, and, in an agony of fear, the whole party dashed back to the drawing-room door; while, in the dim light given by a fallen candle, I saw poor Clara slowly raise her head and look towards the open window—our window.

But there was no other sound; and at last, after quite five minutes' pause, came the lady principal's voice from the drawing-room, in awful tones—

"Miss Fitzacre; come in directly, and close the window after you."

"For goodness' sake, don't fasten it," I whispered; "and oh, Clara, pet, don't—pray, don't—betray me!"

"Hush!" whispered the poor darling, rising up like a pale ghost.

And as I stood, squeezed up in the corner, trembling ever so, she closed the conservatory window, looking out as she did so; then entered the drawing-room, clattered the shutters to; and then, by the sound, I knew that they had all entered the breakfast-room, so I stole out of my hiding-place, and tried the window.

At first my heart sank, for I thought it was fastened; but, no, it yielded to my touch, and as I pushed, the shutters slowly swung open, to show me the room all in darkness. Stepping quickly in, I closed window and shutters, and then stole over to reach the door where I could hear the buzz of voices, and Mrs Blunt scolding fearfully.

I crossed the room as quietly as I could, feeling my way along in the darkness—for Clara had trampled out the fallen candle—when all at once I gave myself up for lost I had knocked over one of the wretched little drawing-room chairs; and I stood trembling and stooping down, meaning to creep under the large ottoman if I heard any one coming.

But they did not hear the noise; and, after waiting awhile, I ventured to open the door, when I could hear plainly poor Clara sobbing bitterly in the breakfast-room; and I was filled with remorse, as I felt how that I ought to be there to take my share of the blame. But I could not—no, I could not, I must own—summon up courage enough to go in and avow my fault.

I had hardly closed the drawing-room door, when I heard a hand rattle the door of the breakfast-room, as if some one was about to open it, so I bounded along the hall to the back staircase; and hardly in time, for the breakfast-room door opened just as I was out of sight, and I heard Mrs Blunt's voice, in loud tones, to the teachers, I suppose—

"Ladies, be kind enough to see that the drawing-room window is properly secured."

Up I darted to reach my own room, and it was well that I made for the back staircase; for there, regularly fringing the balustrade of the best staircase, were all the younger pupils and the servants looking down and listening; while I could hear the sounds coming up from the hall, as my Lady Blunt and the teachers began again to storm at the poor silent girl, who never, that I could hear, answered them one single word, and in the act of slipping into my room, I nearly brushed the dress of one of the pupils.



And now, if Clara would only be a martyr, I felt safe, as I stood inside our room, and listened for a few moments to the words which came up quite plainly in the still night.

"Once more, I insist upon knowing who it was," shrieked Mrs Blunt, while her satellites added their feeble echoes.

"Tell, directly!" screamed Miss Sloman.

"Bad gell—bad gell!" croaked the Fraülein.

"You must confess," cried Miss Furness, in shrill, treble tones.

"Who was it, Miss Fitzacre?" cried Mrs Blunt.

And then there was a stamp upon the floor, but not a word from Clara; and I dared stay for no more, but closed the door, listened to Patty snoring more loudly and ever, and then dashed to the washstand, recalling poor Clara's smutty face, and sponged my own quickly. Then I slipped on my *bonnet de nuit*, and undressed quicker than I ever before did in my life. Then just as I had finished, I heard them coming up the stairs—scuffling of feet and shutting of doors as the pupils hurried into their rooms, some skirmishing at a terrible rate past my door; so I slipped into bed with my head turned towards the window, and lay there with my heart beating tumultuously.

"Now, if they only did not come here first, I'm safe," I muttered.

I felt how exceedingly fortunate it was for me that Patty slept so soundly: for not only had she not seen me enter, but if she had slept all through the disturbance, and had not heard Clara go, why should I not have done the same? And I felt that it would help to remove suspicion from me.

They seemed a terribly long time coming, but I kept telling myself that Clara would not betray me; and I recalled with delight now that I had suffered punishment for her trick, when she moved the lady principal's chair to her fall.

"But there," I said to myself, "they shall tear me in pieces before they know anything I don't, want to tell. But, oh, did poor Achille escape? and what was that fearful crash? I do hope it was the Signor, for poor Achille's sake. But how wet whoever it was must have been!"

"And you will prepare your things for leaving early in the morning, Miss Fitzacre," exclaimed Mrs Blunt, angrily, as she opened the door of the bedroom, and the light shone in. "Now, go to bed immediately. Is Miss Bozerne here?"

"Yes, ma'am," I replied, just raising my head from the pillow.

"Oh! that is right," said her ladyship; "and Miss Smith?"

There was no answer.

"Miss Smith! where is Miss Smith?" shrieked Lady Blunt from the door, evidently thinking that poor Patty was in the plot. "Miss Smith! Miss Smith!" she shrieked again.

"D-o-o-o-n't—Be quiet!" muttered the sleepy-headed little thing.

"Oh! that will do," said Mrs Blunt. "Don't wake her. Miss Bozerne, you must excuse me for locking you in during the rest of the night; but if you object, perhaps Fraülein Liebeskinden will allow you to sleep with—"

"Oh no, thank you, ma'am," I said, hastily; "I shall not mind."

"Good night, then, Miss Bozerne," she said, very shortly; while I felt such a hypocrite that I hardly knew what to do. "Lost girl!" she continued, as she shut the door, and turned the key, which she took away with her, leaving poor Clara standing, pale and motionless, in the centre of the room; but no sooner had the light disappeared, and shone no more in beneath the crack at the bottom of the door, than she gave one great sob—

"Oh! Laura," she exclaimed; and then, throwing herself into my arms, she cried and sobbed so wildly and hysterically, that I was quite frightened.

For she was now giving vent to the pent-up feelings of the last quarter of an hour; but after awhile she calmed down, and with only a sob now and then to interrupt us—for, of course, I too could not help crying—we quietly talked the matter over.

"No; not a word," said the poor girl, in answer to a question of mine—which, of course, you can guess—"not a word; they may send me away and punish me as they like, but not a word will I ever say about it."

"Then they know nothing at all about me, or—" I stammered and stopped.

"You ought to have more confidence in me than to ask such a thing," cried Clara, passionately, as she began to sob again. "You would not have betrayed me if you had been in my position; now, would you?"

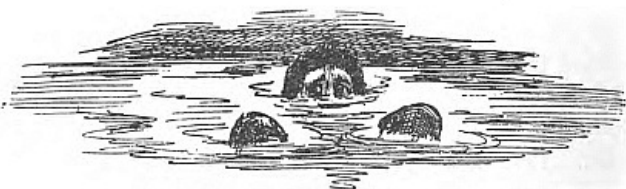
I did not know. While, being naturally nervous, I was afraid perhaps I might, if put to the test; but I did not say so.

"What could have made that horrible crashing noise?" said Clara at last; "do you think it was the policeman, dear?"

"Perhaps it was," I said; "but I know poor Achille went into the cistern. I pushed him in; and I'm afraid he must have been drowned, for I'm not sure that I heard him crawl out. Oh, dear! oh, dear!" I said at last, "what a passion is this love! I feel so old, and worn, and troubled I could die."

"It would be ruin to the poor Signor to be found out," murmured Clara—thinking more of her tiresome, old, brown Italian than of poor Achille. "Oh me! I know it was all my fault; but then how odd that the policeman should have had a meeting too! Or was he watching? Poor Giulio! would that I had never let him love me. I declared that I did not like him a bit to-night when we were together, and I had quite made up my mind never to meet him any more without he would talk of something else than beautiful Italy. Bother beautiful Italy! But now I half think I love him so dearly that I would dare anything for him. That I would."

Poor girl! she grew so hysterical again, that I quite grieved for her, and told her so; and then, poor thing, she crept up close to me; and really it did seem so noble of her to take all the blame and trouble upon herself, while she was so considerate over it, that I could not help loving her very, very, very much for it all. But at last we both dropped off soundly asleep, just as the birds were beginning to twitter in the garden; and, feeling very dull and low-spirited, I was half wishing that I was a little bird myself, to sit and sing the day long, free from any trouble; no lessons to learn, no exercises to puzzle one's brain, no cross lady principal or teachers, no mamma to send me to be finished. And it was just as I was half feeling that I could soar away into the blue arch of heaven, that I went into the deep sleep wherein I was tortured by seeing those eyes again—always those eyes—peering at me; but this time out of the deep black water of the cistern. By that I knew that I had drowned poor Achille, and that was to be my punishment—always to sit, unable to tear myself away, and be gazed at by those dreadful eyes from out of the deep, black water of the tank.



## Chapter Twelve.

### Memory the Twelfth—Than next Morning.

I have often awoke of a morning with the sensation of a heavy, pressing-down weight upon my mental faculties; and so it was after the dreadful catastrophe narrated in the last chapter. I opened my eyes, feeling—no, let me be truthful, I did not wake, for Patty Smith brought me to my senses by tapping my head with her nasty penetrating hair-brush—feeling, as I said before, feeling that the dull pressure upon me was caused by the dread truth that poor Achille really was drowned; while it was the Signor whom I had heard escaping. And so strong was the impression, and so nervous and so low did I feel with the adventures of the past night, that I turned quite miserable, and could not keep from crying.

The morning was enough to give anybody the horrors, for it rained heavily; and there were the poor birds, soaking wet, and with their feathers sticking close to their sides, hopping about upon the lawn, looking for worms. All over the window-panes, and hanging to the woodwork, were great tears, as if the clouds shared my trouble and sorrow; while all the flowers looked drooping and dirty, and splashed and miserable.

Then I began to think about Achille, and his coming to give his lesson that morning; and then about his being in the cistern, with those wonderful eyes looking out at me; when, there again, if there was not that tiresome old Tennyson's poem getting into my poor, weary head, and, do what I would, I could not keep it out. There it was—buzz, buzz, buzz—"Dreary—and weary—and will not come, she said;" till at last I began to feel as if I was the real Mariana in the Moated Grange.

To make me worse, too, there was that poor Clara—pale-faced, red-eyed, and desolate-looking—sitting there dressed, and resting her hot head upon her hand as she gazed out of the window; and though I wished to comfort her, I felt to want the comfort more myself. At last I could bear it no longer, and, in place of weeping gently, I was so nervous, and low, and upset with the night's troubles, that I sat down and had a regular good cry, and all the while with that great, stupid, fat, gawky goose of a Patty sitting and staring at me, with her head all on one side, as she was brushing out half of her hair, which she had not finished in all the time I had taken to dress.

"Don't, Patty!" I half shrieked, at last—she was so tiresome.

"Well, I ain't," said Patty.

"But please don't, then!" I exclaimed, angrily.

"Don't what?" said the great, silly thing.

"Don't stare so, and look so big and glumpy!" I exclaimed; for I felt as if I could have knocked off her tiresome head, only it was so horribly big; and I don't care what anybody says, there never were anywhere before such a tempting pair of cheeks to slap as Patty's—they always looked so round, and red, and soft, and pluffy.

"You ain't well," said the nasty, aggravating thing, in her silly, slow way. "Take one of my Seidlitz powders."

"Ugh!" I shuddered at the very name of them. Just as if one of the nasty, prickly-water, nose-tickling things was going to do me any good at such a time as this.

It really was enough to make one hit her. I never did take a Seidlitz powder but once, and then it was just after reading "Undine" with the Fraülein, and my head was all full of water-nymphs, and gods, and "The Mummelsee and the Water Maidens," and all sorts. And when I shut my eyes, and drank the fizzing-up thing, it all seemed to tickle my nose and lips; and I declare if I did not half fancy I was drinking the waters of the sparkling Rhine, and one of the water-gods had risen to kiss me, and that was his nasty prickly moustache I had felt. But to return to that dreadful morning when Patty wanted me to take one of her Seidlitz powders.

"Mix 'em in two glasses is best," she went on, without taking any notice of my look of disgust—"the white paper in one, and the blue paper in the other, and then drink off the blue first, and wait while you count twenty, and then drink off the white one—slushions they call 'em. It does make you feel so droll, and does your head ever so much good. Do have one, dear!"

I know that I must have slapped her—nothing could have prevented it—if just then the door had not been unlocked, and that horrible Miss Furness came in.

"When you are ready, Miss Smith, you will descend with Miss Bozerne—I will wait for you," said the screwy old thing; but she took not the slightest notice of poor Clara, who sat there by the window, with her forehead all wrinkled up, and looking at least ten years older. It was of no good for one's heart to bleed for her, not a bit, with Miss Furness, who had undertaken to act the part of gaoler, there; so I gave the poor, suffering darling one last, meaning look, which was of no use, for it was wasted through the poor thing not looking up; and then I followed Miss Furness out of the room, side by side with Patty Smith, whose saucer eyes grew quite cheese-platish as she saw the door locked to keep poor Clara in; and then the tiresome thing kept bothering me in whispers to know what was the matter, for she was quite afraid of Miss Furness.

However, I answered nothing, and went into the miserable, dreary, damp-looking classroom with an aching heart, and waited till the breakfast bell rang. For there was a bell rung for everything, when there was not the slightest necessity for such nonsense, only it all aided to make the Cedars imposing, and advertised it to the country round. But when I went into the hall, to cross it to reach the breakfast-room, there were a couple of boxes and a bundle at the foot of the back stairs, and the tall page getting himself into a tangle with some cord as he pretended to be tying

them up.

Just then the drawing-room door opened, and I heard Mrs Blunt say—

“And don’t apply to me for a character, whatever you do;” whilst, very red-eyed and weeping, out came Sarah Ann, the housemaid.

“Once more,” said Mrs Blunt, “do you mean to tell me who it was that I distinctly saw, with my very own eyes, standing upon the leads talking to you?”

But Ann only gave a sob and a gulp, and I knew then that they did not know who had come to see her; whilst I felt perfectly certain that it was *the* policeman, and, besides, the Signor and Achille must have seen what he was.

I was standing close to Miss Furness, who, as soon as she saw Ann, began to bridle up with virtuous indignation; and then set to and hunted the girls into the breakfast-room.

“Is Ann going away?” said Patty Smith, in her dawdly, sleepy way. “I like Ann. What’s she going away for, Miss Furness, please?”

“Hush!” exclaimed Miss Furness, in a horrified way. “Don’t ask such questions. She is a very wicked and hardened girl, and Mrs Fortesquieu de Blount has dismissed her, lest she should contaminate either of the other servants.”

“I’ll tell you all about it, presently,” whispered Celia Blang; but not in such a low voice but that the indignant Miss Furness overheard her.

“You will do nothing of the kind,” said the cross old maid, “and I desire that you instantly go back to your seat. If you know anything, you will be silent—silence is golden. Such things are not to be talked about, Miss Blang.”

Celia made a grimace behind her back, although she was said to be Miss Furness’s spy, and supposed to tell her everything; so Patty’s curiosity remained unsatisfied, while of course I pretended to know nothing at all about what had been going on.

Directly after breakfast, though, Patty had it all by heart, and came red-hot to tell me how that Clara had been caught trying to elope out of the conservatory, whilst Ann was talking from the tall staircase window, when Miss Sloman happened to hear a whispering—for she was lying awake with a bad fit of the toothache. So she went and alarmed the lady principal; and then, with Miss Furness and the Fraülein, they had all watched, and they found it out. Some one, too, had been in the tank, and the conservatory windows were broken, and that was all, except that Mrs Blunt had been writing to Lady Fitzacre—Clara’s mamma—and the poor girl was to be expelled; while for the present she was to be kept in her room till her mamma came, unless she would say who was the gentleman she was about to elope with—such stuff!—and then, if she would confess, she was to sit with Mrs Blunt, under surveillance, as they called it. When, leaving alone betraying the poor Signor, of course Clara preferred staying in her own room.

Such a miserable wet morning, and though I wanted to, very badly indeed, I could not get into the conservatory to set my poor mind at rest by poking down into the cistern with a blind lath; for if I had gone it might have raised suspicions.

Could he still be in the tank, and were my dreams in slumber right?

“Oh, how horrible!” I thought; “why, I should feel always like his murderer.”

But, there, I could not help it—it was fate, my fate, and his fate—my fate to be his murderess, his to be drowned; and I would have given worlds, if I had had them, to be able to faint, when about eleven o’clock the cook came to the door, and asked Mrs Blunt, in a strange, mysterious way, to please come into the conservatory. For the man servant had not come back from the station, and taking Ann’s boxes.

“Oh, he’s there, he’s there!” I muttered, as I wrung my hands beneath the table, and closed my eyes, thinking of the inquest and the other horrors to come; and seeing in imagination his wet body laid upon the white stones in the conservatory.

Oh, how I wanted to faint—how I tried to faint, and go off in a deep swoon, that should rest me for a while from the racking thoughts that troubled me. But I could not manage it anyhow; for of course nothing but the real thing would do at such a time as this.

Out went Mrs Blunt, to return in five minutes with what I thought to be a terribly pale face, as she beckoned out the three teachers who were most in her confidence, Miss Murray being considered too young and imprudent.

There! I never felt anything so agonising in my life—never; and I could not have borne it any longer anyhow. I’m sure, in another moment I must have been horribly hysterical and down upon the floor, tapping the boards with my heels, as I once saw mamma—and of course such things are hereditary—only I was saved by hearing a step upon the gravel. Then my heart leaped just after the fashion of that gentleman’s who wanted Maud to come into the garden so very badly. For there I could see the real eyes coming along the shrubbery, peeping over the fur collar of a long cloak, which hung down to the heels. And I felt so relieved, that a great heavy sob, that had been sticking in my throat all the morning, leaped out suddenly, and made Patty Smith look up and stare.

Then came tramping in Mrs Blunt and the three teachers, and as they whispered together, I was quite startled, for they talked about something being dragged out of the cistern with the tongs. And now I knew it could not be Achille, but made sure it was the poor Signor; when I felt nearly as bad as before, though I kept telling myself that it was quite impossible for them to have lifted the poor, dear, drowned dead man out with a pair of tongs—even if he was



not so very stout. But there, my misery was again put an end to by the Fraülein, who said, out loud,—

“Oh, yes, it was. I see de mark—C. Fitzacre.”

And then I knew that it must have been one of Clara’s handkerchiefs that had been fished out, and “blessed my stars that my stars blessed me” by not letting it be my handkerchief that they had discovered.

There was a step in the hall, and how my heart fluttered!

“Monsieur Achille de Tiraille for the French lesson,” squeaked Miss Furness.

And soon after we were busy at work, going over the irregular verbs, and I could see Achille’s eyes wandering from face to face, as if to see whether there were any suspicion attaching to him. Then followed the reading and exercise correcting, while I could see plainly enough that he was terribly agitated—so much so, that he made at least four mistakes himself, and passed over several in the pupils. And when he found that I did not give him a note with my exercise—one that should explain, I suppose, all that had since passed—when I had not had the eighth part of a chance to write one, he turned quite cross and pettish, and snapped one, and snubbed another. As for poor me, I could have cried, I could, only that all the teachers and Mrs Blunt were there, and Miss Furness looking triumphant. As a rule, all the teachers did not stay in the room while the French lessons were progressing, and this all tended towards making poor Achille fidgety and cross; but he need not have behaved quite so unkindly to me, for I’m sure I had been suffering quite enough upon his account, and so I should have liked to have told him if I had had the opportunity; while now that all this upset had come, I felt quite sorry for the disloyal thought that I had had, and should have been ready to do anything for his sake.

The lessons were nearly over, when all at once the door opened suddenly, and I saw poor Achille jump so that the pen with which he was correcting Patty Smith’s exercise made a long scrawling tail to one of the letters; but he recovered himself directly.

Well, the door opened suddenly, and the cook stood there, wiping her floury hands, for it was pasty-waster day, and she exclaimed loudly,—

“O’m! please’m! the little passage is all in a swim.”

