Spring Days

George Moore

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Charles Franks and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team.

PREFACE

When Henry Vizetelly, that admirable scholar, historian, and journalist, was sent to prison for publishing Zola's novels mine were taken over by Walter Scott, and all were reprinted except “Spring Days.” This book was omitted from the list of my acknowledged works, for public and private criticism had shown it no mercy; and I had lost faith in it. All the welcome it had gotten were a few contemptuous paragraphs scattered through the Press, and an insolent article in *The Academy*, which I did not see, but of which I was notified by a friend in the Strand at the corner of Wellington Street.

“Was the article a long one?”

“No, I don't think they thought your book worth slashing. All I can tell you is that if any book of mine had been spoken of in that way I should never write another.”

I left my friend, hoping that the number of *The Academy* would not fall into the hands of the editor of the great London review, to whom I had dedicated the book after a night spent listening to him quoting from the classics, Greek, English, and Latin. “A very poor testimony, one which he won't thank me for,” I muttered, and stopped before St. Clement Danes to think what kind of letter he would write to me. But he did not even acknowledge through his secretary the copy I sent to him, and I accepted the rebuff without resentment, arguing that the fault was mine. “The proofs should have been submitted to him, but the printers were calling for them! There's no going back; the mischief is done,” and I waited, putting my trust in time, which blots out all unfortunate things, “even dedications,” I said.

Three months later, on opening my door one day, I found him standing with a common friend on the landing. I remember wondering what his reason was for bringing the friend, whether he had come as a sort of chaperon or witness. He left us after a few minutes, and I sat watching the great man of my imagination, asking myself if he were going to speak of “Spring Days,” hoping that he would avoid the painful subject. The plot and the characters of my new book might please him. If he would only allow me to speak about it he might be persuaded to accept a second dedication as some atonement for the first.

“You were kind enough to dedicate your novel—−”

“'Spring Days'?”

“Yes, 'Spring Days.' I know that you wished to pay me a compliment, and if I didn't write before it was because——”

“Was it so very bad?”

A butty little man raised Oriental eyes and square hands in protest.

“You have written other books,” he said, and proposed that we should go out together and walk in the Strand.

“Yes, 'The Confessions of a Young Man' was much liked here and in France. Will you let me give it to you?” We stopped at a book shop. “It will please you and help you to forget 'Spring Days.'“ He smiled. “Never mention that book again,” I added. “I wonder how I could have written it.”

We were in a hansom; he turned his head and looked at me without attempting to answer my question; and from that day till six months ago my impulse was to destroy every copy that came my way. A copy of “Spring Days” excited in me an uncontrollable desire of theft, and whenever I caught sight of one in a friend's house I put it in my pocket without giving a thought to the inconvenience that the larceny might cause; the Thames received it, and I returned home congratulating myself that there was one copy less in the world of “Spring Days.”

When the Boer War drove me out of London I said: “Dublin doesn't contain a copy of that book;” and for nearly eight years I was left in peace, only Edward Martyn teasing me, saying that one of these days he must read the book.

“R——always says, 'I like “Spring Days”.'“

“Insolent little ass,” I answered, “I'll cut him dead when we meet again.”

But Edward was not joking as I thought he was, and some time afterwards he told me that after a good deal of advertising he had succeeded in obtaining a copy of “Spring Days.” The moment he left the room I searched the table and bookcase for it, but he kept it at Tillyra, else it would have gone into the Liffey, which receives all

things.

“My dear George, I like the book better than any of your novels,” he said one day on his return from Galway. “It is the most original, it is like no other novel, and that is why people didn't understand it.”

Of course it was impossible to quarrel with dear Edward, but I wondered if I ever should find pleasure in speaking to him again; and when A. E. told me a few weeks later that he had come upon a novel of mine which he had never read before—“Spring Days,” I said.

“Edward gave it to you?”

“No,” he answered, “I haven't seen him for many months.”

“The worst book I ever wrote.” A. E. did not answer. “What do you think of it?” To my surprise I found him of the same opinion as Edward.

“My dear A. E., you know how I rely on your judgment. For twenty−five years I have refused to allow this book to be reprinted. Shall I relent?”

A. E. did not seem to think the book unworthy of me, and pressed me to read it.

“I'll lend you my copy.”

I received it next day, but returned it to him unread, my courage having failed me at the last moment.

A few months later I met Richard Best, one of the librarians at the National Library. He had just returned from his holidays; he had been spending them in Wales for the sake of the language.

“By the way,” he said, “I came across an old novel of yours—'Spring Days.'“

“You didn't like it?”

“On the contrary, I liked it as well, if not better, than any novel you have written. It is so entirely original. My wife... I think you value her opinion—”

“She liked it?”

“Come home with me, and she'll tell you how it struck her.”

“I will, on one condition, that you don't mention that you spoke to me about the book.”

Best promised, and we had not been many minutes in the house before Mrs. Best interrupted my remarks about the weather to tell me what she thought of “Spring Days.”

“The matter is important. Sooner or later I shall have to think about a collected edition. Is it to be included?”

Mrs. Best, like A. E., offered to lend me her copy, but I could not bring myself to accept it, and escaped from the book till I came to live in London. Then Fate thrust it into my hands, the means employed being a woman to whom I had written for “Impressions and Opinions.” She had lost her copy; there was, however, an old book of mine which she had never heard me speak of—“Spring Days”—and which, etc., she was sending me the book.

“Omens are omens,” I muttered, “and there's no use kicking against the pricks eternally;” and cutting the string of the parcel I sat down to read a novel which I had kept so resolutely out of my mind for twenty− five years, that all I remembered of its story and characters was an old gentleman who lived in a suburb, and whose daughters were a great source of trouble to him. I met the style of the narrative as I might that of an original writer whose works I was unacquainted with. There was a zest in it, and I read on and on; I must have read for nearly two hours, which is a long read for me, laying the book aside from time to time, so that I might reflect at my ease on the tenacity with which it had clung to existence. Every effort had been made to drown it; again and again it had been flung into the river, literally and metaphorically, but it had managed to swim ashore like a cat. It would seem that some books have nine hundred and ninety and nine lives, and God knows how long my meditation might have lasted if the front door bell had not rung.

“Are you at home, sir, to Mr.—?”

“Yes.”

There is time for one word more, dear reader, and whilst my visitor lays his hat and coat on the table in the passage I will beseech you not to look forward to a sentimental story; “Spring Days” is as free from sentiment or morals as Daphnis and Chloe.

G. M.

I

“Miss, I'll have his blood; I will, miss, I will.”

“For goodness' sake, cook, go back to your kitchen; put that dreadful pair of boots under your apron.”

“No, miss; I'll be revenged. He has insulted me.”

“You can't be revenged now, cook; you see he has shut himself in; you had better go back to your kitchen.”

The groom, who was washing the carriage, stood, mop in hand, grinning, appreciating the discomfiture of the coachman, who was paying the penalty of his joke.

“Cook, if you don't go back to your kitchen instantly, I'll give you notice. It is shameful—think what a scandal you are making in the stable−yard. Go back to your kitchen—I order you. It is half−past six, go and attend to your master's dinner.”

“He has insulted me, he has insulted me. I'll have your blood!” she cried, battering at the door. The rattling of chains was heard as the horses turned their heads.

“Put those boots under your apron, cook; go back to your kitchen, do as I tell you.”

The woman retreated, Maggie following. At intervals there were stoppages, and cook re−stated her desire to have the coachman's blood. Maggie did not attempt to argue with her, but sternly repeated her order to go back to her kitchen, and to conceal the old boots under her apron.

“What business had he to rummage in my box, interfering with my things; he put them all along the kitchen table; he did it because I told you, miss, that he was carrying on with the kitchenmaid. He goes with her every evening into the wood shed, and a married man, too! I wouldn't be his poor wife.”

“Go back to your kitchen, cook; do as I tell you.”

With muttered threats cook entered the house, and commanded the kitchenmaid to interfere no more with the oven, but to attend to her saucepans.

“What a violent woman,” thought Maggie, “horrid woman. I am sure she's Irish. I'll get rid of her as soon as I can. The place is filthy, but I daren't speak to her now. She's stirring the saucepan with her finger.”

At that moment quick steps were heard coming down the corridor, and Sally entered.

“Cook, cook, I want you to put back the dinner half an hour. I have to go down the town.”

“O Sally, I beg of you, what will father say?”

“Father isn't everybody. I daresay the train will be a little late; it often is. He won't know anything about it, that is if you don't tell him.”

“What do you want to go down the town for?”

“Never you mind. I don't ask you what you do.”

“You want to go down the slonk,” whispered Maggie.

The cook stopped stirring the saucepan, and the kitchenmaid stood listening greedily.

“Nothing of the kind,” Sally answered defiantly. “You're always trying to get up something against me. Cook, will you keep back the dinner twenty minutes?”

“Cook, I forbid you. I'm mistress here.”

“How dare you insult me before the servants! Grace is mistress here, if it comes to that.”

“Grace has given me over the housekeeping. I am mistress when she is too unwell to attend to it.”

“Nothing of the sort. Grace is the eldest, I would give way to her, but I'm not going to give way to you. Cook, the dinner won't be ready for another half hour, will it?”

“I don't know when the dinner will be ready, and I don't care.”

“It is a quarter to seven now, dinner won't be ready before seven, will it, cook? Keep it back a bit. Now I must be off.”

And, as Maggie expected, Sally ran past the glass houses and the pear and apple trees, for there was at the end of the vegetable garden a door in the brick wall that enclosed the manor house. It was used by the gardeners, and it communicated with a path leading through some corn and grass land to the high road. There were five acres of land attached to the manor house, tennis lawn, shady walks, flower garden, kitchen garden, stables, and coach

house at the back, and all this spoke in somewhat glaring fashion the wealth and ease of a rich city merchant.

"There she goes," thought Maggie, flaunting her head. "What a fool she is to bully father instead of humouring him. We shall never hear the end of this. His dinner put back so that she may continue her flirtation with Meason! I shall have to tell the truth. Why should I tell a lie?"

"Please, miss," said the butler as Maggie passed through the baize door, "I think it right to tell you about cook. We find it very hard to put up with her in the servants' hall. She is a very violent− tempered woman; nor can I say much for her in other respects. Last week she sold twenty pounds of dripping, and it wasn't all dripping, miss, it was for the most part butter."

"John, I really can't listen to any more stories about cook. Has the quarter−to−seven come in yet?"

"I haven't seen it pass, miss, but I saw Mr. Willy coming up the drive a minute ago."

Willy entered, and she turned to him and said: "Where have you been to, Willy?"

"Brighton. Has father come in yet?"

"No. You came by the tramcar?"

"Yes."

With shoulders set well back and toes turned out, Willy came along the passage. His manner was full of deliberation, and he carried a small brown paper parcel under his arm as if it were a sword of state. Maggie followed him up the steep and vulgarly carpeted staircase that branched into the various passages forming the upper part of the house. Willy's room was precise and grave, and there everything was held under lock and key. He put the brown paper parcel on the table; he took off his coat and laid it on the bed, heaving, at the same time, a sigh.

"Did you notice if the quarter−to−seven has been signalled?"

"Yes, but don't keep on worrying; the train is coming along the embankment."

"Then there will be a row to−night."

"Why?"

"Sally told cook to keep the dinner back; she has gone down the slonk to speak to Meason."

"Why didn't you tell cook that she must take her orders from you and no one else?"

"So I did, but Sally said I was no more mistress here than she was. I said Grace had given me charge of the house, when she could not attend to it; but Sally will listen to no one, she'll drive father out of his mind. There's no one he hates like the Measons."

"What is the matter with Grace? Where is she?"

"She's in her room, lying on the bed crying. She says she wants to die; she says that she doesn't care what becomes of her. She'll never care for another man, and father will not give his consent. What's−his−name has nothing—only a small allowance; he'll never have any more, he isn't a working man. I know father, he'll never hear of any one who is not a working man. I wish you'd speak to her."

"I've quite enough to do with my own affairs; I've had bad luck enough as it is, without running into new difficulties of my own accord."

"If she refuses Berkins, father'll never get over it. I wish you would speak to her."

"No, don't ask me. I never meddle in other people's affairs. I've had trouble enough. Now I want to dress."

When Maggie went downstairs, she found her father in the drawing−room.

"The train was a little late to−night. Has Willy come back from Brighton?"

"Yes, father."

"I've been looking over his accounts and I find he has lost nearly two thousand pounds in Bond Street, and I don't think he is doing any good with that agency in Brighton. I never approved of one or the other. I approve of nothing but legitimate city business. Shops in the West End! mere gambling. Where is Grace?"

"She's in her room."

"In her room? I suppose she hasn't left it all day? This is very terrible. I don't know what to do with you. Since your poor mother died my life has been nothing but trouble and vexation. I can't manage you, you are too strong for me. So she hasn't left her room; crying her eyes out, because I won't consent to her marrying a penniless young officer! But I will not squander my money. I made it all myself, by my own industry, and I refuse to keep young fellows in idleness."

"I don't give you any trouble, father."

“You are the best, Maggie, but you encourage your sister Sally. I hear that you, too, were seen walking with young Meason.”

“It is not true, I assure you, father. I met him as I was going to the post−office. I said, 'How do you do?' and I passed on.”

“Where is Sally?”

“She went out a few minutes ago.”

“Didn't she know the time? She ought to be dressing for dinner. Do you know where she's gone?”

“I think she went down the slonk.”

His children had inherited his straight, sharp features and his small, black, vivid eyes. Their hair was of various hues of black. Maggie's was raven black and glossy; Sally's was coarse and of a hue like black−lead; Grace's was abundant and relieved with sooty shades; Willy's hair was brown. He was the fair one of the family, and his hair was always closely cut in military fashion, and he wore a long flowing military moustache with a tinge of red in it. His father and he were built on the same lines—long, spare bodies, short necks and legs, and short, spare arms, and if the father's white hair were dyed the years that separated him from his son would disappear, for although the son had only just turned thirty, he was middle−aged in face and feeling.

Sally and Grace were both thickly built, the latter a little inclined to fat. Maggie was thin and elegantly angular, and often stood in picturesque attitudes; she stood in one now, with her hands linked behind her back, and she watched her father, and her look was subtle and insinuating.

“When I came here,” he said, speaking rapidly, and as if he were speaking to himself, “the place was well enough; there was nothing but those wretched cottages facing the sea, the green, and a few cottages about it; but since those villas have been put up, Southwick has become unbearable. All my troubles,” he murmured, “originated in the Southdown Road.”

Maggie turned aside, smiled, and bit her lip; she did not speak, however, for she knew her father did not care to be interrupted in his musings.

“A hateful place—glass porticoes, and oleographs on the walls.” Here Mr. Brookes stopped in his walk to admire one of his favourite Friths. “Those ridiculous haberdashers, with a bas−relief of the founder of their house over the doorway. The proprietors of the baths, the Measons, poor as church mice, the son a mate of a merchant vessel— these are not proper associates for my daughters. I will not know them; I will not have them in my house.”

“The Measons are quite as good as we are, father. They may be poor, but as far as family goes—”

“You are just the same as the others, Maggie; once there is a young man to flirt with, you don't care what he is or where he comes from. When there are no young men, you will snub the old ladies fast enough; and as for Sally, she is downright rude. I didn't want to see the haberdashers, but while they were in my house I was polite to them.”

“It was the Horlocks who told them to call.”

“I know it was. If Mrs. Horlock likes to know these people, let her know them; but what does she want to force them upon us for? That's what I want to know. We might never have known any one in the Southdown Road; I mean we never should, we never could have known any one in the Southdown Road if Mrs. Horlock hadn't come to live there. We had to call upon her.”

“Every Viceroy in India called upon her. She was the only woman whom every Viceroy did call upon.”

“I know she was. Of course we had to call upon her. Most interesting woman; the General is very nice, too. I like them exceedingly. I often go to see them, although the smell of that mastiff is more than I can bear in the hot weather, especially if lilies or strong smelling flowers are in the room.”

“She feeds the mice, she won't let them be destroyed, she lets the traps down at night.”

“Don't let us go into the animal question. The constant smell of dogs is unpleasant, but I could put up with it—what I can't stand are her acquaintances in the Southdown Road, and when I think that we should not have known any of them if it hadn't been for her! Indirectly—I do not say directly—she is the cause of all my difficulties. It was at her house Sally met young Meason; it was at her house Grace met that young officer for whom she is crying her eyes out; and it was at her house—yes, I hadn't thought of it before—it was at her house that Willy met that swindler who induced him to put two thousand pounds into the Bond Street shop. The Southdown Road might have remained here for the next five hundred years, and we should have known nothing

of it had it not been for Mrs. Horlock; if she likes to know these people let her know them, but why force them upon us? It was only the other day she was talking to me about calling on some new friends of hers who have come to live there. I dare say it is the custom to call on every one at Calcutta, but I say that Calcutta etiquette is not Southwick etiquette, and I don't care how many Viceroys called upon her, I will not know the Southdown Road."

The enunciation of this last sentence was deliberate and impassioned. Mr. Brookes walked twice across the room; then he stood, his hands crossed behind his back, looking at his admired Goodall. His anger melted, and he mused on the price he had paid, and the price he thought it was now worth. Fearing he would return to the Southdown Road trouble, Maggie said: "I am afraid we shall be obliged to get rid of the new cook. She is Irish. Just before you came in I found her in the stable−yard threatening to break Holt's head with a pair of dreadful old boots."

"I don't want to hear about the cook. The money you spend in housekeeping is enormous. Since your poor mother died I haven't had a day's peace. If it isn't one thing it is another. You are fit for nothing but pleasure and flirtation; there isn't a young man in the place or within ten miles you haven't flirted with. I am often ashamed to look them in the face at the station. It is past seven; why isn't dinner ready?"

"Sally told the cook to put the dinner back half an hour."

"Sally told the cook to put my dinner back half an hour!"

Mr. Brookes's face grew livid. The end of all things was at hand; his dinner had been put back half an hour! This was a climax in the affairs of his life, which for the moment he failed to grasp or estimate. Was a father ever cursed with such daughters as his? He had been in the City all day working for them; he did not marry because he wished to leave them his money, and this was the return they made to him. His dinner had been put back half an hour! Passion sustained him for a while; but he gave way, and, pulling out a silk handkerchief, he sank into a chair.

"Don't cry, father, don't cry. Sally is thoughtless; she didn't mean it."

Mr. Brookes wept for a few minutes; Maggie strove to soothe him; he waved her away, he wiped his eyes and in a voice broken with anguish, "Ah, well," he said, "I suppose it will be all the same a hundred years hence." In moments of extreme trouble he sought refuge in such philosophy, but now it seemed inadequate and superficial, and Maggie had begun to fear the violence of the storm she had brewed. She did not mind stimulating ill−feeling, but she did not wish Sally to provoke her father recklessly.

The possibility of his marrying again and having a second family was the one restraining influence Mr. Brookes still retained over his daughters, so Maggie, who was always keenly alive to the remotest consequences of her actions, took care that his home never became quite unbearable to him; and when Sally entered the room, dark and brilliant in red velvet, and in no way disposed to admit she had been guilty of heinous wrong in countermanding the dinner, Maggie attempted a gentle pouring of oil on the waters. But waving aside her sister's gentle interposition, she said: "You mustn't think of yourself only, father. I admit I told the cook to put back the dinner a few minutes. What then?"

"You did it that you might finish your conversation with young Meason," said Mr. Brookes, but his words were weak, it being doubtful if even Meason could add to the original offence, so culminating and final did it seem to him.

"Maggie didn't tell you that last week she met him on the sea road, and walked with him into Portslade."

"Father, father, I beg of you, now, don't cry; think of the servants."

And it was in such unity of mind and feeling that this family sat down to dinner in the great dining−room, rich with all comforts and adorned with pictures by Frith and Goodall. Sally, who unfortunately knew no fear, talked defiantly; she addressed herself principally to her brother, and she questioned him persistently, although the replies she received were generally monosyllabic. As he chewed his meat with reflection and precaution, broke his bread with deliberate and well−defined movements, and filled his mouth with carefully chosen pieces, he gradually ventured to decide that he would not speak to his father that evening of the scheme he had been hatching for some months. It was one of his strictest rules not to think while eating, so it may be said that it was against his will that he arrived at this conclusion. Willy suffered from indigestion, and he knew that any exercise of the brain was most prejudicial at meal times.

After dinner Mr. Brookes and his son retired to the billiard−room to smoke.

“Your sisters are a great trouble to me—a very great anxiety. Since your poor mother died I've had no peace, none whatever. Poor Julia, she's gone; I shall never see her again.”

Willy made no answer. He was debating; he was still uncertain whether the present time could be considered a favourable one to introduce his scheme to his father's notice, and he had made up his mind that it was, when he was interrupted by Mr. Brookes, who had again lapsed into one of his semi−soliloquies.

“Your sisters give me a great deal of trouble, a very great deal of anxiety. I am all alone. I have no one to help me since the death of your poor mother.”

“My sisters are fitted for nothing but pleasure,” Willy replied severely.

II

Mr. Brookes went to London every day by the five minutes to ten; Willy walked into Brighton. There he had been for some time striving to found an agency for artificial manures, and in the twilight of a small office he brooded over the different means of making money that were open to him. The young ladies worked or played as it struck their fancy. Sally admitted that she infinitely preferred walking round the garden with a young man to doing wool−work in the drawing−room. Maggie shared this taste, although she did not make bold profession of it. Grace was the gentlest of the sisters, and had passed unnoticed until she had fallen in love with a penniless officer, and tortured her father with tears and haggard cheeks because he refused to supply her with money to keep a husband. The doctor had ordered her iron; she had been sent to London for a change, but neither remedy was of much avail, and when she returned home pale and melancholy she had not taken the keys from Maggie, but had allowed her to usurp her place inthe house. Sally was supposed to look after the conservatories, but beyond her own special flowers she left everything to the gardeners.