“C-o-o-o-k!” exclaimed Mrs Blunt, in a dreadful voice, as if she meant to slay her upon the spot.

“O’m! please’m!” cried the cook again.

“Why, where is James, cook?” said Mrs Blunt, sternly.

“Cleaning hissself, mum,” said cook; “and as Hann’s gone, mum, I was obliged to come—not as I wanted to, I’m sure,” and cook looked very much ill-used.

Mrs Blunt jumped up, as much to get rid of the horrible apparition as anything; while cook continued,—



“There, do come, mum; it’s perfectly dreadful!” and they went off together; when such a burst of exclamations followed that the three lady teachers rose and left the room, and I took the opportunity of Miss Murray’s back being turned to exchange glances with poor Achille, who had, at the least, been wet; while I longed, for poor Clara’s sake, to ask him about the Signor. But to speak was impossible, and there were too many eyes about for the glance to be long. So I let mine drop to my exercise, and then sat, with a strange, nervous sensation that I could not explain creeping over me, and it seemed like the forerunner of something about to happen.

Just then Miss Furness hurried in and out again, leaving the door ajar, so that from where I sat I could command a view of the little passage, and saw Mrs Blunt walk up, jingling her keys, and stepping upon the points of her toes over a little stream of water that was slowly flowing along. Then going up to the store-room door, I heard the key thrust in, as impelled by I know not what, I left my seat, and formed one of the group which stood looking upon the little stream that I could now see came from beneath the store-room door.

"The skylight must have been left open," exclaimed Mrs Blunt, flinging open the door, and at the same moment the recollection of the crash flashed across my mind; for, as she flung open the door, in her pompous, bouncing way, and was about to step in, oh!—horror of horrors! how can I describe it all? There was the floor of the little room covered with broken glass, water, bits of putty, wood, and a mass of broken jam pots; and the little table, that had evidently stood beneath the skylight, had two of its legs broken off, and had slid its saccharine burden (that is better than saying load of jam) upon the floor in hideous ruin. Some pots were broken to pieces, some in half; while others had rolled to the other end of the room, and were staining their paper covers, or dyeing the water with their rich, cloying contents. But worse, far worse than all, with his face cut, scratched, and covered with dry blood, his shirt front and waistcoat all jam, crouching back in the farthest corner, was the poor Signor—regularly trapped when he had fallen through the skylight; for it was impossible for any one to have climbed up to the opening, through which the rain came like a shower bath, and there was no other way of exit.



The lady principal shrieked, the lady teachers performed a trio of witch-screams—the most discordant ever uttered—and my Lady Blunt would have plashed down into the puddle, only, seeing how wet it was, she only reeled and clung to me, who felt ready to drop myself, as I leaned against the wall half swooning.

Alarmed by the shrieks, Achille came running out, looking, as I thought, very pale.

"Ladies, ladies!" he ejaculated, "*ma foi, qu'est ce que c'est?*"

"Help, help! Monsieur Achille," gasped Mrs Blunt.

He hurried forward, and relieved me of my load.

"Fetch the police," cried Miss Furness.

"*Nein, nein*—it is a mistake," whispered the Fraülein, who had a penchant, I think, for the poor Signor.

"Signor Pazzoletto, it is thou!" exclaimed Achille, with an aspect of the most profound amazement as he caught sight of his unfortunate friend—an aspect which was, indeed, truthful.

For, as he afterwards told me, he had been so drenched in the cistern, and taken up with making his own escape, that he had thought no more of the poor Signor; while, being a wet morning, he had not sought his lodging—which was some distance from the town—before coming, though he was somewhat anxious to consult him upon the previous night's alarm, and hardly dared to show himself. So—

"Signor Pazzoletto, it is thou!" he exclaimed, regularly taken aback, as the sailors say.

"*Altro! altro!*" ejaculated the poor man, who sadly wanted to make his escape, but could see no better chance now than there had been all the night.

For the passage was blocked, while in the hall were collected together all the pupils and the servants—that gawky James coming back and towering above all, like a horrible lamp-post in a crowd.

"My vinaigrette," murmured Madame Blunt.

When if that dreadful Achille did not place another arm around her; and that nasty old thing liked it, I could see, far more than Miss Furness did, and hung upon him horribly, pretending to faint; when I could have given anything to have snatched her away.

"*Pauvre chère dame*" murmured Achille, giving me at the same moment a comical look out of the corner of his eye.

"Oh! Monsieur Achille," said Mrs Blunt, feebly, "oh, help! Send away that wretch. *Otez moi cet homme là.*"

"*Aha! yais! mais ou!*" exclaimed Achille—the base deceiver, to play such a part!—"Sare, you are not business here. Madame dismiss. Take away yourself off. Cut yourself! Go!"

I give this just as Achille spoke it; for I cannot but feel angry at the deceitful part he had played.

The Signor looked at Achille, and gave him a diabolical grin—just as if he would have liked to stiletto him upon the spot, with one of the pieces of broken glass. Then he looked at me, bestowing upon me a meaning glance, as he made a rush past us all, and escaped by the front door; but not without splashing right through the puddle, and sending the water all over the Fraülein, so that she exclaimed most indignantly, until the front door closed with a heavy bang.

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## Chapter Thirteen.

### Memory the Thirteenth—So very Wicked.

It was such a relief to know that the Signor was gone, and that, too, without betraying any one. I could see, too, that Achille revived, now that he felt that he was safe for the present, and redoubled his attentions to Mrs Blunt. I declare I believe he would have stood there holding her for an hour, and she letting him, if Miss Furness had not very officiously lent her aid as well; when the lady principal grew better at once, and allowed herself to be assisted into the breakfast-room, where, after much pressing, she consented to partake of a glass of sherry.

"Oh, Monsieur Achille," she gasped, "such a serious matter—reputation of my establishment! You will be silent? Oh, dear me, what a dreadful upset."

"Silent? Ma foi, oui, Madame Bloont. I will be close as box," and he gave his shoulders a shrug, put his fingers to his lips, half-shut his eyes, and nodded his head a great many times over.



"I knew you would," murmured Mrs Blunt; "and as to my lady assistants, I feel assured that I can depend upon them."

"Oh, yes," cried all these, in chorus.

"And you had better now return to the classroom, Miss Bozerne," said Miss Furness, who had seemed in a fidget ever since I had followed them into the place.

"Ah, yes—please leave us now, Miss Bozerne," said Mrs Blunt. "Of course we can depend upon you, my child?"

I promised all they wished, and was going across the hall, when I met James, with a piece of paper in his hand.

"Please, miss, where's Monser Tirrel?—a boy just brought this for him."

"I'll take it in to him," I said, with the blood seeming to run in a torrent to my heart; and there I stood, with the piece of a leaf of a pocket-book in my hand. It was not doubled up, and as I glanced down upon it I could see that it was scribbled over, evidently hastily, in pencil. I was about to carry it into the breakfast-room, when a word caught my eye; and telling myself it was not dishonourable, and that I had some right to know the secrets of Achille, I felt that I must read it through.

"He says that I am his own, so that I have a right to see his correspondence," I said to myself, trying to find an excuse for the deceitful act; and then trembling all over, I read, hastily scrawled—

“Monsieur,—Vous m’avez insulté affreusement. Si vous n’êtes pas poltrone, vous serez, sans ami, dans les prairies au moulin à une heure.

“Giulio Pazzoletto.”

“Oh, horror!” I ejaculated, “it is a challenge; and if I give it to him, that horrid Italian will shoot or stab to death my poor Achille! What shall I do—what shall I do?”

There I stood, racked with anguish, till I heard footsteps approaching, when I fled into the schoolroom, where there was such a noise, and all the pupils flocked round me directly, to ask no end of questions; but I was so agitated that I could not speak. However, the first thing I did was to spitefully bite the wicked, murderous note into fragments, and scatter them about the place; and then, recalling Mrs Blunt’s last words, I was so retentive of the information the girls were all eager to acquire, that they one and all sided against me, and said I was “a proud, stuck-up, deceitful crocodile.”

“I don’t care, children,” I said, haughtily—for I was more at ease now that I knew he would not get the note—“I don’t care, children, Mrs Blunt said that I was not to talk about it.”

“Children, indeed!” exclaimed little pert Celia Blang—“why, that’s the very thing that would make you tell us all! ’Tisn’t that: it’s because you are so stuck-up, you and Clara Fitzy; but she’s shut up now, and is going to be sent away, and a good thing too; and now you’ll only have Patty Fatty to talk to, and I hope you’ll like it.”

“Hold your tongue, you pert, ill-natured thing,” I said; “I don’t believe that she will be sent away.”

“She will, though,” said Celia; “you see if she isn’t. But we don’t want you to tell us anything—we know all about it, don’t we, girls?”

“Know all about what?” I said, very coolly and contemptuously—for they all seemed quite girlish and childish to me, now that I was the repository of all that secrecy.

“Why all about *it*” said Celia—“about Ann, and some one at the window. Molly told me, and ever so much more that she heard from Ann before she went; and Ann was going to tell her something about some one in the garden—Clara Fitzy, or some one else—only she had not time before they bundled her off. But, there: I sha’n’t tell you any more.”

My ears tingled, as they say, when I heard that latter part about the garden. What an escape it seemed, to be sure! But I passed it all off, and took not a mite of notice; and just then, who should come in but Miss Furness, as I heard a well-known step go crunching along the gravel. Then it was lessons, lessons, till dinner-time; and lessons, lessons, till tea-time; and then lessons again, for the weather was too wet for a walk.

I only saw Clara of a night after that, and, poor thing, she was kept upon prison fare; for a letter came down from Lady Fitzacre, saying that she was too ill to travel at present, and that she left the punishment of the foolish, disobedient child entirely in the hands of Mrs Blunt. So there wasn’t a word said more about expelling her, for Mrs B. was too fond of the high terms and extras she was able to charge for parlour boarders. But they kept the poor thing a close prisoner upstairs for a week; and, to make her position more bearable, I bought her a cheap edition of “Moths,” and smuggled it up. Then I managed “In Maremma;” and whenever I went out, and could get to the pastrycook’s, I filled my pockets full of queen cakes, and sausage rolls, and raspberry jam tarts, and got the inside of my pocket of my silk dress in such a sticky mess, that I declare every time I put my hand in, it made me think of the poor Signor.

Of course, I told Clara everything that happened downstairs as soon as Patty was asleep, though she frightened me terribly by almost going into hysterics the first night, when I told her about the Signor being in the store-room; but I did not mention the jam then, for fear of hurting her feelings. She said I did quite right about the note; for she could never have been happy again if the Signor had killed Achille—just as if Achille was not a deal more likely to have killed the Signor!

I don’t know how the maids knew, but Molly told us that the Signor had quite left the place, and had not paid his lodging nor yet his washing bill; though I don’t want to be spiteful, but I don’t think that last could have been much, for I never caught sight of anything washable but a tiny bit of turn-down collar. And Molly knew—for James told her when he took the packet—that Mrs Blunt sent what salary was owing the same day, while I afterwards learned from Achille that they never met again; and really it was a very good thing for all parties concerned that the poor man went.

Yes! No! Let me see—yes, he told me upon the day I enclosed him the half-sovereign for the poor refugee family whose troubles in London Achille used to paint so vividly I remember he told me, too, that Signor Pazzoletto had gone away in his debt too, and that he was afraid the Signor was not an honourable man.

My poor Achille was very charitable, and kept himself terribly poor that way; but I could not help admiring his generosity towards his fellow exiles, and I used to give him, regularly, all I could from my pocket-money, after he had called my attention to these poor people’s condition; and I must say that papa was very liberal to me in that way, and I could always have a sovereign or two for the asking. Achille used to tell me that he added all he could, and that the poor people were so grateful, and used to write of me to him as “la belle ange.” He said that the mother was going to write and thank me some day, but she never did; while, I suppose from motives of delicacy, Achille never told me their names.

He was really exceedingly charitable, and was often finding out cases where a little money would be well bestowed; and once or twice I wanted to call myself, and see the poor creatures; but his diffidence was so great, that he would not tell me of their places of abode, for he would not be seen moving in such matters, preferring to perform his acts of kindness in secret.

Poor Clara was down and amongst us once more; while, as I before said, there was no more talk of her being expelled, for since the Signor had gone, Mrs Blunt thought that all would be right, and she would have no more trouble. And I must say that, for a long time Clara would never help me a bit in any way, now that she had lost her Giulio, but moped terribly, and seemed quite an altered girl—even going so far as to say bitter, cruel things. One day she quite upset me by declaring that Achille only wanted the money for himself, and that I had better be like her—give up all such folly and love-making: a most cruel, unjust, sour-grapey speech; for as to giving up her black-bearded, Italian-organ looking man, there was little giving up in the case.

At last, down came Lady Fitzacre, and there was such a to-do in the drawing-room; but Clara was so penitent that she was quite forgiven. And then I was had in to be introduced, and, of course, I expected that a lady with such a name would take after her daughter or that her daughter took after her—it don't matter which—and be tall, aristocratic, and imposing; but, instead, she was a little, screwy, pale, squeezey body, with her upper teeth sticking out quite forward, so as to make her look ugly. But she was very pleasant and good-tempered, and made a great fuss over me, and told Mrs Blunt that she would sooner keep a powder magazine than have a troop of such man-killers to manage.

Then she kissed Clara, and said she was afraid that the poor thing was “a naughty, naughty girl,” and that it was “so shocking.”

“But very natural, Mrs de Blount,” I heard her whisper, and it set me thinking about what mamma would say when she found me out.

For I was not going to break with Achille just because there were obstacles thrown in our way. Of course, there were no more meetings to be held in the conservatory, and for a long time, a very long time, we had to be content with notes, and they could not always be delivered. As I hinted before, Clara would not help me a bit. She said she had promised her mamma that she would not engage in anything of the kind again, and she did not mean to break her word. Certainly, she said, she might perhaps come with me some night, or perhaps aid me a little; but it would not be at present, until she had quite got over her late shock. And then the stupid, romantic girl used to talk about her heart being a desert, and asked all sorts of questions about the convent at Guisnes, just as if she had serious thoughts of entering, and turning nun altogether; for she said there seemed no hope for her in the future.

There certainly was not much temptation for her to break her word to her mamma with the new Italian master, Signor Pompare. For of all the frights—oh, dear me! A great, overgrown, stuffy, fat pig; and instead of being dark-eyed, and with beautiful, glossy, black hair, he was actually quite sandy—bird-sandy—and very bald-headed; while his face, where the beautiful, silky, black beard should have been, was all close shaved, and soapy and shiny. And then, too, he used to take such lots of snuff; and there was a crinkly little hole in his upper lip, where he could not shave, and this was always half full of brown powder, so that we decided to call it the reservoir. When he breathed, you used to see the snuff puff out of the place in little tiny, tiny clouds, and fall in a brown bloom over his closely-shaven chin. Not much fear of any of the pupils taking a fancy to him, you would have thought; though I declare if Patty Smith did not say he was a very nice-looking man. But not that that meant anything, for the highest love to which Patty could ascend was love for something tasty to eat.



Actually, two months had passed since we had had an interview, and not one plan could I hit upon, though I had tortured my poor head until I grew quite desperate. Of course, I saw Achille every week for lessons, and twice on Sundays. But, then, all that seemed to count for nothing; and once more I was beginning to grow so miserable and dejected, a state from which his letters hardly seemed to revive me.

Any disloyal thoughts I may have had were thoroughly chased away by the difficulties we had encountered. But, still, leading such a quiet, regular life as we lived, it seemed very hard work to find words and remarks with which to fill up

one's notes. I declare that if they did not grow to be as difficult to write as Miss Furness's essays; and I had to use the same adjectives over and over and over again, till I was quite ashamed of them, and almost wondered that they did not turn sour even though they were meant to be sweet and endearing. As for Achille's notes—heigho! I could excuse him, knowing how difficult it was to find words myself; but towards the latter part of our dear intimacy, his letters grew to be either political, or else full of the sorrows of the poor people whose cause he espoused, and whose sufferings he tried, to use his own words, "to make a little softer."

Of course it was too bad to gape, and keep his notes in one's pocket until they grew quite worn before I opened them, and then to feel that I knew by heart all that he was going to say; but I could not help it, though I tried hard to love and appreciate the things which interested him, and pinched myself terribly to send him half-sovereigns for his "chères pauvres." But, I don't mind owning to it, I did not care a single button or pen nib for the French Royal family, though I did not like to tell him so when he asked me to subscribe for the poor descendants of the noblest of "la belle France." I'm afraid I was not so patriotic as I should have been. I could not help it.

I did try; and no doubt in time I should have grown to have loved the same things as he did; but I did wish that he would have made his notes a little more—more—well, what shall I say?—there, less matter of fact and worldly, when I wanted them to be tender, and sympathising, and ethereal.

Yes—I grew quite disgusted, in spite of Clara's nasty badinage; for she had recovered her spirits as I lost mine, and used to tell me to try her recipe, and I should soon be well again. But, of course, I treated her remarks as they deserved; and grew paler every day in spite of the pleasant country walks, though they were totally spoiled by our having to tramp along like a regiment of soldiers.

For my part, I should have liked to go wandering through the woods, spending ten minutes here and ten minutes there; now stopping to pluck a flower, and now to sit down upon some mossy fallen tree; or else to have lost myself amongst the embowering leaves. In short, I should have liked to do just as I pleased; while all the time the rule seemed to be that we should do just as some one else liked; and "some one else" was generally that detestable, screwy, old Miss Furness, with her "Keep together, young ladies," or "Now, a little faster," or "Straightforward," or "To the right" Oh! it was so sickening, I declare that I would rather have sat up in the dormitory—pooh, such nonsense!—in the bedroom, and watched and envied the birds in the long, wavy boughs of the beautiful cedars. I know I could have contrived several meetings if it had not been for Miss Furness, who was always prying and peering about, as suspiciously as possible, though half of that was on purpose to annoy me, and because she knew that I did not like it.

But though Clara had at one time vowed that she would not help me, she never, in the slightest degree, went against any of my plans; but even went so far as to allow herself to be turned into a passive post-office—if I may use the expression—by holding a note for Achille in her French grammar, and bringing back another when she had had her regular scolding—for she certainly was very stupid over her French, though at one time she had manifested considerable ability over her Italian, while she sketched beautifully.

I managed the place for a meeting, at last; though, after all, it was but a very tiresome place, but, under the circumstances, better than nothing. There was no going out of a night now, even if we had felt so inclined; and, really and truly, after what we had gone through, I felt very little disposed to attempt such a thing again; for Miss Furness used to collect regularly every night all the downstairs keys in a basket, and then take them up to Mrs Blunt's room; and I feel convinced that those four old tabbies used to have something hot in one of the bedrooms. Clara used to say that she could smell it; and yet they would all make a fuss at dinner about never touching ale or porter. All I know is, that Miss Furness's nose never would have looked so red if she only drank water always. They used to think that we did not know of their sitting up of a night; but Clara and I soon found that out, for we began to lie and listen, and could tell well enough that the Fraülein was not in her own room; while every now and then, from some other part, we could hear her blowing her nose with a noise loud enough to alarm the whole house. There never was such a woman before for blowing noses, I'm sure. Why, she could blow her nose as loud as a churchwarden, or a Poor Law guardian, who, as it is well known, can, after county magistrates on the bench, make more noise than any one upon that particular organ. It was quite dreadful to hear the Fraülein trumpeting about, like one of those horrid brass things the soldiers play in the bands—stretching out, and pulling in, and working about, and looking so dangerous.