On Sundays Mr. Brookes walked through the long drawing−rooms aimlessly. Sometimes he would stop before one of his pictures. “There, that's a good picture, I paid a lot of money for it, I paid too much, mustn't do so again.” Passing his daughters, sometimes without speaking, he then stopped before one of the big chimney−pieces, and, pulling out his large silk pocket handkerchief, dusted the massive clocks and candlesticks.

In the billiard−room, at a table drawn up close to the coke fire, Willy slowly and with much care made pencil notes, which he slowly and with great solemnity copied into his diary.

“Your sisters are a great source of trouble to me, a source of deep anxiety,” said Mr. Brookes, and he flicked the rearing legs of a bronze horse with his handkerchief.

“My sisters are only fit for pleasure,” said Willy and he finished the tail of the y, passed the blotting paper over, and prepared to begin a fresh paragraph.

“I am afraid Grace is scarcely any better; she will not leave her room. I hear she is crying. It is too ridiculous, too ridiculous. What she can see in that man I can't think; he is only a man of pleasure. I've told her so, but somehow she can't get to see why I will not settle money upon her—money that I made myself, by hard work, judicious investments.”

“That's a smack at the shop,” thought Willy, as he placed his full stop.

“I'll not settle my money upon her,” said Mr. Brookes, as he resumed his dusting; “and for what? to keep an idle fellow in idleness. No, I'll not do it. She'll get over it—ah, it will be all the same a hundred years hence. But tell me, have you noticed—no, you notice nothing—”

“Yes, I do; what do you want me to say, that she is looking very ill? I can't help it if she is. I've quite enough troubles of my own without thinking of other people's. I'm sure I am very sorry. I wish she'd never met the fellow.”

“That's what I say, I wish she'd never met the fellow, and she never would had it not been for that horrible Southdown Road. Southwick has never been the same since those villas were put up.”

“I know nothing about them; I won't know them. I don't go to the Horlocks because I may meet people there I don't want to know. If you hadn't allowed the girls to go there, she never would have met him.”

“But we had to call on the Horlocks. Every Viceroy that ever came to India called upon her, and they're excellent people—titled people come down from London to see them: but I daresay their banking accounts wouldn't bear looking into. She walks about the green with the chemist's wife, and has the people of the baths to dinner. Mostextraordinary woman. I like her, I enjoy her society; but I can't follow her in her opinions. She says that only men are bad; that all animals are good; that it is only men who make them bad. Her views on hydrophobia are most astonishing. She says it is a mild and easy death, and sees no reason why the authorities should attempt to stamp it out. She quite frightened me with the story she told me of a mad dog that died in her arms. But that by the way. The point is not now whether she is right to feed mice in her bedroom instead of getting rid of them, but whether we should call on people we don't want to know because she asks us to do so. I say we should not. When she spoke to me the other day about the lady whose mother was a housemaid, I said,

'My dear Mrs. Horlock, it is very well for you to call on those people. I approve of, I admire magnanimity; but what you can do I cannot do. You have no daughters to bring out; every Viceroy that ever came to India called on you, your position in the world is assured, your friends will not think the less of you no matter how intimately you know the chemist's wife, but you could not do these things if you had daughters to bring out.'"

"What did she say to that?"

"She was just going out to walk with her pugs. Angel began to—you know, and for the moment she could think of nothing else; when the little beast had finished I had forgotten the thread of my argument. However, I spoke to her about Grace; and she promised that she shouldn't meet the fellow again. I can't think of his name, I get lost in the different names, and they are all so alike I scarcely know one from the other. I have had nothing but trouble since your poor mother died. Your sisters give me a great deal of trouble, and you have given me a great deal of trouble. We couldn't get on in business together on account of your infernal slowness. No man is more for keeping his accounts and letters straight than I, but your exactitude drives me mad; it drives me mad; there you are at it again. I should like to know what you are copying into that diary. One would think you were writing an article for the *Times*, from the care with which you're drawing out every letter; 'pon my word it isn't writing at all, it's painting. You can't write for a pair of boots without taking a copy of the letter, entering it into this book, and entering it into that book; 'pon my word it is maddening."

Willy laughed. "Each person has his own way of doing business; I don't see how it interferes with you, or what difference it makes to you, if I spend three minutes or three days writing a letter."

"Perhaps not, perhaps not; but I am terribly upset about Grace," said Mr. Brookes, and he walked slowly across the room and stood looking at his Bouguereau; "she'll get over it, but in any case she'll miss her chance of marrying Berkins; that is what distresses me. The man stinks of money. I hear that he has been appointed manager of a colliery, that alone will bring him another thousand a year. His business is going up, he must be worth now between seven and eight thousand a year. And he began as an office boy, he hadn't a penny piece, made it all himself."

"So I should think; a purse−proud ass!"

"Never mind, his eight thousand is as good an eight thousand as any in the land, better than a great many. I wouldn't give a snap of my fingers for your broken−down landowners; Berkins has always made excellent investments, and I hear he is now getting as much as fifteen per cent. for money invested."

Willy had been to Oxford, and the arrogance and pomposity of this purse−proud man shocked his sense of decorum. Berkins's vulgarity was more offensive than that of Mr. Brookes. Mr. Brookes was a simple, middle−class man, who had made money straightforwardly and honestly, and he had cultivated his natural taste for pictures to the limit of his capacities and opportunities. Berkins, however, had been born a gentleman, but had had to shift for himself, even when a lad, and he had caught at all chances; he was more sophisticated, he was a gentleman in a state of retrograde, and was in all points inferior to him whom he crossed in his descent. Berkins had bought a small place, a villa with some hundred acres attached to it, on the other side of Preston Park. There he had erected glass houses, and bred a few pheasants in the corner of a field, and it surprised him to find that the county families took no notice of him. Mr. Brookes had sympathised, but the young people laughed at him and Willy had told a story how he had been to shoot at ——, and when a partridge got up right in front of his gun, Berkins turned round and shot it, exclaiming: "That's the way to bring them down!"

And now whenever his name was mentioned, Willy thought of this incident, so very typical did it seem to him of the man, and he liked to twit his father with it. But Mr. Brookes could not be brought to see the joke, and he fell back on the plausible and insidious argument that, notwithstanding his manners, Berkins was worth eight thousand a year.

"And very few girls get the chance of catching eight thousand a year; and she'll miss it, she'll miss it if she doesn't take care."

"You talk of it as if it were an absolute certainty; you don't know that Berkins wants to marry Grace; he hasn't been here for the last month."

"Mr. Berkins is not like the young good−for−nothings your sisters waste their time with, he is a man of means, of eight thousand a year; you don't expect him to come round here every evening to tea, and to play tennis, and to walk in the moonlight and talk nonsense. Berkins is a man of means, he is a man who can make a settlement."

"Has he spoken to you on the subject, then?"

"No, Mr. Berkins is a man of tact, however you may laugh at him for having shot your partridge. He spoke to your Aunt Mary, or rather she spoke to him. Ah, clever woman, your Aunt Mary, wonderful manner, wonderful will, when she wants a thing done it must be done. Your poor mother—I mean no disparagement—but I must say she couldn't compare with her for determination; Sally reminds me of her, but Sally's determination is misdirected, deplorably misdirected; it is directed against me, entirely against me. She must be made submissive; when I spoke to Aunt Mary about her, she said her spirit must be broken; and if she were here she'd break it. If she were here things would be very different, your sisters wouldn't be flirting with all the little clerks in the Southdown Road; but I am alone. I have no one to turn to."

"You were telling me that Berkins had spoken to Aunt Mary about Grace."

"Your Aunt Mary spoke to Berkins about Grace; she told him he ought to be thinking of marrying; that he wanted a wife. Then the conversation turned on my daughters, and Mary no doubt mentioned that at my death they would all have large fortunes."

"Ah, so it is the money that Berkins is after."

"Money comes first. If a man can make a settlement he will naturally demand a—that is to say he will naturally look forward, he will consider what her prospects are; not her immediate prospects, that would be mercenary, but her future prospects."

Willy smiled. "And what did Berkins say?"

"He said he wanted to marry, and he spoke of Grace; he said he admired her. I shouldn't be surprised if we saw him at church to−day."

"Are you going to ask him to lunch?"

"Certainly, if he's there." Then, after a long silence, Mr. Brookes said: "He'll come in here to smoke. Of course you'll leave us alone. Do you mind leaving out your cigars?"

"I have only half a box left; I think really you might keep some in the house to supply your own guests with. You always object if I interfere with your things."

"I am out of my best cigars—it is so hard to remember. He won't smoke more than one."

"I'll put one in the cigar case then."

"You had better fill it; it will look so bad if there is only one; he won't take it."

"He'll take all he can get; he took my bird, I know that!"

"This is a matter of great importance."

"To you and to Grace, not to me," said Willy, and with very bad grace he unlocked a drawer, and placed a box of cigars on the table.

"Thank you. Now what time is it? Half−past ten. By Jove! we must be thinking of starting; I suppose you aren't coming?"

"I am afraid I've too much to do this morning."

The young ladies appeared in new dresses, and with prayer−books in their hands. Mr. Brookes took his hat and umbrella, and Willy watched them depart with undisguised satisfaction. "Now I shall be able to get through some work," he said, untying a large bundle of letters. He wrote a page in his diary, tied up the letters, diary, and notebook in brown paper, and, with a sigh, admitting that he did not feel up to much work to−day, he took up the envelopes that had contained his letters and began tearing off the stamps, and he did this very attentively as if he did not trust his dry thick fingers. Somebody had told him that ten thousand old stamps were worth—he had forgotten the price of old stamps, and wondering he dozed off. When he awoke he cried: "Half−past twelve, they must be on their way back; I wonder if Berkins is with them!" And he strolled out on the gravel.

A few spring flowers marked the brown earth about the trees, and a beautiful magnolia, white as a bride, shed its shell−like petals in an angle beneath a window; the gold of the berberis glowed at the end of the path; and the greenery was blithe as a girl in clear muslin and ribbons. The blackbirds chattered and ran, and in turn flew to the pan of water placed for them, and drank, lifting their heads with exquisite motion. The trees rustled in the cold wind; the sky was white along the embankment, where an engine moved slowly up and down the line.

Willy was sensible that the scene was pleasant and pretty, and remembering he was fond of birds, he thrust his hands deeper in his pockets and walked slowly down the drive, his toes well turned out. "I wonder if they met Berkins at church?" was the question he put to himself gravely. "What a cad he is! No wonder the county people

fight shy of us; a fellow like that is enough to close their doors against us for ever. My father pooh−poohs everything but riches; he positively flies in their faces, so what can I do? I don't care to ask my Oxford friends down here; one never knows how he will receive them. He can talk of nothing but his business. Had I a free hand, had I not been so hampered, we might have known all the best county families, even theduke."