And now I am going to tell you about my plan for an interview; though I might have spared my poor brains all the trouble, for it never did either of us a bit of good, in spite of all my scheming and management I told you that the downstairs doors were always locked now of a night, and that Miss Furness collected all the keys, so that it was quite out of the question to think of trying to get into either of the lower rooms to talk out of the window; so I thought, and thought, and thought, and puzzled, and puzzled, and puzzled, and bored my poor brains, till at last I remembered the empty room at the end of the passage.



"Well, but how ever could he get up there to talk to you?" said Clara; "it's a second floor window."

"Why, come up a ladder, of course," I said.

"But how is he to get one there?" said Clara. "Bring some bricklayers and scaffold poles, and have a scaffold made on purpose?"

"Why, a rope ladder, goosey," I said. "Don't you see?"

But Clara said she could not see, and that she believed that, excepting in ships, there were no such things as rope ladders, and all those that you read of in books were manufactured in people's brains, and never helped anybody yet up to a window; while as to ladies eloping down them, that was all nonsense, for she did not think the woman was living who could get either up or down one of the swingle-swangle things. And then she said that it would not be safe; but I knew better, and told her so, for I was not going to have my plan set aside for a trifle. So then I set to and wrote a letter to Achille.

Since Clara had laughed so terribly, I had not liked to send money in the notes by her; and poor Achille had sent me such a despairing note, telling me how that he must see me—one of the most grievous, broken-hearted notes possible. I declare I don't know what he did not say he would do if he could not see me soon.

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## Chapter Fourteen.

### Memory the Fourteenth—Anticipated Joys.

I wrote and told Achille all my plans, using the top of the drawers for a writing desk, and letting Patty Smith think that I was doing an exercise; for I was so horribly deceitful, writing upon exercise paper, and referring now and then to dictionary and grammar, as if for different words. I told him he was to get hooks made that would fit over the inside of the window-sill, and he was to buy a rope ladder, and I would let down a string and draw it up, and hook it on, when he could easily run up and stand upon the great, wide ledge beneath the second floor windows—a large, ornamental cornice that ran nearly round the house—and there stop and talk to me whenever it was a dark night.

I soon managed, through Clara, for him to have the note; and the next time he came he was quite radiant with joy, and praised all the girls' exercises, though some of them were really execrable I would not look at him, but soon after he was gone Clara slipped a note into my hand, which said that he would be under the window that night at half-past twelve, and that I was to be sure and have a ball of string ready to let down and draw up the ladder, which he had been obliged to make himself; for though he could buy cord enough everywhere in London, there was not such a thing as a rope ladder to be got.

"There, I told you so," said Clara, laughing. "Rope ladder, indeed. I don't believe people ever did sell such things; and you see now if he don't stick halfway up, like a great fly in a spider's web, till Lady Blunt comes, as the spider, and sticks a great knitting needle into his body to kill him. And then she'll call all the other spiders, and all four of them will set to and devour your poor Achille—for they are almost ready to eat him every day, as it is."

"Don't talk such stuff," I said pettishly, though I could not help thinking of Miss Furness and her penchant for Achille, though I knew he hated her.

It did sound so romantic and chivalrous, in spite of Clara's ill-natured prattle, having one's lover coming up a ladder of ropes in the stilly midnight hour, when all were dreaming around. It put me in mind of ladies' bowers, and knights, and cavaliers, and elopements; and dreaming, as I did, I almost began to fancy myself a damsel in distress about to be rescued. I stood there, in our room, in such a sweet, rapt meditation—such a blissful, dreamy, musing fit—when that Clara brought me right down out of the I don't know how manyeth heaven, by saying—

"And where's your string?"

I had not thought of that, and it was a puzzle. I had plenty of crochet cotton, and bobbin, and Berlin wool; but then,

they were none of them strong enough. Time to buy any there was none; for he was coming that night loaded with his dear ladder; while if I tried to get any from the kitchen, some one would be sure to ask what it was wanted for, then what could I say? And, besides, I had told so many dreadful stories already, and prevaricated so much, that I was quite ashamed.

The first thing I determined upon was to make a long plait of my coloured wools; but I soon found that there would not be one quarter enough; then I thought of the girls' slate strings, which held the sponges, and determined to make a raid into the schoolroom and cut them all off, though I felt sure they would not be enough. If I could only have gone out and bought a ball, or sent James, it would have been all right; but that was impossible without first asking Mrs Blunt. Only the week before, a stupid boy's kite came flapping over into the garden, with no end of string, which I might have cut off with my scissors; but I never imagined then that I should want any.

However, I did what I generally do when I want to think deeply, I took some eau de Cologne and bathed my temples, and then sat down before the glass, with my hair all thrown back, and my head resting upon my hand, trying to solve the problem, and wondering what Achille could see in me to like; while just then I remember wondering what had become of poor Mr Saint Purre.

What was I to do? that was the question. I might have cut ever so many strings off my clothes, but then I was sure they would not make half enough; and, after boring my poor brains all sorts of ways, I was quite in despair—for it did seem too bad to be put off by such a beggarly little trifle as a bit of string, when two or three of those little, cheating penny balls, that are made so big by winding a very little string round a very big hole would have set me up for good. I wanted Clara to smuggle the clothes line from the laundry, which would have done admirably; but the nasty thing would not, and tried to make fun of it all by declaring that it was in use; and she would not stir a peg. I could not go myself to see if what she said was true—at least, I dare not; and, there, if it was not tea-time, and we should be rung down in a few minutes. Once I thought of tearing up something into long shreds, and tying them together; and it seemed at last that that would be the plan, and I should have put it into execution, if all at once I had not had a bright thought flash through my head, and felt disposed to call out "Excelsior?" like mamma did when she saw Mrs Blunt's horrid advertisement, and meant "Eureka" all the time.

And what do you think the happy thought was? Why, the lumber-room, where the girls' school boxes were put, along with their cords; and I was just going to hurry off and collect a number, when clatter went the tea-bell, and we were obliged to go down.

I could not eat any of their odious bread and butter—thick and patchy—while the tea was as weak as weak. I declare I was so nervous that I never felt the place to be so vexatious before; and for the least provocation I should have burst out crying. I couldn't help there being nothing to cry about—all I know is, that I felt in a regular crying fit; and the more of the nasty, mawkish warm tea I drank, the worse I was, for it all seemed changed into tears directly, and to be flooding my head; when, if it had been proper tea, of course my poor nerves would have been solaced.

Clara saw how put out I was, and kept treading on my foot, wanting me to look at Mrs Blunt's front, which was all put on sideways; but I declare I could not have laughed if she had put it on backwards. Then that stupid Miss Sloman must go, seeing that I did not eat anything, and tell Mrs Blunt; and, of course, when she asked me, I was obliged to say I was not quite well, when the tiresome old thing must promise to send for Dr Boole if I were not better in the morning. A stupid old thing: she did not know that a dozen yards of good stout string would have made me feel quite in ecstasy.



Bed-time at last; and, as a matter of course, because we wanted her to go to sleep soon, Patty Smith began to write a letter home for another cake and a bottle of currant wine; but Miss Furness must come prowling about and see the light, and she soon put a stop to that; when poor simple Patty did get such a scolding that she sobbed, and cried, and boo-ood, and said it was only for a cake she was writing. Then Miss Furness—a nasty, aggravating old puss—must turn round and scold Clara and me, as she said, for encouraging her, so as to get part of the cake ourselves. Couldn't I have given her a shaking, that's all! Why, it was enough to make anyone feel vicious.

At last, we lay there, listening to the different noises dying out in the house; and I could do nothing but cry for poor Achille's disappointment—for the way to the lumber-room was through the one in which the cook slept, and of course it was impossible to get any cord; and I dare not throw a note out of the window to Achille, for fear that he might not find it in the dark, and if it fell into wrong hands all would have been made known. So there I lay, crying for some time, till the noises in the house one by one died out, and all was still, when I pictured poor Achille watching and waiting, and accusing me of perfidy and cruelty, for making him come and then disappointing him—for he never would imagine that I had been stopped for want of a piece of string. Then came the sound of an owl, hooting and screeching as if in contempt of me for going to bed; and I declare, at last, I was about to creep away to the empty room, and add to the poor fellow's disappointment by opening the window and whispering to him—though I'm sure



he could not have heard; when a strong feeling of stupor seemed to creep over me—a feeling that I could not fight against—while soon all was, as it were, a blank.

The next morning when I talked about it to Clara, she said it showed how much I cared for him to fall asleep. Just as if it was sleep, and I did not know the difference. But there, she always was so absurd! And poor Achille was disappointed, and we had to make another assignation.

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## Chapter Fifteen.

### Memory the Fifteenth—'Twixt Cup and Lip.

Night again; and Achille—poor faithful, charitable, patient Achille—to be there once more watching in the dark that one blank window, that he hoped to see open. I could analyse his feelings as well, perhaps, as he could mine; and how I did pity him for his many disappointments! For nights and nights had passed without the rope ladder having been made available. Still, though, we were hopeful, and thought of others who had been long and patient sufferers for the same cause; while now, in the hope of a meeting, we waited once more. All was still within doors, and everything seemed propitious, for the night was excessively dark. The last door had shut some time before, and within the house the only thing stirring must have been a mouse or else, with our strained ears, as Clara and I lay waiting, dressed in bed, we must have heard it. But though all was so still in the house, it was not so out of doors. First of all there was a horrible cat “tuning its lay,” as Clara called it; and then she said its lay was terribly out of tune to want so much screwing up. Then the dog in the next yard must hear it, and begin to resent the disturbance, and bark at the cat, till I felt sure that pauvre Achille would not come, for the noise was dreadful—rest cat, bark dog; rest dog, howl cat, and so on. There was the chain rattling in and out of the kennel at a most terrible rate, while the creature barked furiously till it was tired, without having the slightest effect upon the cat, or cats, which kept on with the hideous howling, till the dog, evidently worn out, went to sleep.

Oh, it was uncomfortable lying there, so hot and tired with the exertion of dressing under the bed-clothes while lying down, so that Patty Smith should have no suspicion of what was going on and because we thought her awake; when, just as we had finished, she must begin to snore in the most vulgar, horrible way imaginable.

“That nasty cat is just under our window,” I whispered to Clara. “He’ll never come if there’s this noise.”

“I’ll serve it out,” whispered Clara; “only be quiet.”

“What are you going to do?” I said, but she would not answer; and I heard her get out of bed and go to the washstand, and pour ever so much water into the basin.

“Oh, pray don’t make any noise, dear. What are you going to do with that water?”

“Wait a bit, and you’ll see,” she whispered, tittering; and then she went and gently opened the window, when the noise of the nasty cat came up worse than ever.



“You had better not throw out that water, dear,” I whispered; but she only giggled, and then I heard the water go down splash on to the gravel walk, and directly after—

“Oh!” exclaimed Clara. As she spoke up came the sounds of the falling basin, as it struck upon the gravel walk, and was shivered to atoms. Then came the sound of a hurried step upon the path, the rush of a heavy body through the shrubbery, all as plain as could be in the still night, and I knew that Clara had very nearly thrown the basin on poor Achille’s head, and it might have killed him. When as if that was not enough to frighten him away, there were two windows thrown open on the first floor, and at one was Miss Furness, ringing a bell and Miss Sloman screaming, and at the other my Lady Blunt, springing a watchman’s rattle, and making the most horrible din imaginable.

“Well, I really did not mean to do it, dear,” said Clara, as coolly as could be; “you see, the basin was soapy, and slipped.”

“What did you do it at all for, when you were asked not?” I gasped angrily; for it was really enough to drive any one out of her senses to be disappointed like this, time after time. All I hoped was, that poor Achille had escaped safely, and did not know from which window the missile came; for, only fancy, he might have thought that I had thrown it,

and never forgiven me.

You never could have imagined such a disturbance to have proceeded from so small a cause. There were doors opening and shutting, girls screaming, bells ringing; and there we all were, at last, trembling and shaking upon the staircase and landings—all but Patty Smith, who would not get out of bed.

“Dere’s de police!” exclaimed the Fraülein, all at once; and directly after we could hear Mrs Blunt and Miss Furness talking to some one out of their windows; while now there was a profound silence fallen upon the shivering group, and I shuddered as I recognised the deep-toned voice out of doors, and knew it to be that of one familiar with the interior of the grounds.

“Search the garden thoroughly, policeman,” cried Mrs Blunt, from one window.

“Who’s there?” squealed Miss Furness, loudly.

“Why, it’s me, mum,” said the policeman.

“Oh, yes—I know, my good man,” said Miss Furness; “but I mean who was out there?”

“I’m going to look, aint I?” growled the man. “But there aint nobody out here now, even if there was at all. I aint seen anybody in the road.”

I did feel so glad to hear what he said, for I was all in a shiver lest my poor boy should be caught.

“He’s gone, mum,” said the low fellow, after he had been away about five minutes. “Aint not a soul ’cept me in the garding. What had he been up to, mum?”

“Oh, it was a dreadful noise out there,” cried Mrs Blunt, from behind the curtains. “It sounded like some one smashing in the dining-room windows. Pray look, policeman.”

All this conversation sounded quite plain to us on the stairs, for Mrs Blunt’s door and window were both open; and then I could hear the policeman’s heavy step on the gravel, crunching and crackling as he trod on and began kicking about the pieces of Clara’s broken basin.

“Why, here’s some one been shying the chayney outer window,” said the policeman. “Here’s most half a wash-hand basin and a whole stodge of bits squandered all over the gravel walk. That’s what you heerd, mum. The window is right enough.”

“It did sound like that,” squeaked Miss Furness.

“And that’s what it was, mum, if there was none of this here out afore.”

“Oh, no, my good man,” cries Mrs Blunt, getting less fearful and more dignified every moment—“the paths were quite clear this evening.”

“Then it’s some of your young ladies been a havin’ a lark,” said the low fellow.

I turned round to whisper to Clara, but she was gone. Directly after, though, she slipped back to my side, and I whispered to her, laying my hand upon her arm—

“Had you not better tell? Say that it was an accident.”

“Hold your tongue,” she whispered, pinching me.

Then we shrank into the background, for I was afraid some one would notice how bulky our dressing-gowns looked; for, of course, we had not had time to undress again.

We heard the policeman promise to keep an eye on the place, and to call in the morning. Then we heard his footsteps on the gravel, and the pieces of china cracking, windows shut down, and orders for us to go back to our rooms, as there was nothing to fear; when, as we were ascending the stairs, Mrs Blunt’s nightcapped head was thrust out of the door, and we heard her exclaim—

“I’ll investigate this disgraceful trick in the morning, young ladies.”

I trembled for poor Clara—almost as much as I did for Achilles; for it seemed as though the poor girl was always to act as scapegoat; though, certainly, she really deserved to be in disgrace this time, for I begged her most earnestly not to throw out the water.

I would have given Clara half my basin with pleasure, if I could; but then, that would have been of no service. Judge, then, of my surprise when, after looking at Patty, fast asleep as if nothing had been the matter, I turned to Clara’s washstand, there was her basin, safe and sound, and the jug was standing in it!

As we upon the second floor all had small washstands and jugs and basins of the same pattern, I thought that, after all, she had taken mine; but she had not, nor yet Patty’s; and as she saw what I was looking at, she burst out laughing, and said—

“I slipped up and into the Fraülein’s room, and took hers; and now they may find out if they can. Of course, you won’t tell, darling? Promise me that.”

I felt so cross that I was ready to say I would; for I was disappointed, and though the thoughts of the meeting had taken away my appetite, now that it was not to be, I felt as hungry as possible. But it would have been cruel to have said anything, so, of course, I promised.

“Another disappointment for the poor French Verb,” whispered Clara, laughing.

“For shame,” I said, “to speak in so disrespectful a way.”

“But it does not much matter,” she said; “for he would have been afraid to climb up, when he found out really how high it was.”

“Don’t talk stuff!” I said; “he would get up if it were twice as high, for my sake. Why, look how Leander swam the Hellespont.”

“And I say,” cried Clara—laughing, and seeming in the highest of glee, which was too bad—“how cold and shivering he must have been when he got across. Bo-o-o-h?” she said, shuddering, “what a cold frog of a lover! I shouldn’t have liked that.”

“No,” I said, “you have no romance in your composition.”

“Haven’t I,” she said, “you don’t know; but I’m not so head over ears in love as you are.”

“Perhaps not,” I said, spitefully; “because you have no chance.”

“Pooh!” said Clara. “Why, I might have had Achille long before you came, if I had liked.”

“Perhaps, miss,” I exclaimed, with nothing more than reasonable anger, “the next time you mention that gentleman’s name you will prefix the Monsieur.”

“Certainly, ma’am,” said Clara, aggravating me with her mock courtesy.

“And whatever you do,” I said, “if you must tease, tell the truth.”

“That was the truth,” she replied.

“Don’t be such a wicked story,” I exclaimed. “I don’t believe it.”

I could not help thinking, after, that in my childish anger I had made use of childish language.

“I don’t care what you believe, and what you don’t believe,” said Clara, coolly; “and I’ve got—”

“If you young ladies are not silent this minute,” said Miss Furness, outside the door, “I shall be compelled to summon Mrs de Blount.”

As I lay wondering whether she had heard anything of our conversation, and what it was that Clara had got, and whether it was a letter Achille had sent her before I came, which I did not believe, and did not much care if he had, for he had not seen me then—Miss Furness stood listening at the door, while Clara would not answer my whispered questions, pretending to be offended; and I believe I heard Miss Furness sniff out in the cold passage just as I dropped off to sleep.

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## Chapter Sixteen.

### Memory the Sixteenth—Pangs.

I meant in the last chapter to have told a great deal more; but so many of my troubles and misadventures kept creeping in, that I did not get in one-half of what I intended. What pains I took to gain an interview—or, rather, to grant the poor fellow an interview, though it would have been to me the reaching of a green oasis in my journey across life’s desert, when, for a short time, the gentle palm branches would have waved, as it were, in gentle motion above our heads, while our cheeks would have been fanned by the gentle breath of love.

Of course there was a terrible to do about the basin in the morning, but it so happened, luckily, that the cat was not beneath our window, but beyond the Fraülein’s; so that in trying to reach it, Clara had thrown the basin for some distance, and right past our neighbour’s window. The Fraülein declared that she had never opened hers; and, poor woman, she opened her mouth into quite a round O when told that she must have thrown it out. There was nothing to cast suspicion upon us, for it was more likely to have been Celia Blang, on the other side of the Fraülein; and so, at last, the matter dropped, and we heard no more of it then.

But I had such a delightful treat two days after; for while we were going down the High Street, Miss Furness must turn faint, and have to be helped into the first house at hand, to sit down and rest, and that was Mrs Jackney’s, the milliner’s; and there we were, four or five of us at once, in the little parlour—dear Achille’s “apartment meublée,” as he called it. He was from home, giving lessons somewhere, no doubt; but while they were bathing Miss Furness’s face, and giving her sniffs of salts, and glasses of water to drink, I had such a look round the place, and saw his dear old boots in one corner—the pair, I was sure, he must put on for ease and comfort of a night; and I was so glad to see them, for, if, instead, I had caught sight of a nice, handsomely worked pair of slippers, they would have given me quite a pang. Now I felt that the task—no, the pleasure—was left for me.

Then there was a dear, duck of an old coat hanging behind the door; and such nice, funny little holes in the elbows,

where he had rested his arms upon the table while he studied; and there was his pipe, and two bits of cigars, and a few yellow paper-covered books, and one thing which did, I must own, make me feel a little uncomfortable, a scarlet and black smoking cap—at least, it had been scarlet once, and had evidently been made by a lady, and, of course, one would have liked to have known who was the maker.