The latch of the gate clicked, and Mr. Brookes and his family appeared. Maggie and Sally walked on the right and left of their father; Grace came on behind with Berkins, and it seemed to Willy that the city magnate bore himself with something even more than his usual dignity. At first sight he suggested that anomalous creature—a footman with a beard; and the slow, deliberate enunciation marked him as one accustomed to speak in public. His manner of sitting at a table suggested letters and dictation of letters, his manner of moving his glasses on his nose accounts, and at no moment would it have been surprising to see him place his strong finger at the bottom of a line of figures, and begin "Gentlemen," etc.

During lunch, Sally and Maggie spoke in undertones; they glanced occasionally at Grace, who sat by and received Berkins's bald remarks with deference. The girls trembled with excitement; they had pressed and extorted from Grace a hurried statement of what had happened. Berkins had proposed to her, he had told her he had never seen any one except her whom he would care to make his wife. What had she said? She didn't know. She couldn't really remember. She had been taken so suddenly, she was so upset, that she hadn't known what to say. She thought she had said something about the honour—but she really had not had time to say much, for at that moment they were at the gate. Did she intend to accept him? She didn't know; she could not make up her mind. It was a terrible thing to throw over poor Jack; she didn't think she could do it—no matter what father might say. However, she knew he would never give his consent, so it was no use thinking,

"I hope she won't begin to cry," whispered Sally, who had followed Maggie to the sideboard.

"Father looks as if he were going to cry," replied Maggie, moving the decanters and pretending to look for a glass.

Seven thousand a year, ten thousand a year! Would Grace have him? What would father settle on her? The sum he settled on her he must settle on them when they married. As Berkins's wife Grace would have servants, jewels, rich dresses, and a house in London, and they thought of the advantage this marriage would be to them.

The knives clattered; cheese and celery were being eaten. Mr. Brookes had drunk several glasses of port, and was on the verge of tears. Berkins's high shoulders and large voice dominated the dining−table; he was decidedly more than usually impressed by his own worth, and the worth of the money of which he was the representative. Willy chewed his cheese; there were many wrinkles about his eyes—deep lines turning towards the ears; and when he lifted his tumbler one noticed the little nails, almost worn away, of his lean hands.

At last Mr. Brookes said: "I daresay you would like a cigar, Berkins— will you come into the billiard−room?"

Berkins inclined to this suggestion. Willy, who had not quite finished, remained at table. The girls watched each other, and as soon as the elderly men turned their backs they fled upstairs to their rooms.

"Will you try one of these?" said Mr. Brookes, offering a box of choice havannas.

"Thank you. My tobacconist—I must ask you to visit his shop—receives just a few cases of a very special cigar; I have at least two−thirds of them, sometimes more; when you dine with me I'll give you one. This is Chartreuse, I think. My wine merchant knows a man whose cousin is one of the monks. Now the monks set aside the very cream of the liqueur, if I may so speak, for themselves. This liqueur cannot be bought in the open market. You may go up to London prepared to write a cheque for any figure you may like to name, and I will defy you to buy a bottle. I never have any other. It is really quite delicious. I daresay I could get you some."

Mr. Brookes expressed thanks for the amiable offer, and both men smoked on in silence.

"Do you play billiards?"

"No. Do you?"

"No."

Inwardly they congratulated themselves. Presently Mr. Brookes said: "I hear you have been staying with my sister, Mrs. Haltom. You were shooting there, were you not?"

"Yes, they were kind enough to ask me. Very nice shooting they have, too."

"I hear that you have gone in for rearing pheasants."

"Yes; we shot a hundred brace last year."

The conversation dropped, and in an impressive silence both men wondered what they had better say to lead

honourably up to the subject they had come to speak on.

"Is your house your own design? Did you build it entirely yourself? Iforget. I ought to know; you told me all about it when I dined with you."

"There was a house there, but I altered it considerably after my own idea, and not a bad idea, I flatter myself. I spent a good deal of money in laying out the grounds, putting up conservatories, and so forth."

"You are a single man?"

"For a single man the house is, of course, too large; but I do not intend to remain always single, and—and now, Mr. Brookes, as we are on the subject, I had better tell you that I have asked Miss Brookes to be my wife."

Mr. Brookes grasped at the first words. "I am sure I am very pleased to hear it, Mr. Berkins, and I hope the answer was a favourable one."

"Miss Brookes is a modest girl. She has been well brought up, as a girl who is, I hope, to be my wife should be, and she was naturally a little overcome. I did not exactly catch what she said, and I didn't like to press her for an immediate answer. But suppose we assume for the moment that Miss Brookes's reply will be a favourable one—I have, I confess, much faith in her good sense—we might consider the business side."

Notwithstanding his admiration of a man who had made three thousand a year more than he had succeeded in doing, Mr. Brookes could not but feel irritated at Berkins, who, with increasing gravity, continued to assume all things to his own advantage. It had not occurred to him to consider that Grace might refuse him. Why should she refuse him? She could not hope to do better. She appeared to him as a very nice girl indeed, one entirely fitted for the position for which he intended her. He understood that all girls, at least those in society, were innocent and virtuous; he understood that when they married they made faithful and dutiful wives; and he had chosen her not because he had fallen in love, nor yet because he had noticed she was likely to make a better wife than her sisters, but because she was the eldest. Even so he would be twenty years his wife's senior, and he had chosen to marry one of the Brookes girls because he knew them and saw them constantly; because he knew that at their father's death his fortune would be divided between them. Grace was, therefore, an heiress in perspective. The prospect was agreeable, but he foresaw that it would be put forward as an excuse for fixing the sum of marriage settlements as low as possible. It would, however, be difficult for Brookes to settle less on his daughter than he, Berkins, was willing to settle on his wife; so partly in the hopes of forcing Mr. Brookes, and partly because of the pleasure it gave him to speak of himself, he continued talking of his position and possessions.

"In dealing with me," he said, "you are dealing, as you know, Mr. Brookes, with a man of means, a man who can afford to do the thing properly; you will not misunderstand me—you remember you told me that you had great difficulty in keeping the little folk who live here out of your house."

"The neighbourhood has never been the same since they put up that row of villas. A lot of indigent fortune−hunters, they know my girls will have large fortunes at my death, so they come sneaking round the place like so many wolves."

"I can readily sympathise with you; one doesn't make money to keep idle young fellows in the luxuries of life."

"That is what I say."

"But you aren't sufficiently firm, Mr. Brookes; had you been brought up in the hard school that I was you would be more firm; firmness is everything. You married early, I couldn't afford to do that. At sixteen I had to shift for myself. I was three years a clerk at two pounds a week, and not many chances to rise come in the way of a clerk at two pounds a week; he must be pretty sharp, and if he doesn't seize the little chance when it comes, he will remain a little clerk all his life. It is the first steps that are difficult, the rest are nothing. You don't know what the first steps are; I do. Once you've made a thousand pounds you can swim along a bit, but the first hundred, I shall never forget it! Afterwards it is just the same; the proportions are changed, that is all. The first twenty thousand is very uphill work, the second is on the flat, the third is going downhill—it brings itself along."

"A very good simile indeed. There's no doubt that it is money that makes money. When you have none you cannot make it. It is like corn; give a man a handful, and he must be a fool if he can't fill his barn. The beginnings are hard; none knows that better than I. But for the last ten years I've been doing fairly well."

"I had never intended to get married, but when money really begins to accumulate it pushes you along. It is curious how money takes you along. It is like a tide. You first begin thinking of a little place in the country where you can stay from Saturday till Monday. The little place grows; it is extraordinary how it grows. You find you

want flowers, and you put up a glass house; then you begin to get interested in orchids or roses, and you put up two, maybe half a dozen glass houses. Suddenly you find the rabbits are breeding in the hedgerows, and you go out yonder ferretting, but the coachman does not know how to manage the ferrets, and you start a keeper. The keeper says one morning, 'It wouldn't require much to get up a stock of pheasants in that little wood.' You say, 'Very well;' and there you are before you know it, with glass houses, rabbit−shooting, and a pheasant preserve. You have friends to stay with you for the shooting, you get talked about in the clubs, people ask why you aren't married— the place where the wife ought to be stares you in the face: a man of money, of real money, must get married. The friends who come and stay with you suggest a little dance, you think it would be very pleasant; but you know no one in the neighbourhood, the county people won't visit you, so the thing comes about, and you are head over heels in settlements before you know where you are."

"Do you find the county people very standoffish over Preston Park way?"

"I am not in a position to judge; they could not very well call on me situated as I am, a young—well, I will say, a marriageable—man, known to be wealthy; but I have no doubt when I am married they will call on us."

"Twirl them round my little finger, stuck−up lot; I should like to know what they have to be proud of, half of them are broken—their land is worthless. Give me good sound investments, five or six per cent. For some money I am getting seven; the waterworks pays fourteen."

The conversation suddenly dropped, they looked at each other blankly; they felt they had talked a good deal, but without approaching any nearer the subject they had met to speak on.

"Our intention was," said Berkins, in his most solemn and professional manner, "assuming that Miss Brookes is not averse from my suit, to discuss the business side, for there is a business side to all questions, as you, Mr. Brookes, will be the first to see."

Mr. Brookes had begun to anger; he would have liked to have answered that such a discussion was altogether premature, but he yielded before Berkins's authoritative manner, and he replied instead that he would be glad indeed to hear whatever proposal Mr. Berkins had to make.

"I should like to say, then—I will assume that we stand as man to man, equal; you have probably more money invested than I; I am making possibly a larger income—you will forgive me if I am mistaken, but you told me the other day as we went up in the train that you had had a very bad year."

"Three thousand dead loss. It does not matter so much to me, my money is invested, but it would have gone hard with many a man who was relying on his business. Three thousand pounds dead loss!"

"How was that? I suppose the temperance societies affect you; they must have had a great effect on the sale of liquor."

"No one who was not in the trade would believe in the falling off in the quantity of whisky drunk. But it was not that."

"What then?"

"Trade generally, trade depression affects every one; the failure of one makes bad debts for the other. It was bad debts that did it. It was very stupid of me, but I was worried at home: those fortune− hunters from the villas—my daughters are very young, and since their poor mother died they have had no one to look after them. Willy, too, is a great trial to me. Poor boy, he is most anxious to do something, but things don't go right with him; he thought he was going to do a good thing in a Bond Street shop that was converted into a company, but he lost two thousand pounds."

"I thought he was in the distillery with you."

"He was for a while, but he irritated me; he is so confoundedly methodical, everything must go into his diary, he spends half the day filling it up. Besides after you have conducted a business so many years you don't want a partner; you have your own way of doing things, and don't want to be interfered with. He draws a certain income, but he has nothing now to do with the business. We were talking of settlements."

"You do not act as I should regarding the villa residences. I would put them down. I would not have it; but, as you say, we were talking of settlements. I think I said we stood as man to man. In round numbers your fortune equals mine, mine equals yours—very well, let us act equally. I will settle five hundred a year on Miss Brookes, do you likewise; what do you say to that?"