At first, in remembrance of her bitter, teasing words, I thought that it might have been Clara; but it did not look new enough; for the scarlet was fast verging upon the black, and, no doubt, in a short time it would have been impossible to make out the pattern. But I was glad to see it; for it was a hint that Achille would soon require a new one, and I knew who would make it. However, I did not much care; and taking advantage of there being no one looking, I contrived to drop my handkerchief inside it; but directly after I trembled, and wanted to have it back again, for there was my name marked upon it in full, in ink, and I was afraid that his landlady, Mrs Jackney, might see it.

I had a good look at her, to see whether I need feel jealous, and found, to my great delight, that I need not; for she was worse in appearance than Miss Furness, but evidently a very pleasant body; though, all the same I should not have liked her to find my handkerchief. However, there was no getting it back; for Miss Furness was now able to sit up, and I was one of the first to be obliged to leave the room, and stand agonised in the passage, lest any one should find out what I had done. But nothing was seen, and I heard afterwards from Achille, in one of his notes—the best, I think, that he ever wrote to me—how fondly he prized the treasure; and I mentally declared that it was not a bad way of laying out the value of a pocket-handkerchief, and that he should soon have another.

It was all so horribly unfortunate. If we made an engagement to meet, something was sure to happen; while, in spite of the time that had now passed since the poor Signor left, not one short five minutes had poor Achille and I had together. It was enough to make me ever so fond and devoted; and though I might be trembling a little in my allegiance at one time, I was ready to become a martyr now for his sake. But, as I said before, the very fact of an assignation being made was the signal for, or precursor of, something to happen; so that, I'm sure, I was quite in a tremble, a few days after Miss Furness's faint, when Achille gave me a few lines inside De Porquet, telling me, in a few simple words, that he was again that night about to try his fortune, when he hoped I should be able to assist him to benefit the poor exiles, who were now in a great state of distress. No one, to have found that scrap of paper, would have imagined that it was anything more than a piece torn off to act as book-mark, and he gave me the book with it standing right out, so that Miss Furness could see it quite plainly as he passed it right under her nose, saying—

“I have put a piece of paper where you shall go on, Miss Bozerne.”

When I looked at it there was only hastily scrawled—

“Mercredi, une heure,” and “the poor suffer want—les pauvres ont besoin.”

That was all, and it really seemed to be a bit of exercise, and nothing else. But then, I had the key in my heart, and could read it as he meant; though truly it was an exercise for me to find means to overtop all difficulties and meet him. I knew what he meant well enough—just as well as if he had written four pages, crossed, in his own niggling, little, scripply, unintelligible, Frenchy hand. So I sat thinking of the six box cords tied together and hidden away in the bottom drawer, underneath my green silk, and tightly locked up to keep them from prying eyes.

Well, of course, I told Clara—though I may as well own that I really should not if I could have helped it. For she was anything but what I should have liked; and, of course, I did not care to be so teased. And there was my appetite so spoiled again that I could not eat, and poor me in such a fidget for the rest of the day, that I did not know what to do. I slipped upstairs three times to see if the cord was all right, and the knots tightly tied; and then, the last time, if I did not hear Miss Furness calling me, and come down in a flurry and leave the key in the drawer. I turned quite hot all over when I felt for it in my pocket, and was sure I had lost it somewhere; when if I could not get some more cord I should be stopped again. All at once I remembered that the thing must be stuck in the keyhole. So, as soon as the lesson with Miss Furness was over, I slipped to the back staircase, and was about halfway up, when I must meet that tiresome, fat, old Fraülein.

“Vots for you heere, Mees Bozerne?” croaked the tiresome old English killer. “Young ladies 'ave no beesness upstaer in de afternoon. Go you down.”

Of course I had to go down again, for I was breaking rules, and ought to have been at work at private study in the schoolroom till half an hour before tea-time.

“It's too bad,” I muttered, as I began to descend—“too bad to send me to a place like this, where one may not even go up to one's bedroom. I'm sure, I don't feel in the least bit like a school-girl.”

Just then I heard Miss Sloman calling the Fraülein to “Come here, dear!” They always called one another, “my love,” and “dear,” in private, though I'm sure no one could have been more unamiable, or looked more ready to scratch and call names. So the Fraülein again ordered me to go down, and then turned back, evidently to go to Miss Sloman: so, seizing the opportunity, I slipped down into the hall, and began bounding up the front stairs like lightning, when if I did not literally run up against Mrs Blunt, and strike her right in the chest with my head, just as she had come out of her room—for I was not looking, but, with head down, bounding up two stairs at a time.



It was a crash! Poor woman, she could not get breath to speak for some time. But, there, she was not the only one hurt; for that horrible twisted vulcanite coronet was driven right into my poor head, and pained me terribly.

“Ach ten!” cried the Fraülein, who had heard the crash and exclamation on both sides, and now came waddling up; “I told you go down, ten, Miss Bozerne, and you come up to knock de lady principal.”

So I was, without a word to say in defence, sent down in the most dreadful disgrace. But there was some fun in it, after all; for Clara vowed that the poor woman received such a shock that two of her bones—stay bones—were broken, and she nearly swallowed her teeth. But that Clara always would exaggerate so dreadfully; and, of course, that was not true.

I was not going to be threatened with medicine this time because my appetite was bad, so I kept one slice of bread and butter upon my plate to bite at, though it was almost enough to choke me; and then I managed to draw two more slices over the edge of my plate into my lap, where my pocket-handkerchief was spread all ready; and then I wrapped them up, when I thought that no one was looking, and put them in my pocket; and so tea was got over, and I thought what a long time it would be till midnight.

We were all standing in the middle of the classroom before getting our books out for the evening studies, when if Patty Smith did not come up to me, and, without waiting to see whether I would or not, exclaimed—

“Lend me your handkerchief, Laura, dear—I won’t keep it a moment!”

Seizing one end, which stuck out of my pocket, she gave it a snatch, when away it flew, and one piece of bread and butter was slung across the room, and struck Miss Furness in the face; while the other went flop up against the window behind her, stuck upon the pane for a moment, and then fell—leaving a buttery mark where it had been, as a matter of course. I declare I never felt so much ashamed in my life; while there were all the girls tittering and giggling, and Miss Furness wiping her face and scolding terribly about my dreadfully unladylike behaviour, though nothing could have been more humiliating than what followed, for I’m sure I wished there was not such a thing as a piece of bread and butter upon the face of the earth; for said Miss Furness—

“And now, Miss Bozerne, come and pick up those pieces.”

I would have given anything to have been able to refuse; but what could I do? I do not see how I could have helped it, for I really felt obliged; and there I was kneeling down, humbled and penitent, to pick it up; and there were the tiresome, buttery pieces, all broken up into crumbs here and crumbs there, all over the place.

“For your sake, Achille?” I murmured to myself; and that made me bear it until I had picked up all I could, and held the scraps upon a piece of exercise paper, wondering what I had better do with them.

“You had better wipe the butter off that window with your handkerchief, Miss Bozerne,” said Miss Furness, stiffly. “Oh! and it’s of no use for you to make up those indignant grimaces, and look like that, Miss Bozerne,” she continued, in her nasty, vinegary way. “If young ladies are so forgetful of decorum, and cannot be content with a fair share of food at the tea table, but must gluttonously stoop to steal pieces off the plate to devour at abnormal times, they must expect to be spoken to.”

Just as if I had taken the horrid stuff to eat, when so great was my agitation that I could partake of nothing. So there I was, with my face and neck burning in a most “abnormal” way, as Miss Furness would have called it, wiping and smearing the butter about over the pane of glass, and hardly seeing what I was doing for the tears; when there was that Patty Smith staring at me with her great saucer eyes, and her mouth made round and open, as if it had been another eye, and Clara the whole time enjoying it all, and laughing at my discomfort. It was really much too bad, for it was all her fault: the wicked, mischievous, impish creature had seen me put the pieces of bread and butter into my pocket, and had actually set Patty to snatch the handkerchief out.

“The plan succeeded beyond my expectations, darling,” she exclaimed afterwards, when we were alone; and I did

not slap her—which, without boasting, must, I think, show how forgiving a spirit I possess.

But, to return to the scene in the room. When I had finished smearing the window with my pretty little cambric handkerchief, I threw open the sash, and was going to fling out the little pieces of bread-crumbs for the poor little birds—

“Miss Bozerne!” exclaimed Miss Furness, “what are you about?”

“Going to give the crumbs to the birds, ma’am,” I said, humbly.

“Oh, dear me, no,” exclaimed the old puss, seizing upon what she considered a good opportunity for making an example of me, and giving a lesson to the other girls—for that seemed one of the aims of her life: to make lessons out of everything she said or did, till she was a perfect nuisance. “Oh, dear me, no—such waste cannot be allowed. Go and put the fragments upon one of the plates, which James or the cook will give you, and ask her to save them for your breakfast.”



I could have cried with vexation; but I did not, though it was very, very, very hard work to keep the tears back.

“Oh, Achille! Achille!” I murmured again, “c’est pour toi!”

I walked out, like a martyr, bearing the pieces, with bent-down eyes, and gave them to the cook, telling her she was to throw them to the chickens. For I would not have given Miss Furness’s message if she had stood behind me.

Oh, yes, it was nice fun for the other girls, and dearly they used to enjoy seeing me humbled, because I always was rather distant, and would not make confidantes of ever so many; and when I went back, there they were upon the giggle, and Miss Furness not trying to check them one bit, as she would have done upon another occasion—which shows how partial and unjust she could be when she liked. But I soon forgot it all, engrossed as I was with the idea of what was coming that night. As to my next day’s lessons, after sitting before them for an hour, I believe that I knew less about them than when I took out my books; for right up at the top of one of the panes in the buttery window there was a spider spinning its net, and that set me thinking about poor Achille hanging in a web, and the four old lesson grinders being spiders to devour him. For there was the nasty creepy thing hanging by one of its strings ever so far down, and that made me think about the coming night and the rope ladder, till I could, in my overwrought fancy, imagine I saw poor Achille bobbing and swinging about, and ready to go through one of the window-panes every moment. Sometimes the very thought of it made my face burn, and my hands turn hot and damp as could be inside, just as they felt when one had shaken hands with Miss Furness, whose palm, in feel, was for all the world like the tail of a cod-fish.

Sometimes during that evening I felt in misery, and, I believe, all owing to that spider, and thinking of the danger of the feat to perform which I had lured poor Achille. I would have given anything to have been able to beg of him not to attempt it.



“Poor fly,” I thought—“poor, beautiful, fluttering, brightly painted fly; and have I been the means of weaving a net to lure thee to destruction? Oh, wretch that I am!”

And so I went on for some time, just as people do in books when they are very bad in their emotions; and that is one advantage in reading, only emotions are so much more eloquent than they would be, say, in an ignorant, unlettered person; and really, be it pleasure or pain, it is as well to be refined and make a grand display; for it is so much more satisfactory, even if the audience consists of self alone. At times, though, I was so elated that I could feel my eyes flash and sparkle with the thoughts that rushed through my brain; when, as if reading my heart, Clara would creep close, and nip my arm, and keep on whispering—

“I’ll tell—I’ll tell.”

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## Chapter Seventeen.

### Memory the Seventeenth—In Dreadful Daring.

Bed-time at last, and me there, close shut up in our own room; but not before I had run to the end of the passage and tried the end door to see if it was open; and it was—it was! Clara was, after all said and done, nearly as much excited as poor I; and once she sighed, and said that she could almost have wished for the poor Signor to have been there, but I did not tell her I was very glad that he would not be. Then Miss Patty must want to know what we were whispering about, and declare that she would tell Miss Furness, for we were making fun of her; and turn huffy and cross, till she got into bed, and then lie staring with wide-open eyes at the window, just because we wanted her to go to sleep.

“Ma’s going to send me a cake on Toosday,” she said at last, after I had kissed and told her we were not laughing at her; and I must do her the credit of saying that she always was a most good-tempered creature, and never out of humour for long together. “And when my cake comes,” she continued, after five minutes’ thought, “I’ll spend fourpence in ginger beer, if you will each spend the same, and we’ll have a supper.”

“I do wish you would go to sleep, instead of keeping on bothering,” cried Clara.

“I dare say you do, Miss Consequence,” said Patty; “but I shall go to sleep when I like.”

And then, if she did not lie awake until nearly twelve, though we pretended to be both fast asleep, and would not answer any of her foolish, chattering questions, when, as usual, she began to snore; and after waiting until I felt quite sure that she was asleep, I jumped out of bed, and began to dress myself as quickly and quietly as possible. As soon as I had finished and then lain down once more, Clara got up too, and followed my example, even to the lying down again when she had finished; for it was too soon to go yet, and we both felt that it would be safer the nearer we were to the middle of the night; and of course one felt determined to do nothing this time to frustrate one’s designs.

We had tried more than once dressing in bed under the clothes, and, of course, lying down; but that really is such terribly hard work, as any one will find upon testing it, that we both soon gave it up, and waited till we felt sure of Patty being sound asleep; and she really was the heaviest sleeper I ever knew. So we both dressed in the dark; and that is bad enough, I can assure you—dreadfully awkward, for one gets one’s strings so crossed, and tied wrong, and in knots, and muddled about, till one is horribly uncomfortable, besides being twice as long as at any other time.

At last, I whispered to Clara that it was time to go, but there was no answer; and on getting off the bed and touching her, she quite started. For she had been asleep, and when I reproached her—

“Well, of course,” she said, peevishly; “it’s sleeping time, is it not?”

But she roused up directly after, and stood by my side, as I went down upon my knees by the bottom drawer, and tried to pull it out very gently, without making any noise, so as to get at the cord. For the key was in it all right when I came up, and I thought that I would leave it there, though I was all in a fidget for fear any one had been in and looked and seen the cord, while Patty was so curious that I dare not look to see; though if any one had taken it away, what should I have done?

“Cree-ea-ea-ea-eak,” went the drawer as soon as I pulled it, after the lock had shot back with a loud noise like a small pistol; and at this dreadful sound I stopped and turned cold all down my back; for I felt sure that the Fraülein would hear it. So there I knelt upon the floor, trembling like a leaf, and not daring to move; for Clara cried “Hush!” very loudly, and I’m sure I did not know what would come next. In fact, I almost expected to see the bedroom door open, and the Fraülein standing there.

“You should have put some soap upon it,” whispered Clara.

“Yes, same as you did upon the basin,” I said, viciously, and that silenced her; though I believe the mischievous thing was chuckling to herself all the while.

At last, after five minutes had passed, which seemed like as many hours, everything was quite still, so I gave the drawer another pull.

“Craw-aw-aw-aw-awk,” it went, louder than before, and as if on purpose to annoy me; but I was so desperate that I gave the thing a horrible snatch, and pulled it out far enough, when I pushed in my hand and drew out the cord, hardly expecting to find it; but there it was, all right, and holding it tightly, I still knelt there trembling.

“Er-tchisher—er-tchisher,” came now, as loudly as possible, from Patty Smith’s bed; and then we heard the tiresome thing turn on one side.

We waited a little, and then I rose, and stood close to the door, waiting for Clara to join me; when if the stupid thing

did not forget all about my open drawer, which I dare not attempt to close, and went blundering over it, making such a dreadful noise, that I rushed into bed and covered myself up; and, from the scuffling noise, I knew that she had done the same, for it was too dark to see.

“Oh, my shins!” said Clara, in a whisper.

Then I could hear her rubbing and laughing, not that I could see anything to laugh at; while if the Fraülein did not tap at the wall because we were so noisy, and with disappointment gnawing me, I knew that we must not stir for at least another half-hour, when it was quite late enough as it was.

“Oh, what a comfort it is that Patty is such a sleeper!” I thought to myself. And there I lay—wait, wait, wait, until I felt that we dared move, when I again cautiously slipped to the door, and, as I had taken the precaution of rubbing it well with pomatum, the lock went easy. Clara joined me, and then, drawing the door after us, we glided along the passage, hand in hand, listening at every step until we reached the end, where the empty room door was ajar, just as I had left it when we came up to bed. Then we slipped in so quietly that we hardly heard ourselves, and, pushing-to the door, I tried to secure it, but it would not fasten without making a noise; so, as we were right away from the other rooms, I left it, and went across and tried the window.

The hasp went rather hard, but I soon had it gliding up; and then I stood looking out into the dark night, and listening, till I heard a little soft cough from below, which I answered; when my heart began to beat very fast, for I knew that, after all, we were not too late, and he was there.

But there was no time to lose, and, as fast as I could, I undid the nasty tangley cord, which would keep getting itself in knots, and rustling about upon the floor, like a great, long, coiling snake. But I managed at last to have it hanging down, and began fishing about, like I used at Teddington, with papa, till I got a bite; for, after a bit, I felt it softly tugged at—just like the eels under the fishing punt—then it went jig, jig, two or three times, as it was shaken about, and then there was a long jerk, and a soft cough, as if for a signal; and I began to pull up something which grew heavier every moment.

It seemed very long, and I could have fancied that I had pulled all the cord in twice over; but more still kept coming, and I must have had it all close to the window, when Clara suddenly cried “Oh!” when, of course, I started and let go, and down it all went with a rush in amongst the carnations at the bottom.

“Oh, his poor head?” I thought, as I turned sharply round; when, what a task I did have to keep from shrieking!—for there, dimly seen in the open doorway, stood a figure in white, staring at us in the most dreadful way imaginable. There was something so still, and tall, and ghastly about the figure, seen there in the gloom, that I could not stir, neither could poor Clara, as we held tightly by one another while the thing glided softly into the room, closed the door, and stood there staring.

If I could only have sunk through the floor, I would not have cared. One moment I thought of rushing into one of the empty beds in the room; but I restrained myself, because there were no clothes upon them in which to bury oneself. The next moment I was for jumping out of the window to Achille; but it was too far; and we neither of us dared to go into hysterics and scream for help. So that we stood, frightened to death, till Clara sank down at my feet and buried her face in my lap, while I stood staring at the figure, which now came closer and closer as I walked away, Clara shuffling upon her knees to keep up to me.



For a moment I thought that it might have been a teacher *en déshabille*; but the horrible silence soon showed that it was not. And at last, when I felt that I could bear no more, but must scream, having been walked right up to the wall by the hideous thing, it spoke, and the words seemed to act upon us both like magic, sending the blood coursing through our veins, making our hearts throb, and a warm glow to return where a moment before all was frozen and chilling; for just as I was sinking—feeling myself gliding slowly down upon kneeling Clara—I started up, for it said, in a



loud, thrilling whisper—

“What are you two a-doing of?”

Then it sneezed.

Of course it was Patty Smith, who had pretended to be asleep, and watched all the time, following us along the passage, and thoroughly upsetting all one’s plans again. She could see plainly enough that we had the window open, and knew pretty well what was taking place; so we had to make a virtue of necessity, and tell her, in as few words as possible, all about it. Not that I think she would have told tales, even if we had not enlightened her; but we knew she would watch us, and find out for herself; so upon the principle of its being better to make a friend than an enemy, she was told all.

“Won’t you make your cold worse, dear?” said Clara. “You are not dressed.”

“I don’t care,” said the stupid thing; and then she stopped, while I went to the window again; and though I had lost my string, and knew that it was of no use to try any more that night, I gave a gentle cough and then waited a moment. I was about to cough again, but Patty, who was close behind me, sneezed once more loudly; and at last, after waiting a few minutes and coughing again and again, Clara and Patty both grumbled so about the cold that I was obliged reluctantly to close the window. After waiting for awhile, we one by one stole back to the bedroom, where Patty declared that it was such good fun, and that she would go with us next time—just as if we wanted her; while poor I laid my cheek upon my pillow, disappointed, disconsolate, and upset to such a degree that I could do nothing else but have a good quiet cry for I don’t know how long; but I know how wet my pillow grew, so that at last I was obliged to turn it before I could get to sleep.

And what was the use of going to sleep, to be in such trouble that I did not know what to do—dreams, dreams, dreams, and all of such a horrible kind! Now it was Achille in danger, now it was the white figure coming in at the door, and one moment Patty Smith, and then changing into Mrs Blunt and Miss Furness, Miss Sloman and the Fraülein; while, last of all, if it was not mamma, looking dreadfully cross, and then scolding me for my bad behaviour. Oh, it was terrible! And I don’t think that I ever before passed such a night.

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## Chapter Eighteen.

### Memory the Eighteenth—In Terrible Suspense.

My spirits rose a little after breakfast the next morning, though I only smiled sadly as I thought of my many disappointments; but we had had a long talk with Patty, and she had faithfully promised never, upon any consideration, to divulge one of our secrets. Of course I did not like making another confidante; but, under the circumstances, what could one do?

“Ah!” said Patty; “but it was a great shame that you did not tell me before.”

“Why, we should have told you,” said Clara—a wicked storyteller—“only you do sleep so soundly, dear.”

Though, after all, perhaps that was nearly the truth; for, if she had not slept so soundly, we should have been obliged to let her into our secrets sooner.

This satisfied her, but it did not satisfy me; for the stupid creature must go about looking so knowing, and cunning, and deep, and laugh and leer at Clara, and nod and wink at me, all day long, till it was dreadfully aggravating, and enough to make anybody suspicious; and I almost wonder that one of the watchful dragons did not have something to say about it.

“Why, we shall be obliged to have her in the room all the time,” I said to Clara, as I was thinking of my next interview with Achille; that is, if I ever was to have another.

“Never mind, dear,” replied Clara; “it cannot matter much. She is very stupid, and I daresay that I can keep her in order.”

I contrived to let Achille know all when he came the next day, and gave him to understand that he might try again upon any night he liked; for the last was only a false alarm, and all would have gone well had I but only held tightly by the cord. I gave him the information, written in French, at the top of my exercise, while Miss Furness was in the room, when if he had not the audacity to call me up to his elbow—for he had seen it all in an instant—and if he did not point out and mark two or three mistakes in the note I had scribbled so hastily at the top about the last meeting. However, I suppose he wished me to speak his own language correctly; and none but the brave deserve the fair.

There was one thing, though, in our correspondence which I did not like—poor Achille never could take any interest in our English poets; so that, if one quoted a bit of Byron or Moore to him, it was good for nothing, while he, the tiresome man, was always filling up his notes with scraps of Molière, and I am sure I always praised them, and said that they were very beautiful.

And now once more came the night for meeting, with all its heart-throbbing flurry and excitement; but this time, apparently, without any of the terrible contretemps that had previously troubled us. Patty was in high glee, and sat on the edge of her bedstead, munching an Abernethy biscuit, and grinning; while her great eyes, instead of half closing, like anybody else’s would when they were laughing, became more round and wide open than ever. It seemed to be capital fun to her, and over and over again, when I glanced at her, she was giggling and laughing; and I do believe that, if I had not been there, she would have got up and danced about the room.

But it was time to start at last, and upon this occasion I had no noisy drawer to open, for I had a ball of new, stout string in my pocket. So, one at a time, we glided along the passage, Clara going first, Patty second, and I followed behind, to close our door as quietly as was possible.

“Pat, pat, pat,” and, with a gentle rustle, we passed along the passage, and stood at last in the little end room, while I am sure that no one could have heard our footsteps.

Clara made one effort to get rid of Patty before we started, but it was of no avail.

“Arn’t you afraid of catching a worse cold?” she said; “hadn’t you better stay in the bedroom, dear?”

For really she had a most miserable cold, and her eyes and nose looked as red as red.

“I sha’n’t catch any more cold than you will,” she cried, just as she had once before upon a similar occasion—“I want to see all the fun.”

Fancy calling it fun!

So we were obliged to suffer her presence; but I am afraid that I was uncharitable enough to wish that she might catch a bad sore throat for her pains, or else something that would keep her from coming again.

However, there we all were; and as soon as ever we were all in the little room, I secured the door with a fork that I had brought for the purpose, and then, pulling out my string, I unfastened the window, when, fortunately, it glided up beautifully.

Clara was the first to look out, and it not being a dark night, she popped in again directly, saying in a whisper—

“There he is. I can see him.”

“Let me look,” cried Patty Smith, quite out loud; and then, when her head was out of the window, if she did not give quite a loud cough, in not only a most indiscreet way, but, really, one that was most reprehensible.

I pulled her back as quickly as I could, and, in a whisper, gave her a good scolding. Then I tied my scissors to the end of the string, to make it go down quickly, and swinging them over the great ledge, I looked down; but I could not see poor Achille, for he had come close up to the house, and was, of course, out of sight beneath the cornice.

“But I shall see him soon,” I said to myself; and went on letting down the scissors till the string felt slack, and I knew that they touched the ground, when, just as before, I felt the string seized and jerked about, as if being attached to something; and well I knew what, though a half-fear took hold upon me now lest it should break the string, which was not so strong as I could have wished.

But now there was the signal; and I began to pull up the heavy rope ladder, cutting my poor little fingers with the string. At first it came up pretty quickly, but soon slower, for again it began to grow heavier; and at last, when I made sure that it must be nearly up, if it must not turn contrary against us, and catch against the cornice, and remain immovable.

What was I to do? It was of no use to pull and jerk; for, if we had pulled any harder, I’m sure that the string must have broken. If it had not been for Clara, I should have climbed out of the window, and stood upon the cornice, to set it at liberty, for she could easily have held my hand, so that I should really have been quite safe.

But she would not hear of this, and I don’t know what I should have done if I had not thought of lowering the ladder down a little way, and then trying again, when, to my great delight, up it came, and Clara soon had hold of a pair of great iron hooks, just the sort of hooks I expected to see; and on fixing them upon the sill, my side, we found that they fitted beautifully; so I threw myself upon them to hold them in their places, lest they should slip.

Just after that there was a sharp rustle of the rope, and then it was pulled tight; while now, making Clara hold one hook and Patty the other, I strained out as far as I could reach, so that I could see Achille mounting, slowly ascending, the dangerous thing; and, although we all held on as tightly as we could, when he was about a dozen feet from the ground the tiresome rope began to twist and spin round and round, so that the poor fellow was twisting just as if he was being roasted, and I’m sure he must have been as giddy as giddy.

Fortunately for him, he did not always go the same way round, but twisted back again, or else he must have dropped off. It was not as if he had been close up to the house, for then he could have touched the wall and stopped himself; but the cornice, which was a good width, kept him away, so that he swung clear. And perhaps, after all, it was quite as well, for he might else have gone right through one of the windows.

It was very shuddery and dreadful; but we poor girls could do nothing but grasp the rope and hold our breath, and, as Clara said, hold our tongues; though Patty would keep letting go, and staring out of the window when she was not wanted to.

“Won’t I tease him about this,” she said. “Only see, the first time he finds fault with my exercises.”

“Hush! you foolish child,” I exclaimed. “Good gracious me! you must never say a word to him about it, under any consideration.”

“Mustn’t I?” said Patty, as innocently as could be.

“No, of course not,” cried Clara; “that would ruin everything.”

For I was now reaching as far as could be out of the window, to see what poor Achille was about; for the rope seemed to be doing nothing, and did not jerk as if he was getting higher and higher. And then, oh, dear! if I could not just see one of his feet where his head was last time I looked; for he was sitting upon the sill of the first floor window—the best bedroom, which was, of course, empty—and, I suppose, resting himself.

All at once, though, I heard him whisper—

“Is de ting sauf?”

“Yes, yes,” I whispered in reply.

And then the rope crunched upon the cornice, as if he had again committed to it his weight, when I drew in my head and waited, trembling, for him to reach the window; and it did seem such a long time to come so short a distance; but, as he told me afterwards, the loops would keep slipping away when he wanted to put his feet in them, besides the rope spinning him round until he was giddy. At last I looked out again, and then drew back my head in agony; for if he was not hanging by one leg, head downwards, just like my poor Dick, the canary, did in London, when it caught its claw in the wire of the cage and could not get loose.



As I said, I drew in my head, quite in an agony of fear; but the rope jerked about so that I was obliged to gaze once more, and then I ejaculated, quite loudly—

“Oh, Achille!”

“Eh, yais, oui,” he exclaimed. “I ’ave put in mine’s foot.”

“In what—in what, mon cher?” I whispered.

“Oh,” he gasped, in a thick voice, “mais je suis giddy. I ’ave puts my foot trou de loops, and cannot get him back.”

“Oh, pray come in!” cried Clara, who had heard every word, and seemed quite horrified—“pray come in and shut the window. Let’s go away.”

“Oh, nonsense,” I said, “he will be hung: he will die! His head is hanging down, and his leg sticking up in the rope. He has slipped. Whatever shall we do?”

“Why don’t you cut the rope?” said Patty; but of course no one took any notice of her.

“Let’s unhook the things,” whispered Clara, “and then drop him down into the laurustinus.”

“Oh, how can you be so stupid!” I panted. “It would kill him: he’s right above the first floor window-sill.”

“Well, but we can’t shut the window with those things there,” said Clara; “and it will not do to be found out.”

I looked again, and there he still was twirling round just as if he was being roasted, and the rope shaking so that I thought it must break. I kept whispering to him, but he did not hear me; and just dim and indistinctly as he was seen, I could make out that he was trying to double himself up and get his hands to the rope.

I never, I’m sure, felt anything so dreadful before in my life as those few moments when he was struggling there, and me unable to help him; for, in addition to the horror, there was the pricking of my conscience, as it told me that this

was all my fault, and that if he was killed I should have murdered him. Which was very dreadful, you know, when that last affair of the cistern, which he escaped from with a fearful drenching, ought to have been a warning to me to have spared him from running any more risks on my behalf.

I declare that I should have tried to slide down the rope to help him, or else to share his fate, if Clara had not restrained me once more; but she kept tightly hold of my waist, till there came up a sound like the gnashing together of teeth, the rope gave a terrible shake, and the iron hooks fell jingling upon the floor.

There was a crashing and rustling of leaves and branches, as if a heavy body had fallen amongst trees, and then all was still, except for a deep groan—a French groan—which came up, thrilling us all horribly; for the rope had come unfastened, and had slipped through the round rings of the hooks.

We all stood aghast for a few minutes; but at last I summoned up courage enough to lean out, and whisper loudly—

“Achille! mon ami Achille!” when, as if in answer, came a most doleful “H-ooo, o-o-o, ho-o-o-o!” which made one’s very blood run cold.

“That’s only an owl,” said Clara, the next minute.

“A howl!” said Patty; “that it wasn’t, it was a groan, just the same as the pigs give when they’re dying in our slaughter-house at home.”

I leaned out of the window as far as I could, once more, and was trying to pierce the darkness below, when all at once I heard a window to the right opening very gently, and squeaking as it ran up, and that window, I felt sure, was the lady principal’s; so, recollecting the night of the alarm from Clara’s basin—agonised though I was—I felt obliged to close ours quietly, pick up the two hooks, and then we all three glided back to our room—my heart chiding me the while for forsaking poor Achille in such a time of dire distress. But what could I do? To stay or to raise an alarm was to be found out, and perhaps—ay, perhaps!—poor fellow, he was not hurt, after all.

It was just as well that we did slip back, for we had hardly closed the door before the alarm bell on the top of the house began to ring, and we heard the Fraülein spring out of bed with a regular bump upon the floor.

We were not many seconds scuffling into bed; and, just as we lay down, we heard the Fraülein’s door open, and then there were voices talking and a good deal of buzzing about, for quite half an hour. But we thought it better not to go out; for, when Clara took a peep, Miss Furness was hunting several of the girls back into their rooms with—

“Nothing the matter, young ladies. Back to your dormitories.”

So we lay quite still, and listened; while I essayed to allay my horrible fears about poor Achille, and tried to fancy that every sigh of the wind among the branches was him stealing—no, I won’t say stealing, it looks so bad—hurrying away. Then we heard the Fraülein come in, and her bed creak loudly as she lay down; and once more all was quiet, and I felt sure that they could not have seen or heard anything, but I dared not get up once more to see. Clara said she was sure she heard Mrs Blunt talking to the policeman out of the window again. Perhaps she did, but I did not; though it was most likely, after the ringing of the alarm bell.

“What are you sobbing for?” said Clara, all at once.

“Oh, I know he’s killed,” I said.

“Pooh, nonsense,” she replied, in her unfeeling way, “he only went plop among the bushes; and they say exiles always manage to fall on their feet when they come to England, just like cats. He is not hurt, unless he has scratched that beautiful face of his a little bit.”

“Then you don’t think he is killed, dear?” I said, seeking for comfort, alas! where I was but little likely to find it, I’m sorry to say.

“Not I,” said Clara; “it was not far enough to fall.”

“I sha’n’t go no more,” drawled Patty; “it ain’t half such fun as I thought it was. Why didn’t he come right up?”

“Don’t be such a goose!” cried Clara to the noodle. “Why, didn’t he get his leg caught, and then didn’t the rope give way?”

“I’m sure I dunno,” said Patty, yawning; and then, in spite of all the trouble, we all dropped off fast asleep.

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## Chapter Nineteen.

### Memory the Nineteenth—Our New Guardian.

For a few moments after I woke I could not make out what made me feel so heavy and dull. Of course, it was partly owing to their ringing that stupid bell down in the hall so early, for fear we should have a morsel too much sleep; but all at once, as upon other occasions, I remembered about the previous night and poor Achille; when, of course, the first thing I did was to rush to the window and throw it up, to try and catch a glimpse of the scene of the last night’s peril, when the first thing my eyes rested upon was that horrid Miss Furness taking her constitutional, and, of course, as soon as she saw me she must shake her finger angrily, because I appeared at the window with my hair all tumbled. I never saw anything like that woman. I always did compare her to an old puss, for she seemed as if she

could do without sleep, and always got up at such unnatural hours in the morning, even when the weather was cold and dark, and wet, when it seemed her delight to go out splashing and puddling about in her goloshes; and somehow, or another, she never seemed to catch cold as anybody else would if she had acted in the same way. It must have cost her half her salary for green silk umbrellas; for James generally managed to spoil every one's umbrella when they were given him to dry, and Miss Furness never would use any but the neatest and most genteel-looking parapluies, being the only thing in which she displayed good taste.

Of course I had a good look out as soon as I was quite ready to go down, when I could see that the flower bed was a great deal trampled, one of the bushes was quite crushed, so that I knew there would be a terrible to do about it as soon as it was noticed.

"Well, is he there?" said Clara, "or is it only his pieces? Do make haste down, and run and secure his heart, before they pick it up, and put it on a barrow to wheel away."

"La!" said wide-open-mouthed Patty, staring; "he would not break, would he?"

"Oh, yes," replied Clara. "French gentlemen are very fickle and brittle, so I should not at all wonder if he broke."

"Better break himself than the jam pots," I said, spitefully, when Clara coloured up terribly, as she always did when the Signor was in any way alluded to; for though I did not like to hurt her feelings about the jam when she was shut up, of course, she had not been at liberty long before she heard all about it I know it was mean on my part to retaliate as I did, but then she had no business to speak in that way; for it was too bad to make fun out of such trouble. Then, of course, she must turn quite huffy and cross, and go down without speaking; for some people never can bear to be joked themselves, even when their sole delight consists in tormenting other people.

I could not but think that poor Achille had escaped unhurt, though at times I went through the same suffering as I did on the morning after the discovery in the conservatory;—and really, when one comes to think of it, it is wonderful that no suspicion ever attached to either Achille or myself over that dreadful set-out. Breakfast over, I seemed to revive a little; though I must confess that what roused me more than anything was Miss Furness finding out that I looked pale and red-eyed, and saying that she thought I required medicine.

"For you know, Miss Bozerne, a little foresight is often the means of arresting a dangerous illness; so I think I shall call Mrs de Blount's attention to your state."

"Oh, please, don't, ma'am," I said. "I assure you that I feel particularly well this morning."

But she only gave one of her self-satisfied smiles and bows; when in came the tall footman to say that the gardener wished to speak with "missus."

"Missus" was not there, so the footman went elsewhere to find her; but the very mention of that gardener brought my heart to my mouth, as people say; though I really wonder whether that is true—I should like to know. Then I had a fit of trembling, for I made sure that he had found poor Achille, lying where he had crawled, with all his bones broken, in some out-of-the-way corner of the garden; perhaps, possibly, to slake his fevered thirst in my favoured spot, close by the ferns, and the miserable fountain that never played, green and damp beneath the trees.

But I could not afford to think; for just then the door was opened, and Mrs Blunt stood with it ajar, talking to the gardener in the hall, and of course I wanted to catch what he said; when, just as if out of aggravation, the girls made a terrible buzzing noise. But I heard enough to tell me that it was all about the past night, and I caught a word here and there about bushes broken, and big footsteps, and trampled, and so on; while, as a conclusion to a conversation which had roused my spirits by telling me that poor Achille had not been found, Mrs Blunt placed a terrible damper upon all by saying—

"It must have been the policeman, gardener; and he shall be spoken to respecting being more careful. But for the future we'll have a big dog, and he shall be let loose in the garden every night."

I could have rained down tears upon my exercises, and washed out the ink from the paper, when I heard those words; for in imagination, like some gladiator of old, in the brutal arena, gazed upon by Roman maids and matrons, when battling with some fierce wild beast of the forest, I saw poor Achille struggling with a deep-mouthed, fang-toothed, steel-jawed bloodhound, fighting valiantly to have but a minute's interview with me; while, dissolving-view-like, the scene seemed to change, and I saw him, torn and bleeding, expiring fast, and blessing me with his last words as his eyes closed. Then I was planting flowers upon his grave, watering them with my tears, and plaiting a wreath of immortelles to hang upon one corner of the stone that bore his name, ere I departed for Guisnes to take the veil and shut myself for ever from a world that had been to me one of woe and desolation.

"Oh, Achille! beloved, martyred Achille!" I muttered, with my eyes closed to keep in the tears, when I was snatched back to the realities of the present by the voice of Miss Furness, who snappishly exclaimed—

"Perhaps you had better go and lie down for an hour, Miss Bozerne, if you cannot get on with your exercise without taking a nap in between the lines."

I sighed—oh, so bitter and despairing a sigh!—and then went on with my task, sadly, sorrowfully, and telling myself that all was indeed now lost, and 'twere vain to battle with fate, and I must learn to sit and sorrow till the sun should shine upon our love.

The dog came.

Such a wretch! I'm sure no one ever before possessed such a horrible, mongrel creature. Instead of being a large,

noble-looking mastiff or hound, or Newfoundland dog, it was a descendant, I feel convinced, of the celebrated Snarleywow that used to bite poor Smallbones, and devour his dinner. It was one of those dogs that you cannot pet for love, because they are so disagreeable, nor from fear, because they will not let you; for every advance made was met by a display of teeth; while if you bribed it with nice pieces of bread, they were snapped from your hand, and the escapes of your fingers were miraculous. I should have liked to have poisoned the nasty, fierce thing; but, of course, I dared not attempt such a deed. And what surprised me was Mrs Blunt being able to get one so soon, though the reason was plain enough—the wretch had belonged to a neighbour who was only too glad to get rid of it, and hearing that Mrs Blunt wanted a dog, jumped at the chance, and I know he must have gone away laughing and chuckling. We used to call the horrid wretch Cyclops, for he had only one eye; but such an eye! a fiery red orb, that seemed to burn, while the wretch was as big almost as a calf. I knew that poor Achille would never dare any more adventures now for my sake; and it did seem such cruel work, for a whole fortnight had passed since I had heard from or seen him, for when the lesson was due after our last adventure, there came a note from Mrs Jackney's, saying that Monsieur de Tiraille had been taken ill the night before, and was now confined to his bed.