"Pooh, pooh! I couldn't think of such a thing. Five hundred a year!" said Mr. Brookes, and throwing his cigar into the fireplace, he walked up the room indignantly. "I was wrong to consent to discuss the matter; to say the

least, it is premature; I never heard of such a thing. Five hundred a year! This is worse than the Southdown Road, many degrees worse."

"Sir, such insinuations are most uncalled for; I must beg of you to withdraw them. I must ask you to remember you are talking to one at least in the same position as yourself, to a man of seven thousand a year!"

"Pooh, pooh! seven thousand a year—you are making that to−day, to−morrow you mayn't be making three. Yours isn't invested money."

Berkins had risen from the great leather armchair, and he stood expressionless as a piece of office furniture, his grave face divided by the green shade of the billiard lamp; Mr. Brookes remained with his back—his straight fat back bound in a new frock coat that defined the senile fatness of the haunches—turned to his guest. He stooped as if to examine his favourite Linnell, but, in his passion, he did not see it. The table, covered with a grey cloth, lay like an account spread out between the moneyed men.

"Taking your words into due consideration, I think I had better wish you good−morning, Mr. Brookes."

"Mr. Berkins, I would not wish you to misunderstand me," said Mr. Brookes, whom the prospect of losing seven thousand a year had suddenly cooled. "My daughter will have—my children, I should say— will have my fortune divided amongst them at my death, and when we come to go into figures you will find—"

"But in the meantime, what do you propose to settle on her?"

Mr. Brookes hesitated. He was angry at being pressed. Berkins's domineering tone irritated him; he would have liked to bundle him from the house.

Presently he said: "I think, considering the very large sums of money my daughters will come into at my death, that a settlement of two hundred a year is ample."

"Very well, in that case I shall settle the same."

"I could not, I will not, consent to any such arrangement. The man my daughter marries must settle on her a sum of money equivalent—"

"To what you settle on her."

"To her position, to her expectations," replied Mr. Brookes, growing more and more angry.

"But I don't know what her expectations are; you may marry again." "I do not intend to marry again."

"Very possibly, but I know nothing of that; business is business, and I should be a fool if I settle five hundred to your two hundred."

Mr. Brookes stopped in his walk, and he looked at Berkins, who stood, his hand laid upon the billiard table as upon a huge balance sheet. The word business had carried the men back to their offices in London, and, quite forgetful of the subject of their bargaining, each strove to obtain an advantage over the other.

"Well, let us say two hundred and fifty, that is my last word."

"Then, Mr. Brookes, I will not take your daughter."

III

"Willy, make haste, I beg of you; I shall miss my train. It is now exactly half−past nine."

"You had better go without me; I cannot start now. I haven't nearly got my things together."

"Very well, very well."

Willy walked from room to room tying and untying brown paper parcels in his most methodical and most dilatory manner. His sisters stood watching him from the drawing−room door.

"Did father tell you nothing when Berkins left? They had a row, hadn't they? It isn't off, is it?"

"I wish you would not speak so loud, Sally; you can be heard all over the house."

"Do tell us."

"But I don't know. Father was very much upset. I couldn't speak to him about my own business, I know that."

"Well, I suppose we shall hear about it to−night. You are going to meet Frank in Brighton, aren't you?"

"Yes; he is coming to lunch with me."

"Don't keep him all day; send him on here, we might have a game of tennis."

Willy did not answer; and he thought as he went upstairs, what a trouble young girls were in a house. "They think of nothing but pleasure, nothing but pleasure."

One, two, or three more delays, and he was ready, and with his brown paper parcel tucked under his arm he set forth. Upon the young blue of the sky, the fresh green of the buds melted. There were a few elms, but hardly enough to constitute an avenue. The house looked as if it had been repeatedly altered. It ran into unexpected corners and angles; but it was far enough from the road to justify a gate lodge. The swards were interspersed with shrubs in the most modern fashion, and the sumptuous glass−houses could be seen gleaming in the sun. It was a hot day, and the brick wall was dappled with hanging foliage, and further out, opposite the windows of the "Stag and Hounds," where Steyning's ales could be obtained, the over−reaching sprays of a great chestnut tree fell in delicate tracery on the white dust. The road led under the railway embankment, and looking through the arched opening, one could see the dirty town, straggling along the canal or harbour, which runs parallel with the sea. A black stain was the hull of a great steamer lying on her side in the mud, but the tapering masts of yachts were beautiful on the sky, and at the end of a row of slatternly houses there were sometimes spars and rigging so strange and bygone that they suggested Drake and the Spanish main.

Southwick is half a suburb, half a village. In the summer months the green seems a living thing. It is there the children talk and tumble when school is over. They are told to go to the green, they are forbidden to go to the green, and it is from the green the eldest girl leads the naughty boy howling. When they are a little older they avoid the green, it is too public then. It is to the green that elevens come from far and near to play their matches. All the summer through the green is a *fete* of cricket. It is to the green the brass bands come on Saturday. On the green, bat and trap is played till the ball disappears in shadow. The green is common; horses and cows are turned out there. All profit by the green. It is on the edge of the green the housewives come to talk in the limpid moonlight. It is on the green the fathers smoke when the little cottage rooms are unbearable with summer heat. It is on the green that Mrs. Horlock walks with her pugs and the chemist's wife, to the enormous scandal of the neighbourhood.

To the right, facing the embankment, and overlooking some fields, is the famous Southdown road, and parallel with the green is Mr. Brookes's property—a solid five acres, with all modern improvements and embellishments, and surrounded by a brick wall over six feet high.

Willy hated Southwick. He thought it ugly and vulgar; he regretted deeply that his father would make no advances, and that they were as far from county society to−day as when they came to live in the place thirty years ago. "I knew the best people when I was at Oxford, why can I not know them now? Here we are doing the same thing from year's end to year's end; why, with our money we ought to be hob−nobbing with the duke." In moments of dejection this was one of Willy's commonest thoughts. "I did my best, but I was opposed. Father doesn't care, and as for the girls, they'll take up with any man so long as he is young. Still, in spite of them I should have got on if I hadn't lost my nerve and had to give up hunting; and without hunting there is no way of

making acquaintances.”

Willy had relied on a hunter as Berkins had on pheasants and glass−houses. But he hated hunting, and finding he got no further than a few breakfasts, he had told a story of a heavy fall and sold his horses. He had then insisted on dinner−parties, and some few people more or less “county” had been collected; the pretext was politics, but Willy and politics were but a doleful mixture, and the scheme collapsed. The family was not endowed with any social qualifications, Willy least of all, and having failed to advance himself individually, and his family collectively, he threw up the game.

We rarely cultivate for long things in which we may not succeed in— the lady with a small waist pinches it, the man with pretty feet wears pretty shoes, and in no circumstances could Willy have shone in society. He failed to interest the ladies he met on the King's Road, he knew this; and to sum up his deficiencies, let us say he was lacking in “go.” He was too timid to succeed with the more facile loves whom he met in the evenings on the pier. All the same he had had his love affair.

Oh! men of inferior aspect and speech, often in you a true heart abides; you, and you only, are faithful to the end.

To this unromantic person a shred of pure romance was attached. None knew the whole story, and none spoke of it now; but his sisters remembered that Willy had fallen in love with a girl whom he had seen play “Sweet Anne Page.” They remembered long letters, tears and wild looks. He had sent her diamonds; and one night he had attempted suicide. All was now forgotten; at least it was the past, and nothing remained but one little melody which he had heard her sing, and which he sometimes whistled out of tune.

But sooner or later a man's talents, and if not his talents, his tastes, appear through the mists of youth, and henceforth they lead him. Willy's efforts in society had resulted in abortive dinner−parties, his efforts in sport had been cut short by nerves, his efforts in dissipation had left him with a tolerably well−filled wardrobe, his efforts in love had brought him tears and a commonplace mistress, whom he kept in the necessaries of life in various lodging− houses. So his youth had passed; but in all this mediocrity a certain spirit of resistance endured. His taste for figures grew more pronounced; he surrounded himself with account books, letter books, and diaries; he took note of every penny that passed through his hands. Money−making, profitable investments—that was to be his aim in life; and as each year closed his thoughts fixed themselves more definitely and entirely on it; and it was natural that it should be so, since all other outlets for the passion of life were barred to him. His forced retirement from the distillery did not worry him. No one could please his father in business; his uncle had once threatened to throw his brother out of the window. Besides, the business was a declining one, and twelve thousand pounds for a junior partnership was not bad. Nor did his failure to make a success of the manure agency discourage him; the shop was a different matter, that was his own idea, he had thought of a fortune, and had lost two thousand pounds. It had crippled him for life. True enough, there were other things to do. Some stockbrokers make twenty per cent. on their money, not in wild speculation, but in straightforward genuine business. He might go up to London and learn the business—he had heard that it would not take more than six months or a year to pick it up—and start on his own account. A thousand pounds would be sufficient to begin with; or he might buy a partnership—he could do that for three or four thousand. Either of these courses would suit him, the latter for preference, but a certain amount of capital would be necessary before he could take either, and that he hadn't got, and to all appearances it would be very difficult to persuade his father to consent to drawany more money out of the distillery.

So Willy's thoughts ran as he ascended the flight of wooden steps that led to the platform of the little country station. “The folk down here think there is nothing in me, that I am good for nothing but walking up and down the King's Road, but they little know what I have in my head. I'll make them open their eyes one of these days.” The sting of vanity is in us all. Our heads may be greed, our bellies lust, our limbs charity, faithfulness, truth, and goodwill, but in some cranny of our tails vanity always lies, only it may be marvellously well hidden, as in Willy. The keenest observer would not have detected it in him, and when he came out of his habitual reserve and lamented that bad luck had always followed him and spoke of his projects, one might have suspected him of greed, but hardly of vanity. Now he stood leaning on the wooden paling, and his movements showed the back and loins in strong outline, marking the thick calves. Without taking any heed, his eyes followed the cricket ball, which was in turn slogged into the horse−pond and cottage gardens. Through long familiarity, the green had faded from his notice, nor did the burnt−up crops on the Downs attract his thoughts, nor yet the sinuous lines of the hills. From the platform one saw the whole of Southwick. The green with its cricket match, Mrs. Horlock and her

dogs, the forge, the stile, the various cottages, the long fields full of green wheat, and, far away, the carriages passing like insects along the road under the Downs; then on the right were the back gardens of the cottages, a large inscription announcing the different branches of the grocery business, a few fields with cows leaning their muzzles over the rough palings, some more cottages, a barn, and then the magnificent five acres of the Manor House, rich with glass−houses, and beautiful in a cloud of trees. From the platform of the station one could see the sea, not much of it, but one could see the sea; the slates of the street that went along the water's edge did not quite bar the view. The very small presence of Southwick contrived to hide the sea; even when one walked to the water's side the great mass of shingle which forms the outer bank of the canal allowed only one narrow rim of blue to appear. The inhabitants forget they live by the sea, and when the breeze fills their gardens with a smell of boats and nets they think of the sea with surprise.

Tired of the monotonous running to and fro of the cricket players, Willy walked up the platform. Arrow−like, the line lay in front of him, and in the tinted distance, in faint lines and flashes of light and shade, Brighton stretched from hill to hill. Morning was still in the sky, and the sea was deep blue between the yellow chimney−pots. A puff of steam showed up upon a distant field, and the train came along from Portslade, one of the links of the great chain of towns that binds the south coast. “I hope Frank won't arrive in Brighton before me,” thought Willy.

They had been big boy and little boy at school. The vivacity of the Celt amused the good−natured south Saxon, and when Lord Mount Rorke called to see his nephew, he found him talking with Brookes. Once Willy had been invited to spend part of his holidays at Mount Rorke. Afterwards they visited each other's rooms, and so their friendship had been decided, and, in spite of—or, perhaps, on account of—a very marked difference in their characters and temperaments, gathered strength as it matured. Another link between the men was that Escott had accompanied Willy to the theatre when he went to see the actress whom he had loved so madly. Frank had heard her sing the song which Willy whistled when his thoughts went wandering. Willy confided in no one—great sorrows cannot be and never are confided; but Frank had seen her, and he played her songs on the piano, and that was enough for Willy.

The young men had not seen each other for two years. Frank had shown some taste for painting, and his uncle, whose heir he was, had sent him, if not to study, at least to think about art in Italy. From Italy he had gone to Greece and Russia, he had returned home through Germany, he had visited Holland and France.

“Is the London train come in?” Willy asked when he arrived in Brighton.

“Yes, sir, just come in, about five minutes,” said the man as he opened the door. Willy waited until the train had stopped dead, he got out carefully, and, looking through the confusion of luggage and bookstall trade, he saw Escott questioning a porter and hailing a carriage. “By Jove! I shall miss him,” cried Willy, and he hastened his steps and broke into a sharp trot. “Frank! Frank!” he cried.

“Oh, there you are!” cried Frank, and he lifted his stick, and called sharply to a large black and white bull−dog that paddled about on its bow legs, saliva dripping from its huge jaws, looking in its hideousness like something rare and exquisite from Japan. He dismissed the porter and the carriage, which he had hailed with an arrogant wave of his stick. He was tall and he was thin. His trousers were extremely elegant, a light cloth, black and white check, hung on his legs in graceful lines, and he wore tiny boots with light brown cloth tops. The jacket and waistcoat were in dark brown cloth, and the odour of the gardenia in his buttonhole contrasted with that of the sachet− scented silk pocket−handkerchief which lay in his side pocket. His throat showed white and healthy in the high collar tied with a white silk cravat in a sailor's knot, fastened with a small diamond. His hands were coarse and brown; he wore two rings, and a bracelet fell out of his cuff when he dropped his arm. His chest was broad and full, but the shoulders were too square; the coat was padded. There was little that could be called Celtic in his face or voice, the admixture of race was manifested in that dim blue stare, at once vague and wild, which the eyes of the Celt so often exhibit. The nose was long, low, and straight, the nostrils were cleanly marked, the mouth was uncertain, the chin was uncertain, the face was long, deadly pale, rather large, the forehead was high, receding at the temples. The hair (now he removes his hat, for the air is heavy and hot, and the sun falls fiercely on the pavement) is pale brown, and it waves thinly over the high forehead, so expressive of a vague and ill−considered idealism. Frank Escott was of Saxon origin on his father's side, but the family had been in Ireland for the last two hundred years, and had married into many Irish families that had at different times received direct contributions of Celtic blood. Long residence in England had removed all Irish accent and modes of speech; but in hook, and

book, and cook he lengthened the vowel sound. Occasionally a something strange grated on the ear, and declared him not of the south of England, suggested the north, and insinuated Cumberland; an actor could not reproduce these trifling differences with caricaturing them. He was absolutely good−looking, and he was too well dressed. He laughed a good deal, and his conversation was sprinkled with cynical remarks and cutting observations.

"You don't seem to go in for dress now as you used to."

"I haven't the money to spend on it; but tell me, don't you like this suit?"

"Well, pretty well; whose is it? Did Walpole make it? Do you deal with him still?"

"Yes, it is one of Walpole's, but I have had it turned."

"Had it turned? I have heard of turning an overcoat, but a morning coat! I did not know it could be done; that's what makes it look so shaky."

"Now don't you get laughing at my coat, it looks very well indeed. I suppose you think I am not fit to walk with you. I daresay it doesn't look as smart as yours, which has just come out of Walpole's shop."

The young men had so much to say, and were so genuinely glad to see each other, that their thoughts hesitated and they were embarrassed.

"I suppose you enjoyed your trip abroad very much," Willy said drily and punctiliously; "you were more than a year away—nearly eighteen months, I think."

"About that. I enjoyed myself. I think I liked Italy best; it has been more painted and described than any country, and yet it is quite different from what one imagines; it is grey and dim and green and dusty. It looks—how shall I put it?—it looks worn out and faded."

"The women aren't worn out and faded if all one hears is true," said Willy, with a short laugh.

"The women are right enough. I must tell you about them one of these days, lots of stories. There was a little Italian girl I met at Milan. It was a job to get away from her; she followed me, 'pon my word, she did; she declared she would commit suicide. I was awfully frightened. Naples is really too shocking. I'm not a prude, but Naples is really— "

"I suppose it is the same all over the Continent. One of these days I must go abroad and have a look round. You were a long time in Rome?"

"No, only a few weeks, but I was too taken up with the pictures to think of anything else. The Michael Angelos are beyond anything any one can imagine. He is the only one who can compare with the Greeks, and I don't see why one shouldn't say he is as great. Of course there are things, the daughters of—I forget the name—the group of two women leaning back in each other's arms in the British Museum. But I don't know, Michael Angelo is quite different, and I can't see that anything can be said to be finer than the figures of Day and Night— how often I have drawn them—the figure of Night, the heavy breasts to show that she has suckled the Day."

"But which way are we going? I must go to Truefitt's to have my hair cut."

"You haven't forgotten the old place, I see. Do you still keep up your subscription?"

"I suppose mine has run out, I have been abroad so long. Nothing like a good shampoo; for a guinea a year you can have it done as often as you like."

"I haven't subscribed lately. There used to be such a pretty girl at the counter. Do you remember?"

"You dog, always thinking of them," and laughing loudly they passed through the shop, and it was Frank that stared most at the young lady. They read *Punch* aloud to each other; they cracked jokes with the hairdressers; they snorted and laughed through the soap and jets of hot and cold water. Frank allowed scent and ivories to be pressed upon him by the young lady at the counter; Willy declined to be led into such extravagances.

As he stepped out into the shine of the street, and took step from his friend, he said: "By George! it makes me feel young again. It is just like old times."

"Yes, it does make one feel jollier, doesn't it?"

"How jolly it is here; not too warm, just nice. What shall we do? Sit down on that bench in front of the pier?"

"I'm agreeable. How jolly it is. Just look at those boats! One could make a picture of that."

Over the sea hung a white veil of mist, but the sun glowed through and melted into it, and harmonised it with the water green and translucent. The sea sucked about the shingle with little sudden sighs; the sails of the pleasure boat waved in the fairy−like depths, and all the little brown fishing−boats lay becalmed, heaving tremulously like tired butterflies upon the breast of a blue flower. The nursemaids lay together on the shingle, and their novels

slipped down the stones to their feet. The children played with the tide and the sand. There were crowds of women—Jewesses with loud dresses: and the strange world of bath chairs! Ladies so old that they seem certain to fall to pieces when they are taken out; ladies with chestnut curls soft and fresh—why were they in bath chairs? General officers, mounted on white Arabs; acrobats and songs.

The young men sat facing the sea. Frank called, “Triss, Triss. Splendid dog that is. If I were to let him he would guzzle the other dog in about two minutes.”

“He looks a ferocious brute.”

“You don't like dogs? You couldn't see a handsomer dog than that; unfortunately, he's the wrong colour; if he were brindle or white, he'd take a first prize. Come here, you brute.”

Amid some little excitement and anxious looks, Triss came up, growling and showing his teeth. Frank explained that it was only his manner. Frank took the paw that was extended to him, but Triss's friendliness seemed somewhat dubious, for he still further uncovered his formidable fangs.

“I really don't care to sit here with that ferocious brute.”

“I assure you he won't bite, it is only his manner. Isn't it, Triss? Kiss me, kiss me at once,” and amid many growls of almost subterranean awfulness, the dog licked his master's face.

“I wish you would tie him up—to oblige me.”

Highly pleased at the fear and wonder his dog had struck in the gaudy Jewesses and the shaky generals, Frank threatened and finally forced the dog to lie down. He continued to expatiate on the dog's points— the number of wrinkles, the bandiness of the legs, etc. The conversation dropped in heat and glare, and the picturesqueness of the sea.

“How horribly out of tune you do whistle—you go into a different key; this is more like it.”

“Yes, how sweetly she used to sing it. Do you remember the night we went to see her, the last time the piece was played? I threw her a bouquet, a splendid one it was, too, cost me three guineas in Covent Garden. We went afterwards and had supper at Scott's in the Haymarket. How jolly those days were. I don't seem to be able to enjoy myself now as I used to then.”

“What has become of her? One never hears of her.”

“She died soon after.”

“I am sorry I spoke of her; I didn't know.”

“Oh, it doesn't matter.” Then after a long silence, Willy said: “I hear your engagement is broken off.”

“Yes.” Frank drew a long and expressive breath, and, with melodramatic movements of the shoulders, he sighed. “I have not seen you since. Oh, I had terrible scenes with the father. They had a house up the river. I followed them, and put up at the Angler's Hotel. She told her father that I must be allowed to come to the house, and he had to give way. You don't know the river? Well, it is wonderful to awake at Maidenhead in the morning and hear the sparrows twittering in a piece of tangled vine; to see that great piece of water flowing so mildly in all the pretty summer weather. We used to live in flannels, and spent long afternoons together in the boat—we had such a spiffing boat, as light and as clean in the water as a fish—and we used to linger in the bulrushes, and come back when the moon was rising with our hands full of flowers.”

“But why was it broken off?”

“My uncle, old Mount Rorke, wants me to marry an heiress, and I have nothing except what he allows me, or scarcely anything. She used to wear a broad−brimmed straw hat, and the shadow fell over her face. I made a lot of sketches. I must show them to you one of these days when you come up to town, and I filled an album with verses. I used to write them at night. My window was right in front of the river, and the moon used to sail past, and in the morning I used to read her the poems I made overnight beneath the branches of the cedar, where we used to run the boat. But the father was a brute. I got the best of him once though. It was a private view day at the Academy, and he had forbidden Nellie to speak to me—even to notice me. I went straight up to her, and took her away under his very nose before he could stop us. We walked about all day. Oh! he was mad.”