Only think! confined to his bed, and poor Laura unable to go to him to tend him, to comfort him, and smooth his pillow, at a time when he was in such a state of suffering, and all through me—all for my sake! I'm sure I was very much to be pitied, though no one seemed to care; while as for Clara, she grew unbearable, doing nothing but laugh.

Oh, yes, I knew well enough what was the matter, and so did two more; but, to make matters ten hundred times more aggravating, that lean Miss Furness must go about sighing, and saying that it was a bilious attack, and that England did not agree with Monsieur Achille like la belle France; and making believe that she was entirely in his confidence, when I don't believe that he had done more than send word to Mrs Blunt herself. And then, as if out of sympathy, Miss Furness must needs make a fuss, and get permission to take the French class—she with her horrid, abominable accent, which was as much like pure French as a penny trumpet is like Sims Reeves's G above the stave.

"Oh, yes," she said, "she should be only too happy to take the class while poor Monsieur Achille was ill."

And one way and another, the old fright made me so vexed that I should have liked to make her jealous by showing her one of Achille's letters.

So, as I said before we had a dog in the place; and, oh, such a wretch! I'm sure that no one ever before saw such a beast, and there it was baying and howling the whole night through.



The very first day he came to inhabit the smart green kennel that Mrs Blunt had had bought, he worked his collar over his ears and got loose, driving the gardener nearly mad with the pranks he played amongst the flowers; when who should come but poor meek, quiet, innocent, tame Monsieur de Kittville. The wretch made at him, seizing him by the leg of his trousers; but how he ever did it without taking out a bit of his leg I can't make out, for his things were always dreadfully tight; and there was the wretch of a dog hanging on and dragging back, snarling the while, and the poor little dancing master defending himself with his fiddle, and shrieking out—

"Brigand! Cochon! Diable de chien! Hola, ho! Au secours! I shall be déchiré! Call off te tog!"

And at every word he banged the great beast upon the head with the little fiddle, till it was broken all to bits; but still the dog held on, until the gardener and James ran to his assistance.

"He won't hurt you, sir," said the great, tall, stupid footman, grinning.

"But he ayve hurt me, dreadful," cried the poor dancing master, capering about upon the gravel, and then stooping to tie his handkerchief over his leg, to hide the place where the dog had taken out a piece of the cloth, and was now coolly lying down and tearing it to pieces. "I am hurt! I am scare—I am fright horrible!" cried poor Monsieur de Kittville; "and my nerves and strings—oh, my nerves and strings—and my leetle feetle shall be broken all to pieces. Ah, Madame Bloont, Madame Bloont, why you keep such monster savage to attack vos amis? I shall not dare come for give lessons. I am ver bad, ver bad indeed."

"Oh, dear, oh, dear! how can I sufficiently apologise?" exclaimed Mrs Blunt, who had hurried up, and now began tapping the great dog upon the head with her fan. "I am so extremely sorry, Monsieur de Kittville. Naughty dog, then, to try and bite its mistress's friends."

"Aha, madame," said the poor little man, forgetting his trouble in his excessive politeness and gallantry—"mais ce n'est rien; just nosing at all; but I am agitate. If you will give me one leetle glass wine, I shall nevere forget your bonté."

"Oh, yes, yes—pray come in," said Mrs Blunt.

And then we all came round the poor, trembling little martyr; and although we could not help laughing, yet all the while we pitied the good-tempered, inoffensive little man, till he had had his glass of wine and gone away; for, of course, he gave no lesson that day, and I must chronicle the fact that Mrs Blunt gave him a guinea towards buying a new instrument.

"But, oh, Clara," I said, when we were alone, "suppose that had been poor Achille?"

"Oh, what's the good of supposing?" said Clara, pettishly. "It was not him, and that ought to be enough."

"But it might have been, though," I said; "and then, only think!"

"Think," said Clara, "oh, yes, I'll think. Why, he is sure to have him some day."

"Don't dear, pray," I said.

"And then," continued Clara, "he'll fight the dog, and kill him as King Richard did the lion."

"Oh, please, don't tease," I said humbly; "I wonder how he is."

"Miss Furness says he is better," said Clara.

"How dare Miss Furness know?" I cried, indignantly.

"Dear me! How jealous we are!" she said, in her vulgar, tantalising way. "How should I know?"

And, for the daughter of a titled lady, it was quite disgusting to hear of what common language she made use.

"I don't believe that she knows a single bit about it at all," I said, angrily; for it did seem so exasperating and strange for that old thing to know, while somebody else, whom he had promised to make—but there, I am not at liberty to say what he had promised.

"You may depend upon one thing," said Clara, "and that is that your Achille will not be invulnerable to dogs' bites; though, even if he is, he will be tender in the heel, which is the first part that he will show Mr Cyclops, if he comes. But you will see if he does not take good care not to come upon these grounds after dark—that is, as soon as he knows about the dog. By-the-by, dear, what a dislike the dog seems to have to anything French."

"I'd kill the wretch if it bit him," I said.

Clara laughed as if she did not believe me.

"I would," I said; "but I'll take care somehow to warn him, so that he shall run no such risks. For I would not have him bitten for the world."

"Of course not—a darling?" said Clara, mockingly.

And then no more was said.

But matters went unfortunately, and I had no opportunity for warning poor Achille, who was attacked in his turn by the wretch of a dog—who really seemed, as Clara said, to have a dislike to everything French; while, by a kind of clairvoyance, the brute must have known that poor Achille was coming. For, by a strange coincidence—not the first either that occurred during my stay at the Cedars—the creature managed to get loose, and lay in wait just outside the shrubbery until *he* came, when he flew at him furiously, as I will tell.

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## Chapter Twenty.

### Memory the Twentieth—The New Prisoner.

I had no idea that Achille was well enough to go on with the lessons, neither had anybody in the house; for Miss Furness had just summoned us all to the French class, and my mind was, to a certain extent, free from care and pre-occupation, when I heard a most horrible snarling and yelling, and crying for help. Of course I darted in agony to the

window, when it was just as I had anticipated—just as I knew, by means of the electric current existing between our hearts—Achille was in peril; for the horrible dog had attacked him, and there he was in full flight.

As I reached the window, the wretch leaped upon him, seizing his coat, and tearing away a great piece of the skirt; but the next moment poor Achille made a bound, and caught at one of the boughs of the cedar he was beneath; and there he hung, with the horrible dog snapping and jumping at his toes every time they came low enough.



It was too bad of Clara, and whatever else I may look over, I can never forgive this; for she laughed out loudly in the most heartless way, and that set all the other girls off wildly, though Miss Furness, as soon as she saw what had happened, began to scream, and ran out of the room.

Only to think of it, for them all to be laughing, when the poor fellow must have been in agony! Now he contracted, now he hung down; then he drew himself up again, so that the dog could not reach him; but then, I suppose, from utter weariness, his poor legs dropped down again, and the vicious brute jumped at them, when of course poor Achille snatched them up again—who wouldn't?—just as if he had been made of india-rubber, so Clara said. Such a shame, laughing at anyone when in torment! It was quite excruciating to see the poor fellow; and if I had dared I should have seized the poker and gone to his assistance. But, then, I was so horribly afraid of the wretched dog myself that I could not have gone near it; and there poor Achille still hung, suffering as it were a very martyrdom, with the dog snap, snap, snapping at his toes, so that I felt sure he would either be killed or frightfully torn. All at once, for I really could not keep it back, I gave a most horrible shriek, for though James was running to get hold of the dog, he was too late.

The beast—the dog I mean, not James—had taken advantage of poor Achille's weariness, leaped up and seized him by one boot, when nature could bear no more weight, and I saw the unhappy sufferer fall right upon the dog; when there was a scuffle and noise of contention, and the cowardly animal ran yelping and limping off upon three legs; while Achille, looking pale and furious, stood straightening and brushing his clothes, and trying to put himself in a fit state to pay his visit.

That was the last I saw; for the next thing I remember is Mrs Blunt calling me a foolish, excitable girl; and they were sopping my face with cold water, making my hair all in such a wet mess, and the salts they held close to my nose were so strong that they nearly choked me.

"There, leave her now, young ladies, she is getting better," said Mrs Blunt; for the horrible sick sensation was certainly going off, and I began to awaken to the feeling that Achille was safe. Then it struck me all at once that I must have fainted away from what I had seen, and the thoughts of those around being suspicious nerved me to rouse myself up and hide my confusion.

They wanted me to give up my French lesson that morning, but I declared that I was so much better that they let me go in, and I really did expect just a glance; but, no, he was like a piece of marble, and took not the slightest notice either of Clara or poor me. Then, too, he was as cross and snappish as could be, and found great fault, saying everything was disgracefully done, and that every one had been going back with the French ever since he had been away. But I did not mind that a bit; for I saw how it was making Miss Furness's ears tingle, which was some consolation, seeing how hard she had been working us, and what a fuss she had been making, as if she were Monsieur Achille's deputy; and really I was getting jealous of the tiresome old thing.



I took my snubbing very patiently; but I could not help feeling terribly angry when he rose to go, and, with an affectation of bashfulness, Miss Furness followed, simpering, looking, or rather trying to look, in our eyes, as if she were engaged. But I followed too, almost as soon as the door was closed; and to my rage and disgust I found the hall empty, with Achille's hat still standing upon the table, so that he could not have gone.

"They must have gone into the drawing-room," I muttered.

And then once more my head began to swim, for I felt raging—jealous; and it did seem a thing that, after all I had suffered and done for his sake, I was to be given up for a dreadful screwy thing, old enough to be my mother at the very least. But I would not faint this time, I was too angry; and stepping across the hall, I opened the drawing-room door, softly and quickly, and walked in just in time to see that base deceiver, Achille, kissing the hand of the old hypocrite. And how they did both flinch and cower before my indignant glance!

Miss Furness was, of course, the first to recover herself, and step forward in a vixenish manner, just as if she would have liked to bite.

"And pray, Miss Bozerne, what may be your business?" she exclaimed.

"Oh, I merely came for my wool-work," I replied, in a tone of the most profound contempt; and, sweeping across the room, I fetched a piece of work that I knew to be under one of the chair cushions, and then I marched off, leaving Achille the very image of confusion, while as for Miss Furness, she was ready to fly at me with spite and anger.

I kept it up till I was outside the room, and had given the door a smart bang, when I rushed upstairs, and past Mrs Blunt, who called to me in vain to stop, and then to my bedroom, where I locked myself in, and had such a cry, as I dashed down the wool-work, and threw myself upon the bed, to lie with my burning cheek upon my pillow, and water it with my tears.

Rage, vexation, disappointment, love—I'm sure they were all mingled together, and sending me half wild. Only to think of his turning out a deceiver!—to leave me and go and pay court to a woman of forty, with a yellow skin, scraggy neck, and a temper of the most shrewish! I was so passionate then, that I jumped off the bed and ran to the glass, and if it too was not a deceiver, and did not tell me a story, I was handsome. But I vowed that I would be revenged for it all; and I stamped up and down the room, thinking of what would be the best way; but, somehow, I could not think of a plan then, so I lay down once more, and had another good cry.

"Never mind," I said.

Then I raised myself upon my elbow, and just at that moment some one knocked.

"What is it?" I cried, after whoever it was had knocked four times, and would not go away.

"Mrs de Blount says that she requests you to descend directly," said one of the younger pupils.

"Tell her I have a very bad headache," I said, which really was a fact; and then I would not answer any more questions, for I was determined not to go down until all the marks of my crying had faded away, which I knew would not be for some time.

"Miss Furness won't make me afraid of her any more," I said to myself. "I've mastered her secret; and Achille dare not tell of me, for fear of betraying himself. I'll serve them both out."

I lay nursing up my wrath, till I felt obliged to cry again; and then, when I had done crying, I again picked up my wrath and nursed it; and so on, backwards and forwards, till all at once I started up, for there was one of those hideous German brass bands. A set of towy-headed, sleepy-faced boys were blaring out "Partant pour la Syrie" in the most horribly discordant manner, till James was sent to order them out of the grounds, when, to get the dreadful discords out of my head, and my mind more in tune, I took advantage of a permission lately given me by Mrs Blunt, and slipped quietly down into the drawing-room, which was now empty. Sitting down to the piano, I rattled away at "La Pluie de Perles" until my fingers ached again, when I took up something of Talexy's, and I suppose it was all emotional, for I'm sure I never played so brilliantly before in my life—the notes seemed quite to sparkle under my fingers, and I kept on rattling away till I was tired, and dashed off the great finishing chords at the end.

Then I slammed down the piano, spun myself round upon the stool, and jumping up, I was about to make a pirouette, and what we girls, in happy, innocent, thoughtless days, used to call a cheese, when I gave a start, for Mrs Blunt was standing there with a lady in walking costume, who was smilingly inspecting me through a great gold eyeglass, just as if I were some curiosity; and, of course, instead of the pirouette, I made one of the spun-out, graceful obeisances so popular at the Cedars.

"One of our pupils," said Mrs Blunt, in her most polite tones. "Mrs Campanelle Brassey—Miss Bozerne. Young and high-spirited, you see," she continued, smiling benignantly upon me, just in the way that she had done when mamma was with me, and never since. "Young, happy, and light-hearted. Just at that age when life has no cares,"—couldn't I have pinched her. "She adores melody—quite a daughter of the Muses."

"Charming gyrl," said the lady, smiling. "Sweetly featured—so gazelle-eyed. Most unaccountably like my Euphemia."

"Indeed!" said Mrs Blunt. "How singular! They will, no doubt, be like sisters."

"Charming for Euphemia, to be sure," said Mrs Campanelle Brassey. "It will make the change from home so pleasant, and she will not pine."

"No fear of that," said Mrs Blunt—"ours is too home-like an abode."

"No doubt," said Mrs Campanelle Brassey. "And then there is that other charming gyrl—the one with the sweet, high-spirited features—the one you just now showed me. Lady—Lady—Lady Somebody's daughter."

"Lady Fitzacre's," said Mrs Blunt.

"To be sure," said Mrs Campanelle Brassey. "Why, your establishment will be most enviable, Mrs Fortesquieu de Blount; for I'm sure that you will have the Three Graces within your walls."

"Oh, fie!" exclaimed Mrs Blunt, playfully; "you are bringing quite a blush to the face of our young friend."

My cheeks certainly were tingling, but it was only to hear them talk such twaddle; and I knew well enough now that they must have been looking on for some time, while Mrs Blunt only let me keep on strumming to show off before the visitor; for if it had been one of the girls who played badly, she would have been snubbed and sent off in a hurry for practising out of her turn.

For a moment, though, I felt a pang shoot through me—a jealous pang—as I thought that, if this new pupil came, she might bear off from me my Achille; while the next moment I was ready to laugh scornfully from the recollection that I had no Achille, that he was already another's, that men were all false and deceivers, and that I could now turn satirical, and sympathise with Clara.

However, I showed none of the painful emotions sweeping through my breast, but took all in good part, and allowed Mrs Campanelle Brassey to tap me with her eyeglass, and kiss me on the cheek, which kiss was, after all, only a peck with her hooky nose; and then she must take what she called a fancy to me, and march me about with them all over the place, and call me "My love," and "My sweet child," and all that sort of stuff, when she was seeing me now for the first time; but, if I had been the most amiable of girls, but plain, like Grace Murray, instead of showy and dashing, she would not have taken the least mite of notice of me.

Yes: really, this is a dreadfully hypocritical world!

"My Euphemia will be charmed to know you, my love," said Mrs Campanelle Brassey, looking at me as if I were good to eat, and she were a cannibal's wife—"charmed, I'm sure."

"I sha'n't be charmed to know her," I said to myself, "if she is as insincere as you."

"I'm sure that you will soon be the best of friends. It will be so nice for her to have one to welcome her directly she leaves home, and, of course, we shall have the pleasure of seeing you on a visit at the Belfry during the vacation."

Of course I thanked her, and thought that if I liked Euphemia I should very likely go home with her for a while, since all places now seemed the same to me, and I should require some *délassement*.

"This is one of our classrooms, my dear madam," said Mrs Blunt, opening the door where all the girls were sitting, and just then Clara came across from the practice-room, with her music-book beneath her arm, for Mrs Blunt had taken care that Mrs Campanelle Brassey should not stand and hear her hammer away at the old ting-tang. Clara told me afterwards that she stopped as soon as the door opened. But then Clara never could play a bit, and I must say that she knew it, though, as I before said, her sketches were lovely.

"Charming, indeed," said Mrs Campanelle Brassey, inspecting the girls through her glass, just as if it were a lens, and they were all so many cheese-mites.

Just then I exchanged glances with Miss Furness, but I was not going to be stared down; for feeling, as I did, fierce and defiant, I just contemptuously lowered my lids. Next moment the door was closed, and we went into the dining-room, and then upstairs to the dormitories.

"What a charming little nest!" exclaimed Mrs Campanelle Brassey, when we entered our room at last, after inspecting, I think, every chamber in the place—for everything really was kept beautifully nice, and neat, and clean; and, though plain, the furniture and carpets were tasty and nice—"what a charming little nest! Three beds, too! And pray who sleeps here?"

"Let me see," said Mrs Blunt, affecting ignorance, "this is your room, is it not, my dear? Ah! yes, I remember; and you have Miss Fitzacre with you, and who else?"

"Miss Smith, ma'am," I said, quietly.

"Ah, to be sure, Miss Smith," said Mrs Blunt.

"Not a very aristocratic name," said Mrs Campanelle Brassey, smiling, and twirling her eyeglass about. "Pity, now, that that bed is not at liberty; it would have been so charming for the three girls to have been together night and day. I suppose that you could not manage to change the present order, Mrs de Blount?"

"Shall I give up my bed, ma'am?" I said, quietly.

"Oh, dear me, no—by no means," said Mrs Campanelle Brassey. "I thought, perhaps, as I had seen Lady Fitzacre's daughter and yourself, and you seemed so much of an age, that it might have been possible for the young person of the name of—er—er—"

"Smith," suggested Mrs Blunt.

"Yes—er—for her to be exchanged into another room."

Mrs Blunt thought that perhaps if her young friend did not object to being separated she might possibly manage it. And really I hoped she would; for any one, even Celia Blang—little spy that she was—would have been better than poor Patty.

“But I really should not like to introduce my dear child here at the expense of doing violence to anybody’s feelings,” said Mrs Campanelle Brassey.

“Oh, no! I know you would not wish that,” said Mrs Blunt; “and really, if Miss Smith objected at all to being removed, I don’t think I could—er—I should like to—to—”

“I see, perfectly,” said Mrs Campanelle Brassey; “and I quite admire and appreciate your system, Mrs de Blount. But what does my young friend here say—would she object to such a change being made? Would she not miss her friend, the young person of the name of—er—Jones?”

“Smith,” corrected Mrs Blunt; for somehow the vulgarity of the name seemed too much for Mrs Campanelle Brassey.

“I should be very glad to see the change,” I said.

“And about Miss Fitzacre?” said Mrs Blunt, with such an air of hypocritical interest, looking all the while so innocent.

“Oh, I’m certain that she would be glad,” I rejoined. “In fact, ma’am, I have heard her say so. Miss Smith is very young, ma’am,” I said, modestly, “and has never been a companion or friend to us.”

And then I felt very much afraid lest Patty should hear of what I had said, and repay me by telling all she knew.

“No; I should never have expected that from what I have seen of your two charming pupils. Mrs de Blount, that they would have had feelings, sentiments, or emotions in common with a young person of the name of—Jones.”

“Then, if your daughter wishes it, my dear madam,” said Mrs Blunt, “I think we may venture to say that the matter is settled to your satisfaction. You see,” she continued, “that when a new pupil arrives, I look upon mine as quite a maternal charge—one that embraces all that a mother owes to her child, with that of the teacher and trainer of the young and budding intellect.”