“If she was willing to brave her father in that way, why was your engagement broken off?”

“My uncle was so very difficult to deal with. I didn't see her for some time.” Frank did not say—perhaps, he did not know—that his engagement had been broken off through his own instability and weakness of character. The young lady, whom he called Nellie, had told him she would wait if he would elect a profession and work for a place in it. But Frank had not been able to forego late hours and restaurants, and Nellie had married some one

who could. “You know I converted her. Doesn't her father hate me for that! We used to go to high mass at the oratory. I explained to her the whole of the Catholic religion.”

“But I thought you didn't believe in it yourself?”

“I am talking of some time ago; besides, a woman, it isn't quite the same thing; and if I have saved her soul! I don't know if I told you that I was writing a novel; I don't think I did. The idea of it is this: A young man has loved three women. The first charmed him by her exceeding beauty; he lives with her for a time. The second captivates him, or rather holds him through his senses; his love for her is merely a sensuality; then he falls in love with a fair young girl as pure as falling snow of any stain in deed or in thought; he is engaged to marry her—or, I don't know, I haven't made up my mind on that point, perhaps it would be better if he did marry her. Well, the woman whom he has loved with a merely sensual passion comes back, and to revenge herself she tries to tempt the good girl to go wrong; she talks to her of men and pleasures; this is a good idea, I think, for I feel sure it is women far more than men who lead women astray. Then the first woman whom he has loved for her beauty merely, comes along and continues the diabolical work of the first, by suggesting—I don't know, anything—that the young girl should go in for dress; the young man finds out the scheme, and to save the girl he murders her, he is thrown into prison, he is tried, and in the crowded Court he makes a great speech—he tells how he murdered her to save her from sin, he tells the judge that on the Judgment Day a pure white soul will plead for him. What an opportunity for a piece of splendid writing! The Court would be filled with fashionable women, that weep and sob, they cannot contain themselves, the judge would wish to stop the young man, but he cannot. What a splendid scene to describe! And the young man goes to execution confident, and assured that he has done well. What do you think of it?”

“It is really difficult for me to say; I never like giving an opinion on a subject I don't understand.”

“I know; but what do you think?”

Fortunately for Willy's peace, the conversation was at this moment violently interrupted by Triss. He rushed forth, and Frank was only in time to prevent a pitched battle. He returned leading the dog by his silk handkerchief, amid the murmur of nurse−maids and Jewesses.

“That's the worst of him; he never can see a big dog without wanting to go for him. Down, sir, down—I won't have you growl at me.”

“I can't see what pleasure you can find in a brute like that.”

“I assure you he's very good−tempered; he has a habit of growling, but he does not mean anything by it. What were we talking about?”

“I think we were talking about the ladies. Have you seen anything nice lately? What's the present Mrs. Escott like, dark or fair?”

“There isn't one, I assure you. I met rather a nice woman at my uncle's, about two months ago, a Lady Seely. I don't know that you would call her a pretty woman; rather a turned−up nose, a pinched−in waist, beautiful shoulders. Hair of a golden tinge, diamonds, and dresses covered with beads. She flirted a great deal. We talked about love, and we laughed at husbands, and she asked me to come and see her in rather a pointed way. It is rather difficult to explain these things, but I think that if I were to go in for her—”

“That you would pull it off?”

The young men laughed loudly, and then Frank said: “But somehow I don't much care about her. I met such a pretty girl the other day at the theatre. There were no stalls, and as I wanted to see the piece very much, I went into the dress circle. There was only one seat in the back row. I struggled past a lot of people, dropped into my place, and watched the piece without troubling myself to see who was sitting next to me. It was not until the *entr'acte* that I looked round. I felt my neighbour's eyes were fixed upon me. She was one of the prettiest girls you ever saw in your life—a blonde face, pale brown hair, and such wonderful teeth—her laughter, I assure you, was beautiful. I asked her what she thought of the piece. She looked away and didn't answer. It was rather a slap in the face for me, but I am not easily done. I immediately said: 'I should have apologised before for the way I inconvenienced you in crushing into my seat, but, really, the place is so narrow that you don't know how to get by.' This rather stumped her, she was obliged to say something. The girl on the other side (not half a bad looking girl, short brown curly hair, rather a roguish face) was the most civil at first. She wasn't as pretty as the one next to me, but she spoke the more willingly; the one next to me tried to prevent her. However, I got on with them, one thing led to another, and when the piece was over, I fetched their hats and coats and we walked a little way up the

street together. I tried to get them to come to supper; they couldn't do that, for they had to be in at a certain time, so we went to Gatti's and had some coffee. I couldn't make out for a long time what they were; they were evidently not prostitutes, and they did not seem to me to be quite ladies. What do you think they were?"

"I haven't an idea—actresses?"

"No. They wouldn't tell me for a long time. I got it out of them at last; they're at the bar in the Gaiety Restaurant."

"Bar girls?"

"Yes."

"Some of those bar girls are very pretty; rather dangerous, though, I should think."

"They seemed to me to be very nice girls; you would be surprised if you heard them talk. I assure you the one that sat next to me spoke just like a lady. You know in these hard times people must do something. Lots of ladies have to buckle to and work for their bread."

Frank lapsed into silence. Willy sat apparently watching the blue and green spectacle of the sea. Frank knew that it interested him not the least, and he wondered if his friend had heard what he had been saying. Triss, seeing that smelling and fighting were equally vain endeavours, had laid himself out in the sun, and he returned his master's caresses by deep growls. One more menacing than the others woke Willy from his meditation, and he said: "What's the time? It ought to be getting on to lunch time."

"I daresay it is."

"Where shall we go? Do you know of a good place? What about that restaurant opposite the pier?"

"Well," said Willy, with a short, abrupt laugh, "the fact is, I must lunch at my office; but I shall be very glad if you will come."

"I didn't know you had an office—an office for what?"

"I started an agency at the beginning of the year for artificial manure, but I think I shall drop it. I am arranging to go on the Stock Exchange. The difficulty is whether I shall be able to get my father to allow me to take enough money out of the business."

"What business?"

"The distillery."

"Oh, but what about this office? Why are you obliged to lunch at your office? Are you expecting customers? I know nothing about that sort of thing."

"No, I wish I were. The fact is, my missis is staying in Brighton for a few weeks. The child has been ailing a good deal lately, and the doctor ordered change of air."

"Child! Missis! I know nothing of this."

"A very nice woman, I think you'll like her. She is devoted to me. We've been together now two years or more, I can't say exactly, I should have to refer to my diary."

"But the child?"

"The child isn't mine. She had the child before I knew her."

"And what is the matter with it?"

"Curvature of the spine. The doctor says she will outgrow it. Cissy will be quite strong and healthy although she may never have what you would call a good figure. But there is a matter on which I want to speak to you. The fact is, I am going to be married."

"To whom?"

"To the lady whom you will see at lunch, Cissy's mother."

Frank said: "If you really love her I have nothing to say against it." Willy did not answer. Frank waited for an answer and then broke the silence: "But do you love her?"

"Yes, I am very fond of her; she is a very good sort."

Frank was implacable. "Do you love her like the other one?" The question wounded, but Frank was absorbed in his own special sentimentalities.

"I was younger then, it is not the same; I am getting old. How many years older am I than you—seven, I think? You are three−and−twenty, I am thirty. How time flies!"

"Yes, I am three−and−twenty—you don't look thirty."

"I feel it, though; few fellows have had so much trouble as I have. Your life has been all pleasure."

“If a man really loves a woman he is always right to marry her. Why should we suppose that a woman may not reform—that true love may not raise her? I was talking to a novelist the other day; he told me thestory of a book he is writing. It is about a woman who leaves the husband she has never loved for the man she adores; she goes away with him, he marries her, and she sinks lower and lower, until she becomes a common prostitute.”

“You are quite mistaken. I am sure that when you see the missis—”

“My dear fellow, pray do not misunderstand me. I would not for worlds. I am only telling you about a book, if you will only listen. I told him that I thought the story would be ten times as interesting if, instead of being degraded, the woman were raised by the love of the man who took her away from her husband. He made the husband a snivelling little creature, and the lover good−looking—that's the old game. I would have made the lover insignificant and the husband good− looking. Nevertheless she loved the lover better. I know of nothing more noble than for a man to marry the woman he loves, and to raise her by the force of his love; he could teach her, instruct her. Nellie will never forget me. I gave her a religion, I taught her and explained to her the whole of the Catholic faith—”

“I hope you won't try to convert my sisters.”

“You do pull me up so! Don't you understand that I was very young then? I was only twenty, not much more; besides, I was engaged to Nellie.”

“Come back to what we were talking about.”

“Well, I have said that if you love her I believe you are quite right to marry her. But do you love her?”

“Yes, I do; how many times more do you want me to say I do?”

“Of *course* if you are going to be rude—”

“No—you understand what I mean, don't you? I am very fond of the missis; if I weren't I shouldn't marry, that goes without saying, but one likes to have things settled. I have been with her now more thantwo years. I've thought it out. There's nothing like having things settled. I'm sure I'm right.”

The young men looked at each other in silence—Frank quite at a loss; he could nowise enter into the feelings of a man whom an undue sense of order and regularity compelled to marry his mistress, as it did to waste half his life in copying letters and making entries in a diary.

“Then why did you consult me?” he said, for he came to the point sharply when his brain was not muddled with sentiment.

“I am not heir to an entailed estate, like you.”

“I am not heir to an entailed estate. Mount Rorke might marry to−morrow.”

“He is not likely to do that. It is an understood thing that you are heir. My father might cut me off with a shilling if he were to hear I had married without his consent, and I should be left with the few hundreds which I draw out of the distillery, a poor man all my life.”

“If that is so, why marry? You are not in love with her—at least not what I should call being in love.”

“But can't you understand—”

“No, I can't, unless you mean that you are down with marriage fever.”

“I have considered the matter carefully, and am convinced I am right,” he answered, looking at Frank as if he would say, but didn't dare, “don't let's talk about it any more, it only distresses me.” “The marriage must be kept a secret. If my father were to hear of it I should be ruined, whereas if Mary will consent to go on living as we are living now, one of these days she will be a rich woman. I daresay my share of his money will come to at least fifteen hundred a year, and then I shall be able to recompense her for the years she has waited for it. Do you understand?”

“Perfectly. The only thing I don't see is how I am to influence her. You've no doubt told her and fully explained to her what the consequences would be if you were to publish the banns.”

“I have, but it would strengthen my hand if you were to tell her all you know of my father. Tell her that he is very obstinate, pig−headed, and would certainly cut me off; tell her that he is sixty−six, that it is a hundred to one against his living till he is eighty, even if he did there would be only fourteen years to wait for fifteen hundred a year; tell her if she tells that I have married her it is just as if she threw fifteen hundred a year out of the window.”

“And when shall I tell her all this?”

“Now. We are going to have lunch at my offices, she'll be there. We'll talk the matter over after lunch.”

“Very well, let's start. Come along, Triss.”