“Exactly so,” said Mrs Campanelle Brassey, nodding her head.

“And therefore,” continued Mrs Blunt, apparently much encouraged—“therefore, my dear madam, I try to study pupils’ comfort and wishes, even in those which some people might consider trivial things. I study, as far as I can, the present as well as the future; so that when, strong-winged, these young birds take flight, they may always in their happy futures—”

“Certainly—happy futures,” said Mrs Campanelle Brassey, nodding her head; “certainly, after such training.”

“Happy futures, look back,” continued Mrs Blunt, “to the days when they were at the Cedars, and feel a tear dim their eye’s brightness—a tear, not of sorrow, but of regret.”

“Very true,” said Mrs Campanelle Brassey. “I quite agree with you, Mrs de Blount. Charming sentiments.”

“And therefore, you see, had there been any dislike to the alteration upon our young friend’s part,” said Mrs Blunt, “I should not have liked to make the change.”

Yes: she actually said all that, just as if she believed it, and even smiled at me as she spoke; while, I declare, I almost felt dumb-founded to hear what she said.

The Cedars certainly must have been a most delightful place to motherly eyes, for at every turn go where we would, Mrs Campanelle Brassey was lost in admiration, and found everything charming; and she did not scruple to say so, and to such an extent that I grew tired of hearing her. But that did not matter, for there was no getting away; and I had to go with her, into the dining-room again to have some cake and wine, which I had to ring for, and then go and sit down by the side of the visitor, who seemed to know by instinct which would be the softest couch.

James brought in the wine, and when I was asked, as a matter of course, I ought to have declined, and said, with a display of Cedar deportment, “No, thank you;” but I did not intend anything of the sort, and said “Yes,” for I knew that Mrs Blunt always had the best sherry brought out for the visitors, and was in consequence terribly stingy over it. So I said, “Yes, if you please,” and took a glass, while she was obliged to smile all the time; for I did not mean to be walked about, and talked at, and talked to all day for nothing.

But at last I was set at liberty, and went off to the schoolroom to discuss the coming of the new girl, who was so handsome and charming in every respect, till Miss Furness returned from the drawing-room, where she had been to be introduced, and desired us to pursue our studies, when, of course, we were all very industrious for quite five minutes.

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## Chapter Twenty One.

### Memory the Twenty-First—I Suffer.

“I can’t think how mammas can be so silly as to believe all that is said by these lady principals,” said Clara. “And so there’s another new girl coming, just my age? I wonder how she will like Cedar mutton—all gristle and tiff-taff. I wish I

was out of it, I do! And so it's all off between you and Monsieur Achille, is it, dear? Well, I'm very glad, for it had got to be dreadfully tiring, really. Now, tell the truth, ain't you glad yourself?"

"N-n-no, I don't think I am," I said. "It will be so dull now, with nothing to look forward to; and—heigho!—who would have thought that he would be so false?"

"Anybody, everybody," said Clara; "and yet you were highly offended because I said French gentlemen were fickle and brittle. Never mind, dear, there will be some one else some day, and I shall be bridesmaid, after all."

"Don't talk such stuff," I said, dolefully; while from the far distant past there seemed to rise up the reproachful countenance of Mr Saint Purre, as I had seen him last, and I could not help sighing; while if any one had asked me whether I was sighing about Monsieur de Tiraille or Theodore Saint Purre, I really don't think that I could have told them.

Time slipped on—I can hardly tell you how, but it really did pass. I had been home for the Christmas vacation, and tried hard to keep from going back to the Cedars, but in vain. Mamma declared that it was all for my good, and was what she called inflexible. So, after a regular round of gaiety, I was back at the hateful place once more, with the old routine wheel going round, and round, and round, and seeming to grind all the skin off my temper, so that I grew cross, and fretful, and peevish. Forming our minds, indeed! They did form our minds there, and a very bad shape they made them into. I know I was one of the most amiable of girls when I went down there; while at home now I am melancholy, and irritable, and—and—well, I don't know what.

Time went on—cold winterly days, when we could hardly smell the fire; and as to warming ourselves, we had better have been guilty of high treason. Mrs Blunt was better, and loved a good fire, getting quite close to it; but Miss Furness had a theory that too much warmth was unwholesome, and that after coals had been put on, a fire ought never to be poked; and I declare if that tiresome old thing used not to lock up the fire-irons in the book cupboard when she left the room, so that we should not touch the grate; and there we used to be, poking it with pieces of slate pencil till they broke, or burning the end of the big ruler by hammering the burning coals with that.

Wet days, when there was no walking. Northeasterly windy days, when Miss Furness's nose turned more red than ever, and her eyes watered with the bleak breezes that she would face. Health was everything, she used to say, and perhaps she was right; but I know I would rather be poorly and comfortable than healthy and always in misery and pain.

Dull, dreary days, with lessons from this one and lessons from that one. Italian I made some progress with, and music I always did love; but as for French, of late that had been sadly neglected. I really blushed at times to take up my exercises to Monsieur de Tiraille; but he never uttered a word of praise or blame, but always sighed softly as he looked over them, while I was stern and obdurate as fate itself. No, I could not forgive him; and note after note that he would have had me take I pretended not to see, while as to those which he sent by Clara, I returned them unopened. I repeat I could not forgive; for he had wounded me deeply, and in my tenderest sensibilities, and I showed him always that I was entirely changed. I was sorry for him, for he looked very unhappy. Yes, I pitied him, and pitied his weakness that had tempted him to forsake me for Miss Furness. I could have suffered anything else at his hands—neglect, scorn, contempt; but to forsake me for her—oh, it was too bad! But I was resigned: might they be happy!

Yes, I said so; and then I smiled in bitter mockery, as I looked upon Miss Furness's vinegary aspect, thought of her early morning walks, and cold, uncomfortable ways, and asked myself what there was in her to make a man happy, when, like a flash, the answer came—*money*! For I recollected the hints I had heard dropped of Mrs Blunt being sometimes in pecuniary difficulties, and borrowing of Miss Furness, who had been very saving, and had had one or two legacies left her; so that really, and truly, the establishment was more hers than Mrs Blunt's; and if she had liked she could have laid claim to the concern, but perhaps was waiting her time. Yes, that must be the secret; and Achille must know it. Why, of course she had told him, and they had made their plans together. I had quite given him up; but somehow the idea of those two scheming and plotting for their future angered me terribly, and whenever I had such thoughts I used to be obliged to shed a few bitter tears; so that I grew quite to sympathise with Mrs Blunt, and could see plainly enough now why Miss Furness was allowed to assume so much, and to sleep on the first floor, besides being taken into consultation upon every important occasion, when the other teachers were nowhere, or only admitted upon sufferance.

How the romance of one's life seemed to have passed away, while one was really living under a cloud!—and I knew now the meaning of the expression. And yet there was something resigned in my feelings, and I did not mind it so very much; for I was waiting for the end of my sojourn here. I had learned the truth of there being something pleasant in melancholy, and I was always repeating the words of the old song—

"Go! You may call it madness, folly,  
You shall not chase my grief away;  
There's such a charm in Melancholy,  
I would not, if I could, be gay."

I'm not sure whether that is quite right, but it is as I recollect from very, very long—ages ago; and it was about this time that I began to feel—oh, so old, and worn, and weary.

Yes, Achille tried hard to obtain my forgiveness; but I would not notice. He whispered to me more than once, over the lessons, that it was from motives of policy that he had so acted; but I would not hear him. And it was about this time that mamma began to send me word of how frequently Theodore Saint Purre used to call at Chester Square, and how kindly he always inquired after me; and it really was very kind of him, and almost looked as if he took an interest in me. But then, what interest could he feel in the poor, weak school-girl that I was? So I only sighed when mamma

wrote, and tried, by being good friends with the new pupil, Euphemia Campanelle Brassey, to keep from being miserable about Monsieur de Tiraille—for I made a vow never to call him Achilles any more. Then he must try to pique me by taking more notice of Clara and Euphemia; but he gained nothing by that movement, for I saw Miss Furness look at him—which, I mean to say, is a far better simile than daggers, for they are old, exploded things that have gone off without noise; while crochet needles are things of the present, equally sharp, and more vicious, from being barbed. And then, too, I told Euphemia all about his treatment of me, while Clara already knew it, and laughed in his face, making him look so ashamed, when he had been trying to be so—so—so—well, what's that word?—*empresé*; whilst the next time he came, Euphemia, who had felt a little flattered, regularly turned up her nose at him. Of course, I am speaking metaphorically, for Patty Smith was the only big girl who really could do that literally, but then it came natural to her. And it was such a good thing that we had got rid of Patty; for, as I have said before, I think, I never could look upon her, big as she was, as anything but a child; while she acted as a regular check upon all our little chats.

No, Monsieur de Tiraille gained nothing by that movement, only the holding of himself up to the scorn of the three eldest girls in the establishment; and after that it was that he took to sighing softly, and assuming the martyr, for he attacked the citadel of my poor heart in every conceivable way. But I fortified it with thoughts of the past, and regularly set him at defiance, my only regret—I think, I will not be sure upon that point—my only regret being that the poor exiles of whom he had written to me would suffer from this estrangement, for I knew that he could not do a great deal for them. And when I wondered whether Miss Furness would be generous, and help them out of her store, my heart whispered No, and I felt so pained and sorry, that I enclosed two sovereigns, all I had saved up, in a piece of paper, with the words—“For the poor exiles,” written inside, and gave it to him in that dear old, dog's-eared, thumb-nug—dear to me from a thousand recollections!

The next time he came he was radiant with hope, but the arrows of his dark eyes glanced from the cold mail of pride with which I was armed now. I was as iron itself, while he seemed perfectly astounded. But he was mistaken: for the money sent was not in token of reconciliation, but so that others who were deserving should not suffer from our estrangement; and I can assure you that I felt very proud of my ability to crush down the love that, I am afraid, still burned in my breast.

In other respects matters went on very quietly at the Cedars; from being so fierce and snappish, Miss Furness was now quiet, and amiable, and smiling; and though I hated her most horribly, I tried to crush all my dislike down, and make the best of things. I found, too, now, that I was invited occasionally to take tea in the drawing-room, when Mrs Blunt had a few particular friends; and, altogether, they seemed to treat me differently to the way from which I suffered when I first came.

Then, too, Euphemia Campanelle Brassey being in our room made it a little better; but, for all that, I was dull, and wretched, and miserable. You know, it was so tiresome in the old days with Patty; we did not want to be always drinking Spanish liquorice water, and eating sour apples, and cakes, and gooseberries in bed—it was so childish. It was all very well sometimes; but then Patty was so ravenous, thinking of nothing else but eating, and always wanting to have what she called a feast, and making the room smell horribly of peppermint—which, in its way, is really as bad as onions. But Effie Campanelle Brassey really was a nice girl, and sensible; and, of course, as we were allowed no suppers, it was nice to have a little in our bedrooms; so we had one box that we used to call the larder, and took it in turns to keep it replenished. Sometimes we used to have sausage rolls, sometimes pork pies, and little tartlets that there was an old woman in the town used to make so nicely. But our greatest difficulty used to be about something to drink; for though we could bring home a paper bag in one hand and a parasol in the other, of course we could not carry a bottle, and you may be sure that we did not care for Spanish liquorice water, nor yet for lemonade. I should have liked bottled stout, though I did take almost a dislike to it after Patty Smith proposed to give me a Seidlitz powder, for the effervescence put me in mind of it. But, as a rule, we used to have wine—sherry or claret—in a dear, nice, champagne-looking bottle, with a silvery top, and a blue heraldic dragon sitting in a castle, with his head out of the top and his tail sticking out of the bottom—a scaly-looking dragon, like Richard Coeur de Lion's legs in the old pictures; while the tail was all barbed like a crochet needle tied back to back to another crochet needle. And, oh, it was such fun! I believe those were the only merry times we had. The new servant always got the wine for us from a man in the town, and we used to lend her the key to put the bottle in the larder when she went up to make the beds; and I'm afraid to tell you how many bottles we drank, for it would be too shocking.

Effie Campanelle Brassey was a really dear girl, and could enter into matters so much better than Patty Smith, and it was a pleasure to sit in the dusk of a night and tell her all about our disappointments—for, of course, they were disappointments, the poor Signor being found out, and Achilles proving so utterly lost to all proper feeling, and acting as he did with Miss Furness.

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## Chapter Twenty Two.

### Memory the Twenty-Second—Weak Woman.

They say that it is natural for women to be weak, and of course they who said so must know best about it. So if woman is naturally weak, I do not think I need be very much ashamed of owning that I was the same as the rest of my sex, and willing at last to forgive poor Achilles; for really he did begin to look so pale and distressed, so worn, and sallow, and miserable, and seemed so to humble himself before me, that I began to be afraid he was contemplating something dreadful. He appeared so dejected, and bent, and old, and directed at me such penitent looks, that no one with a heart beating within her breast could have resisted for long; and by degrees his sorrow began to melt away the hard, cold, icy armour in which I was encased, to sap the walls of the citadel of stone I had built round my heart, and one day—I could not help it—I could not resist the piteous look he directed at me, but forgave him with one quick, sharp glance, which brought almost a sob from his breast; while, though his eyes were cast down, I could see him swelling almost, as it were, with emotion, and I escaped from the room as soon as I possibly could, to try and

calm the wild, fluttering sensation that pervaded my very being.

Then Clara laughed at me, and sneered, and flouted, and jeered; but I did not care, for something seemed always telling me that I loved him very dearly. But I made up my mind to refrain from all meetings, and to do nothing clandestine, except the correspondence with a few notes; though I knew that it was nonsense to think for a moment that papa or mamma would ever give their consent to my loving and being espoused by a French master.

And then began the notes again; while now that I think of it all, it seems perfectly wonderful that we were not found out, over and over and over again, for Achille grew so terribly barefaced—I mean in his ways, for of course he did not remove his beautiful beard. Sometimes it was Clara who had a note for me, sometimes Euphemia; and then I did not like it, for it did not seem nice for them to be the bearers of the notes; and if the thing had been possible, I declare that at such times I should have felt jealous; for I could not help thinking it possible that he had squeezed their hands when he had delivered the notes; and, as a matter of course, such a thing was too dreadful to contemplate for more than about half a minute at a time.

You may be sure I never asked them if such had been the case; but I know that I used to be snappish, and not like to say “thank you” for the missives, however welcome they might be. But they never knew the reason, only thought that perhaps something had put me a little out of temper.

And what notes those used to be!—all bewailing his inability to meet me; for it was quite out of the question to make any appointments, with that horrible dog ranging and roaming about like a fierce wolf, night after night; nearly driving the poor old gardener mad, too, with the mischief he did.

“I declare, miss,” the old man said to me, “I’d sooner set up and watch in the garden myself night after night, than hev that there blessed beast a-destroying of everythink. Certainly, there ain’t such a deal jest now; but what it will be when we comes to verbenas and bedding plants saints knows. Ribbon gardening, indeed!—the whole blessed garden’s torn to ribbons already. If some one would only poison him!”

“If some one would only poison him!” I mentally said, after him.

But no one did, and we had to content ourselves with notes. Yes, such notes!—not what they were of old—full of patriotism; but all the same, pressing me to fly with him, to be his, to leave this land of cold and fogs for his own sunny south, where all would be smiles, and beauty, and love, and blue skies, and emerald verdure, and sunshine. Oh, what a future he painted! It was quite enough to destroy one’s sleep for the night, for one could do nothing but lie in the wild waking dream of an excited imagination. And then, after such waking hours, there was a violent headache in the morning. What could I do, being so weak, and leaning towards him as I did then? I knew how wicked it was, and how grievous; but then, it all seemed like fate—like something that was to be; and I used to think that all would come right in the end, when mamma and papa would forgive me, and we should all be happy together.

“He knows that you will have a nice little sum of money when you come of age,” said Clara, spitefully.

“That I’m sure he doesn’t,” I said. “How can you talk such nonsense? Why, he don’t know anything about our position at home.”

“Why, how can you say so?” replied Clara, “when you told him in my hearing, one night down in the conservatory, months ago.”

And that was right, though I had not recalled it at the time; but it was too bad of Clara to try and make out that Achille was prompted by mercenary motives, when he was the very soul of generosity, and kept himself horribly poor by the amounts he gave away. And, besides, he was too much of a gentleman to care for money, except as regarded the good it would do to his fellow creatures.

But there, as it must have been seen all along, Clara always was petty, and spiteful, and full of little remarks of that sort, which she would throw at you, when they would come round, and hard, and prickly, just like one of those nasty, spikey chestnut shucks that will not bear to be handled. So I grew not to mind what she said; and when I told Achille, he used to laugh, and say that she was “une drôle de fille,” and, like me, he took no further notice of it.

I would not consent for such a time—months, and months, and months; but I knew that at last I should be compelled to yield, and go with him. “But not yet,” I said, “not yet,” and I drove it off as long as I could; but at last I gave up, and promised to be his—the promise that should make me another’s! And then began a week of such nervous excitement as was almost unbearable. Such foolish ideas, too, came into my head—some of them so childish that I was almost ashamed of them; such as wishing, like I had read of somewhere, to save up pieces of bread and butter, and to purchase a suit of boy’s clothes. In short, it seemed as if nothing but absurdities would come into my head.

I should have gone on as comfortably again if I could have taken Clara and Euphemia into my confidence; but upon this most momentous of undertakings I felt, and Achille agreed with me, that I should confide in no one; for this was, indeed, too serious a matter to trust to another. In fact, at times I felt that I could hardly trust myself; for I used to be like the wife of King Midas, and I declare that the knowledge was such a burden that it would have been a relief to have put one’s head down by the river, and whispered the secret. Every lesson day came a note; and there was the night settled, and everything arranged, before I could bring myself to believe that it was true; while all around me seemed strained, changed, and unnatural, and sometimes I really used to feel as if I were dreaming.

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## Chapter Twenty Three.

### Memory the Twenty-Third—The Horror of my Blighted Life.

The night before the one appointed for my flight with Achille, I sat down and wrote two letters home—one the usual weekly affair, the other a tear-bedewed prayer for pardon. In it I detailed the full particulars of the step which I had taken, pointing out at the same time the uselessness of attempting pursuit; for long before I could be discovered I should be the wife of the man who possessed my heart, truly and thoroughly. Yes; that letter was tear-bedewed, and there was something very mournful in writing home upon such an occasion. But the die was cast, and I felt quite relieved when I had placed both letters in their envelopes; and then, leaving one for enclosure in the letter-bag of the house, I secured the other in my bosom, and soon after retired to rest.

Yes, I retired to rest, but not to sleep, and rose the next morning pale and dejected; while how I went through my lessons that day I cannot think now. However, to keep suspicion entirely at a distance, when Achille came we took not the slightest notice of one another; and, so that there should be no miscarriage of our undertaking, not so much as a single line passed from one to the other. But just as he was going I gave him one look, to show him that I was worthy of his trust, and, come what would, I should keep my word.

The time had already been fixed for twelve, so that with a carriage in waiting we could be driven across the country, twelve miles to the neighbouring town, where the main line of railway passed—ours at Allsham being but a branch. There we could catch the night mail as it whirled through—or rather, as it stopped; and then, conveyed to London, we could leave by an early train the same morning for Scotland. All this had been fixed by Achille, and conveyed to me in a note at his last lesson. And how deliciously romantic it all seemed, and how elated I felt, in spite of my trepidation! Away to Scotland, to be his—his own. And then, perhaps in sunny France, live a life like some golden dream, from which we could look back to the days of slavery at the Cedars. Oh, it was too much!—the thoughts of it even made me tremble; and as I lay pretending to be asleep that night, I thought my heart would have burst with its emotions, as it beat and bounded trying to be free.

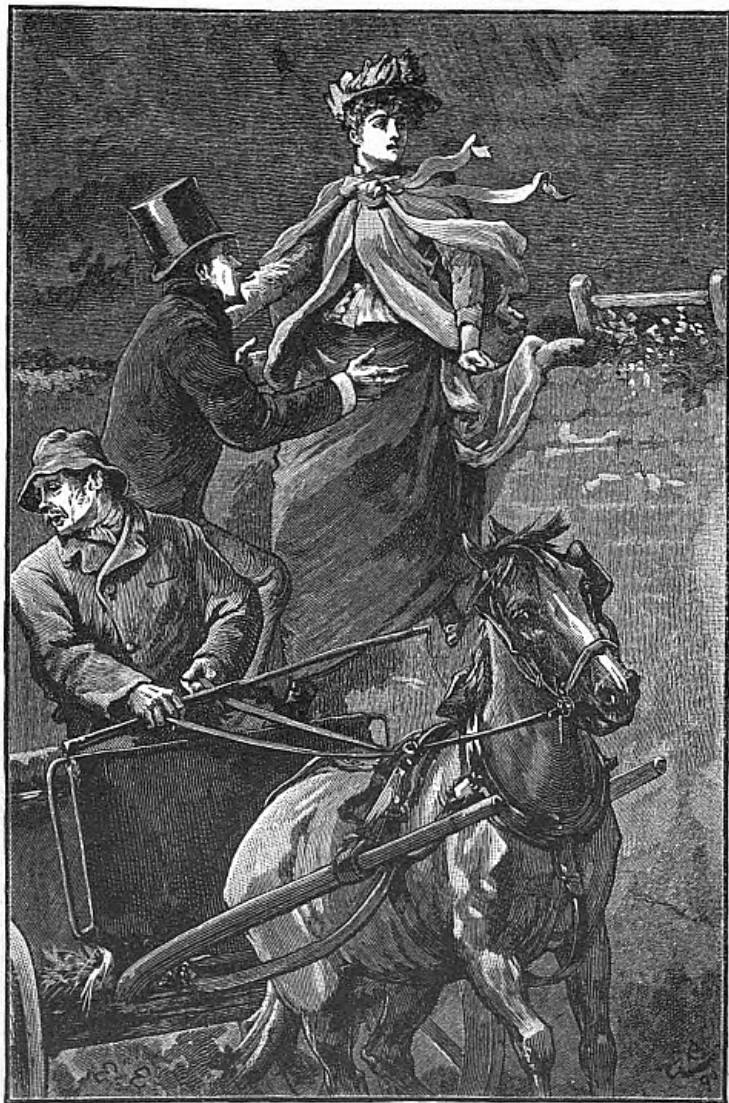
Is it always so, that people will talk and do the very opposite to that which you wish? Upon other nights, when I wished for half an hour's chat with Clara or Effie, they would be too sleepy to talk; but this night they seemed to be horribly wakeful, while the noises in the house went on as if they would never be still. I had been in quite a flutter for some time, owing to my having somehow mislaid the last note Achille had sent me. Where it could be I knew not, unless it had slipped down through my clothes; but that I looked at as impossible, and I lay hoping that it was still somewhere in my things. Every other letter, after ten readings, I had carefully destroyed; but this one I dared not burn, for fear that it should contain instructions that I might forget. Even though I had carefully learned it by heart, I still fancied that I might again wish to refer to it. The very thought of its being found put me in a cold perspiration; but things all grew so quiet at last, that my courage revived, and feeling now so thoroughly embarked in the undertaking, I summoned all my strength of mind and waited.

Twelve o'clock, and not a sound to be heard—not even the baying of the dog, which, in the excitement of the preparations, I had forgotten; and now it seemed that he would be the only stumbling-block in my way. But I was prepared to meet every danger; and slipping out of bed, I crept out of the room to the empty place at the end of the passage, where I had conveyed what few things I should require, for, of course, I had not undressed. And now—bonneted, shawled, and gloved, and with my reticule bag in my hand—I stood listening with beating pulses to the faint sounds yet to be heard in the house. Now it was the ticking of the clock, now the chirping of the crickets in the kitchen; while above all, heavily and loudly, came the beating of the rain upon the skylight, telling of how bitter a night it was, and I shuddered as I thought of poor Achille standing in the wet.

Our plans had been well made; and, screwing up my courage, I stepped along the passage, down to the first floor, and reached the large staircase window in safety, slid it up, and, to my intense joy, there was poor, wet Achille standing at the top of a strong step-ladder, ready to assist me down.

"Enfin, mon ange," he whispered, as I climbed tremblingly upon the sill as quickly as possible; for I had heard words spoken at the foot of the stairs, and I knew directly what they meant, as dining-room and drawing-room doors were thrown open, and lights streamed out. Yes, I knew what Clara afterwards told me was the case—Miss Furness had picked up the note, and they were all collected in the hall and passage, ready to capture me when I descended, little thinking that the window mentioned meant that upon the first floor.

"Now dis foot—now dat," he hissed through his teeth; and, somehow, I don't know in what way, he guided me down the ladder, to which I clung tightly, wet as it was; and, as lights and faces appeared at the open window, Achille dragged the ladder down, and we were in full flight across the lawn; where he supported me with one hand, and trailed the ladder after us with the other.



“Before I knew where I was”—

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“Dere goes de confound bell,” cried Achille. “No, no,” he whispered, “not yet—don’t faint, mon ange.”

“But the dog? Where is the dog?” I exclaimed.

“Having one great pound of steaks and two mutton bones,” he replied.

And then, with the murmur of voices behind, and the bell ringing loudly, we hurried through the wet bushes to the wall, where he placed the ladder, and this time nerving myself, I mounted it boldly, and before I knew where I was I found myself helped down into a carriage drawn close up at the side—that is to say, into the cart; for Achille had been so unfortunate that he could not procure a post-chaise. There, with an umbrella to protect me from the inclemency of the weather, I sat upon the hard seat between Achille and the rough man who was the driver.

“That ere was the pleeceman as we passed,” growled the latter, directly after we had started.

“P’raps they shall want him at de house,” replied Achille, laughing.

Away onward we tore, for fully an hour and a half, through the dark night, and through the rain, which would keep coming, blown by the gusts, right underneath the umbrella, in spite of all *he* did to protect me. And in spite of all my efforts and the tender words of Achille—whispered to me in his own dear tongue—I could not keep from shivering; for somehow all this did not seem so very nice, and romantic, and pleasant.

Oh, that night! I shall never forget it, though it all seems whirled up together in one strange, gloomy dream of rain, and darkness, and wind, and cold, and a stumbling horse, and a rough, stably-smelling, wet driver, smoking a strong pipe, and shouting to the horse to “Harm!” Of wet straw, and Achille without a great coat, and the umbrella so blown by the wind that it took two hands to hold it, and the points would go into the driver’s eye and make him swear.

Then there was poor Achille, wet and suffering from the cold and waiting in the rain; and his hands so cramped with holding the umbrella; and the dreary, miserable station fire so low that it would not warm him. And after he had dismissed the man, he was too cold to get out his purse; but fortunately I was able to pay for the two first-class tickets to London. And then almost directly there was a vision of steam, and lights, and noise, and the fast train dashed into the wet station, where the rain kept flying from the wind, which seemed to hunt it along; and then we were inside one of the dark blue cloth lined carriages, where I could see by the dim light of the thick, scratchy, bubble lamp that there were two gentlemen. I felt so ill, and cold, and shivery, I should not have known how to keep up, if



one them, seeing my wet state, had not kindly passed a little flask of sherry to Achille, who made me drink some.

How I trembled, and felt that they were looking me through and through; and I felt sure that I had seen them both before, and that they knew me, and would go straight off and tell papa; but fortunately they both seemed sleepy, and curled up in their wrappers in the two corners, after one of them had insisted upon lending us a great skin thing, which was nice and warm and comfortable.

But they say that there are a great many hidden things in nature that yet remain to be explained; and really this must be one of them, this which I am now about to mention. Something would keep trying the whole time to make me believe that all this was not very nice, and that I would much rather have been back at the Cedars, snug in my own bed. It was, of course, all nonsense—only a weak fancy prompted by my disordered mind; but still it would keep coming back and back, in spite of all Achille's whispers and tender words, till at last I really think I had forgotten all about the "sunny South" in the miseries of the present.

But I crushed all those thoughts at last, down, down into the dark depths of oblivion; for I was allowing Achille to hold my cold hand in his, as I tried to make out what the train kept saying, for as distinctly as could be in the noise and rattle, and whirl and rush, there were certain words seeming to be formed, and it sounded to me as if those words were—"Blind, conceited, foolish girl!—blind, conceited foolish girl!" over and over again, till I would not listen to them any longer, as we sped on and on, nearer and nearer to great London.

I supposed that my note had been found, but I felt that it must have been too late to do us any harm; for I knew that the telegraph clerk left Allsham Station at eight o'clock, through Mrs Blunt once wanting to send a message to one of the girls' parents when she was ill, and they could not have it until the next morning, which was not so soon as they could get a letter. So I felt quite at rest upon that score; while now, thanks to the sherry and the skin rug, I began to get rid of the miserable shivering that had made me feel so wretched.

Only to think of it!—on and on, towards London, where papa and mamma were lying calmly asleep. The thoughts of them, and their peace, and unconsciousness of what was happening, made me recall the letter I had written, and draw it from its hiding-place to hand to Achille to see that it was posted. But before I passed it over to him, I felt that I could not send it as it was. I must insert one tender word, one more kind sentence. So, taking out my pencil, I screwed up the point, and then, with very little difficulty, raised the lappel of the envelope—for really our gummed envelopes are so very insecure—while I knew that we must stop at some hotel in London where I could obtain wax or a fresh envelope. So I took out the note, and prepared to write upon the palm of my hand; but seeing what I meant to do, Achille lent me his hat, upon the crown for desk, I laid my note as, by the light of the dim lamp, I began to trace in pencil a second—let me see; no, I remember it was a fourth—loving, prayerful postscript.

Tiresome light! How terribly it began to dance about! I thought that part of the line must be much out of repair, for the carriage wobbled excessively. My eyes, too, were dim as the light, and I had to try again and again to read the postscript which met my frightened gaze:

"Mrs Fortesquieu de Blount desires her best respects and compliments, and—"

"Qu'est ce que c'est, mon ange?" murmured Achille, as I dropped the fatal letter, and nearly swooned away; for—oh, how could I have been so foolish!—I had marked the envelopes so as not to make any mistake, and yet had put in the wrong letters, sending word home that I had eloped, and giving them ample notice of my intentions.

I caught the letter up again, and tried to pass it off as nothing—only a sudden pang, for I dare not tell Achille; but who can imagine my agony as we sped on for the rest of our journey? For we could not converse, on account of the other passengers, and my brain was in a whirl.

All at once the train began to slacken, and, in the comparative quiet, I hoped and thought possible a dozen things: the letter might have miscarried, or been sent wrong; it might have been lost; papa and mamma might have been out—plenty of things might have happened in my favour; and then we drew up at another dismal station, whose bleared lights we could see through the rain spotted windows. Here the tickets were collected, and I felt sure that the ticket collector looked suspiciously at both Achille and me; while, as we waited, I could hear them clanking in the milk tins into the great wild beast cage upon wheels that they have upon the night trains of that and, I suppose, all railways. At last, just as we were about to start, the door opened again, and a wet man jumped in, and sat there staring at us all the rest of the way.

London at last, in the darkness and misery of the early morning! It was of no use to try and keep them back, the tears would come, and even the reassuring pressure of Achille's hand was of no avail to cheer me; for, oh! it did look so very, very, very miserable in the dark, cheerless, wet time, and I hardly knew how to stand.

"This way, sir," said a man who appeared to be one of the guards, for he was dressed just like one. "Cab all ready, sir."

"Merci," replied Achille; and I clung to his arm as we followed the civil guard under the long row of dismal hanging lamps, some alight and some out, past the hissing engine, with its bright light, and warm, ruddy, glowing fire; and at that moment I did so wish that I was a happy, careless engine driver, warming myself in the cheery heat—anything but what I then was; for I was dreadfully unhappy, and, I am afraid, even a little disappointed that my fears had no suite, so strange a contradiction is a woman's heart. However, on we went to where another man was waiting by a cab, and as soon as we approached he opened the door.

Weak, faint, and miserable, I hurried in, and leaned back trembling in a corner, expecting Achille the next moment would be at my side; but, to my horror, I saw a slight scuffle take place, and Achille dragged off. The guard-like man jumped in, shut the door after him, and pulled up the glass; while at the same moment the horrid wet cab jangled off, and the creature lowered the front window and gave some instructions to the driver.

"Oh, stop, stop!" I cried, in agony, as I jumped up. "There is some mistake. Where is Monsieur Achille—the gentleman who was with me?"

"That clinches what didn't want no clinching, my dear," said the horrid wretch, shouting at me, for the cab made so much noise—"that clinches it, my dear. I hadn't a doubt before; and as to now, why, it's right as right, and there's no mistake. Now sit down, my dear. I shan't hurt you, so don't be frightened; and it's of no use for you to try and jump out, because I don't mean to let you. There now, see what you've done—you've broke the window! Not very surprising, though, for they always makes cab windows of the thinnest glass they can get hold of for the benefit of their fares. Make a handsome thing out of the profits, some owners do, being mostly broken by noisy swells who can pay up. Helps the shoeing bill, you know, my dear. Now, do sit still. What a struggling little bird it is!"

I was horrified and mad; for the wretch had caught me in his arms as I started from my seat and beat at the window till it fell shattered to pieces; but in spite of my struggles he held me down upon the seat by his side.

"It's all right, my dear Miss Laura Bozerne. And you needn't be in the least bit afraid of me; for I'm an old married man, sent by some one you know very well, working under the advice of my wife, and I'm to be depended upon. So sit still, my little dove, you're saved out of the hawk's claws this time."

What could I do but sink back with a hysterical sob, my mind in a state of chaos? I really, I'm sure, did not know then whether I was pleased or sorry, though I had felt it incumbent upon me to struggle a little at first. I'm sure my brains were all anyhow, as I wondered who the man was by my side, and where he was taking me. Had Achille betrayed me and fled? Oh, no—impossible! Papa must have taken steps to stop us; and this wretch by my side was, I felt sure, a detective.

Up and down street after street, all dark, dismal, and deserted, as I could see when the wretch rubbed the steaming glass with his sleeve. The lamps were all burning; and here and there we passed a policeman, and, every time the light shone upon their wet capes, fresh tears gushed from my eyes as I thought of Achille and his probable fate. Then, too, I thought again of where they were bearing me. Was I to be imprisoned—taken before a magistrate? Oh, it was horrible! and the long, jangling ride seemed as though it would never end.

"Now, that's what I call sensible, my dear," said the wretch, all at once—shouting so that I'm sure the driver could almost have heard. "Some people, you see, never do know when they're took, but keep on fighting agen it when there's no more chance of getting away than flying. That's right, take it coolly, and a good cry will do you no end of good, I dare say."

Then, finding me quiet and resigned, my captor appeared to take but little more notice of me, only turning his head my way from time to time as we passed a lamp. I would have given anything to have known where we were going; but, of course, under the circumstances, I could not summon courage enough to ask; but at last I seemed to recognise places that we passed, first one and then another becoming familiar, till it seemed almost like returning home from a ball. And—yes—no—yes—no—yes, it was our own house before which we had driven up, and the driver was ringing furiously at the bell!

Oh, yes, it was all plain enough now. I had been entrapped and brought home, and I knew that I had betrayed myself by my own folly.

"Oh, Achille, Achille!" I murmured.

"He's all right, miss, I dare say," said my captor, who certainly possessed a preternatural sharpness of hearing; "and I should think that we had better sit here in the dry till the door opens, though I dare say that won't be long, for they expex us."

And he was right; for, with swimming eyes, I saw the flash of light, while I could not help blessing the darkness of the cold, winterly morn, which hid me from the gaze of the vulgar. The people on either side were doubtless asleep, and there was no one visible but a policeman, who helped to carry me over the wet pavement into the hall, where, trembling and dizzy, I stood for a moment before papa in his dressing-gown, and then really and truly I fainted dead away.

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## Chapter Twenty Four.

### Memory the Twenty-Fourth—Fate.

I never saw Achille again, and I never once dared to ask either mamma or papa about his fate; for they were both so kind and tender all the time that I was seriously ill from the cold, exposure, and agitation to which I had been subjected. It was quite a month before I was able to go out again; while now—heigho!—would that I had never had a heart!

No: I never saw Achille again; but never, oh never will I believe that newspaper report, though papa marked it all round thickly with a quill pen, and left it where I could not avoid seeing it! It was in one of the horrible evening papers, and said that one Achille de Tiraille had been committed for trial upon a charge of swindling; but, even if it were true, it could not have been my Achille—the soul of truth, honour, and chivalry, whom I had once known.

Shall I ever be happy again? I feel seared and blighted; and, except that pink is pleasing, I care little for dress. Papa is very kind, so is mamma, and they have never even hinted at the past; while as for the Cedars, such a place might never have been in existence. They take me to all the operas, but "Trovatore" seems to be my favourite, since I cannot help comparing the sorrows of two real individuals known to the reader with those of the fictitious people of

the opera. Yes—the sorrows of Leonora and her poor Trovatore seem quite to refresh me, though the sole pleasure of my life of late has been the committing of these tear-bedewed confessions to paper, for the benefit of all who may read them.

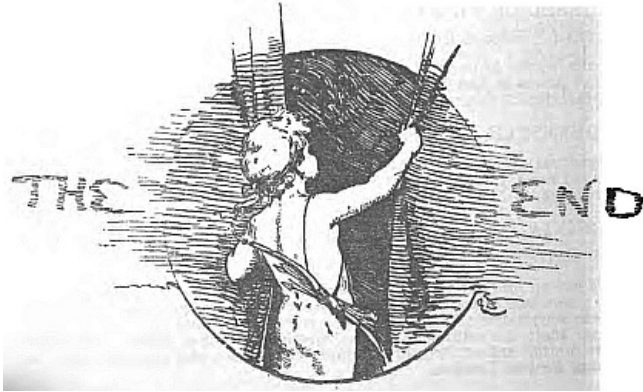
I have written again to Soeur Charité, and she sends me in return such kind, loving words. I know she would be glad were I once more beneath the shelter of her dove-like wings; but neither papa nor mamma would, I am sure, ever again listen to any proposition for me to leave home. So I practise self-denial, and try to improve upon the lessons inculcated by Mr Saint Purre, who often calls, mamma being very fond of his society.

### Postscript.

“Eldersmere, June 4th, 1800.

“My dearest Laura—Pray excuse haste, for we are just off to ‘Parigi O cara,’ to see the Exposition—papa, mamma, your humble servant, and Effie Campanelle Brassey. I will write at length from there. But just a line to say that we are delighted to hear of your engagement, and Effie and I will be doubly delighted to be bridesmaids. What fun, though, to think of all the school frolics, and—and—but there, I won’t say a word; only mind this, I mean to come and stay for months with you when you are Mrs Saint Purre. And so he is to have a living down in the country? My! what fun, to see the saintly Laura attending, basket in hand, to her poor, and her Sunday school children! Heigho! and poor me without so much as an offer yet. Do, there’s a dear, have a few nice fellows at the wedding, just out of pity, you know; for, only think, both Effie and I will soon be eighteen! You say that the Cedars is never to be mentioned; but I must tell you that in the advertisements it is now, ‘Lady Principals, Mrs Fortesquieu de Blount and Miss Furness.’ Goodbye, my own dear, dear pet, sweet, darling Laura; and I am, as I always shall be, in spite of hundreds of tiffs, your affectionate friend,—

“Clara Fitzacre.”



The End.

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