With Triss tugging dangerously at the silk handkerchief whenever he saw a likely pair of legs or a dog that he fancied, the young men sauntered up West Street.

“But tell me: how do you manage to have so many people to lunch in your office; your premises must be pretty extensive?”

“I have the whole house; I was obliged to take it. I couldn't get another place that would suit me, and I thought I should be able to let the upper part; I did have a tenant for a little while, but he was obliged to leave. I believe I am the unluckiest fellow alive. Here's the place.”

“Agency for Artificial Manure” was printed over the door. Willy asked the office−boy if there were any letters, and they went upstairs. The windows of the front room were in view of a church spire, and overlooked a little shadowy cemetery; and at one window Cissy sat, the little crutches by her side, watching the children playing amid the tombs.

“Where's your mother, Cissy?”

“In the back room cooking herrings, uncle.”

Mrs. Brookes was a homely, honest−eyed woman, with dingy yellow hair.

“Let me introduce you. This is my friend, Mr. Escott, you have often heard me speak of him.”

“You must excuse my shaking hands with you, sir, I have been cooking.”

“She is an excellent cook, too. Just you wait and see. What have we got?”

“Some herrings and a piece of steak.”

“Is that good enough for you?”

“I love herrings.”

“I am glad of that, these are quite fresh; they were caught this morning. You must excuse me, I must go back; they want a deal of attending to.” Presently she appeared with a tray and a beer jug. Willy called to the office−boy. “We have no cheese,” said Mrs. Brookes.

Cissy begged to be allowed to fetch the cheese and beer.

“No, dear, I am afraid you aren't well enough.”

“Yes, I am, uncle; give me a shilling, and let me go with Billy.” Then, breaking off with the unexpected garrulity of children, she continued: “I am getting quite strong now; I was down on the beach this morning, and watched the little boys and girls building mounds. When I am quite well, uncle, won't you buy me a spade and bucket, and mayn't I build sand mounds, too?”

“We'll see when the time comes.”

“Well, let me go with Billy and fetch the cheese.”

“No, you can't go now, dear, there are too many people about; this is not like London.”

Cissy had the long sad face of cripples, but beautiful shining curls hung thickly, hiding the crookedness of the shoulders. She was nine years old, and was just beginning to awake to a sense of the importance of her affliction.

After lunch she was sent downstairs to the office−boy. Willy sat rubbing his hands slowly and methodically. After some hesitation he introduced the subject they had come to speak on. “Mr. Escott will tell you, Mary, how important it is that our marriage should be kept secret; he will tell you how the slightest suspicion of it would ruin my prospects.” He then spoke of his position in the county, and the necessity of sustaining it. Frank thought this rather bad taste; but he assured Mrs. Brookes, with much Celtic gesticulation, that her marriage must be kept a secret till her father−in−law's death. The young men and Mrs. Brookes remained talking till the rays trailed among the green grass of the graves, and the blue roofs that descended into the valley, and clung about the sides of the opposite hill. It had been arranged that Willy and Mrs. Brookes should go to London to− morrow to be married. Frank was convinced that she would not break her promise, and he hoped they would be very happy. She had only raised one objection. She had said: “What is the use of my being married if I shall have to live with him as his mistress?”

“A great deal of good. Your position will be secured. Willy will not be able to leave you, even if he felt inclined, and you will know that only one life, that of an old man, stands between you and fifteen hundred a year.”

“I want no assurance that my dear Willy will not leave me,” she said, going over and putting her arms about him; “but as you like. I shall never say anything about the marriage till Willy tells me. I hope I shall never do anything but what he tells me.” And she went over and sat on his knees.

“You are a dear old thing,” he said, squeezing and planting a vigorous kiss on her neck.

Frank's eyes filled with hot tears, his heart seemed like bursting. “What a beautiful thing love is!” he said to himself, and the world melted away from him in the happiness he drew from the contemplation of these who were about to bind themselves together for life.

“Be most careful what you say to my sisters. I would not trust them. The temptation to get me cut out of everything might—I ought not to say that, but one never knows. I dare say no such accident could happen to any one else, but if I leave the smallest thing to chance I am sure to come to grief. They will question you. They will want to know what we did all day.”

“I'll say we sat on the beach.” “That's it. Good−bye. I shall be home the day after to−morrow.”

IV

When the young ladies at the Manor House did not get their dresses from London, a dressmaker came from Brighton to help them, and all together they sat sewing and chattering in the work−room. Maggie would take a bow or a flower, and moving it quickly, guided by the instinct of a bird building its nest, would find the place where it decorated the hat or bonnet best. Neither Sally nor Grace could do this, nor could they drape a skirt or fit a bodice, but they could work well and enjoy their work. But what they enjoyed more was the opportunity these working days afforded for gossip. Mrs. Wood had the Brighton scandal at her tongue's tip, and what she would not tell, her niece told them when her aunt left the room. Secrecy was enjoined, but sometimes they forgot, and in Mrs. Wood's presence alluded too pointedly to stories that had not yet found their way beyond the precincts of the servants' hall, and then the dressmaker raised her mild eyes, and looked through large spectacles at Susan, who sat biting her lips. Susan told the young ladies of her love affairs; they told Susan of theirs; and the different codes of etiquette gave added zest to the anecdotes, in themselves interesting. The story of the young man who had said, “I am afraid that parcel is too heavy for you, miss,” and had been promised a walk in the twilight on the cliff, evoked visions of liberty, and the story of the officer at the Henfield ball, with whom Sally had discovered a room that none knew of, did not fail to impress the little dressmaker. They talked a great deal about Frank. His face and manner called up the name, and after a few hesitations they used his Christian name as they did when he came to see them years ago.

“He is a very good fellow—I don't say he isn't. No one could say he wasn't nice−looking, but somehow he doesn't make you feel—you know, right down, you know, through and through.”

“Electricity,” said Maggie, with a low, subtle laugh, and her thread cracked through the straw of the hat.

“Yes,” cried Sally boisterously. “Electricity, I never heard it called that before; but it isn't a bad name for it; it is like electricity. When a man looks at you—you know, in a peculiar way, it goes right down your back from the very crown of your head.”

“No, not down my back; I feel it down my chest, just like forked lightning. Isn't it horrid? You know that it is coming and you can't help it. Some men fix their eyes on you.”

“It is just when you meet a man's eyes—a man you like, but haven't seen much of.”

“I don't think liking has anything to do with it. I hate it; don't you?”

“No, I don't know that I do. I can't see anything so disagreeable as that in it. 'Tis rather a shock, a sort of pang.”

Mrs. Wood raised her mild face and looked surprised through her thick spectacles; the merry niece bit her lips, and strove to stay her laughter. Then Maggie said: “Sue, have you ever felt electricity?”

“Oh, miss! I don't think I understand,” and she glanced at her aunt over the hem she was running.

“Now, come, tell the truth. You mean to say you never felt electricity?”

“I don't think I ever did, miss.”

“I don't believe you. Not when that nice young man you were telling us about looked at you? Come, now, tell the truth.”

“Well, miss, I don't know—I thought it was very revolting.”

Mrs. Wood said nothing; with her hand in suspended gesture and her spectacles a−glimmer with round surprise, she sat looking at Miss Maggie. Her reveries, however, were soon cut short, for Sally not only asked her if she had ever experienced the doubtful pleasure of electricity, but advised her when she returned home to try if her husband's looks could thrill her.

“I don't think the conversation at all nice,” said Grace, who had up to the present taken no part either by looks, or words, or laughter.

“Who cares what you think? You used to be fond enough of sitting out dances with him. You mean to say he never gave you electricity?”

“No, never.”

“Then I hope Berkins will,” said Sally, with a coarse laugh.

The association of Berkins with electricity proved so generally ludicrous that Mrs. Wood, conscious of the respect she owed Miss Brookes, pretended to look for her handkerchief, and it was for a moment doubtful if the spectacles would preserve their gravity. Tears started to Grace's eyes, and she bent over her work to hide them from her sisters, which was unnecessary, for Maggie and Sally were absorbed in past experiences.

“What about Frank?” Sally asked, and Susan looked up curious to hear Maggie's answer.

“Well,” said Maggie, staring at the window, “Frank is very good−looking, but I don't think that he electrifies one... he did once.”

“And when was that?” said Sally.

“You remember the first time he came to stay here? Willy brought him down from London. We went to bed early and left them playing billiards; I lay awake waiting to hear them come up the stairs, and as he passed my room Frank stopped and I thought he was coming in. I felt it all down my spine, but never afterwards. You see, I didn't know him much then.”

“And Jimmy?”

“I never liked Jimmy.”

“If you don't like him why trouble about him?” Sally replied in her usually defiant manner. “You always take good care to trouble about my men. You tried all you could to get Jimmy away from me, yet you pretend to father that you never flirted with him.”

“I didn't flirt with him; once a young man looks at you you think no one must speak to him but yourself. If young Meason asks me to dance with him, I cannot refuse; I am not going to make myself ridiculous though you were to look all the daggers in the world at me, but as for flirting with him, I never cared enough about him.”

“And what about meeting him in London?”

Maggie coloured a little, and repudiated the accusation.

“You told him you were going to London, and you asked him if he were going, and what he would be doing that day. I don't know what more you could say.”

“I never said any such thing.”

“I have it from his own lips.”

“It isn't true; I will ask him to your face if he ever said such a thing; I will tell father that.”

“Well, there's no use in quarrelling,” said Grace, “and I wouldn't advise you to worry father about it. You know he can't stand the name of Meason. It seems to me that neither of you care much whom you flirt with, you like so many young men.”

“It is better to like a dozen young men than one old one.”

“I shan't marry Mr. Berkins, no matter what you say. However, you can't accuse me of interfering in your affairs.”

“No, *you* don't.”

“No more do I. If you want Frank, take him, only don't come sneaking after Charley. I don't want Frank; I don't care twopence about him. If you want to see it out with him, I shan't interfere; only don't you come interfering with me and Jimmy, or Charley either.”

Maggie did not like the idea of Sally getting two to her one. She would have liked to have introduced a proviso about Alfred, but the title Mount Rorke slipped between her thoughts, and she refrained. She knew the present treaty secured her immunity from Sally only so long as the affections and attentions of Jimmy and Charley showed no signs of declension, and she was aware that her promise would only hold good so long as Frank interested and Charley remained away in London.

The canary that had been twittering, now burst forth into long and prolonged shrillings. Grace folded up her work along her knees; and holding it in her hand like a roll of music, she said that they would never hear the end of this tennis party.

“I don't see why father should ever know anything about it, he has taken that horrid old Joseph with him, he never says more than a few words to the footman, and he never sees the cook or housemaid. We have all to−morrow to get the house straight.”

“It is not certain that he is going to stay the night in London.”

“Yes it is. Don't fidget. Have you got the wine out? We should have a dozen of champagne. Mind you make no mistake; '80, that is the wine you must get. Jimmy is most particular what he drinks, and Alfred has the most

frightful headaches if he drinks anything but the very best. I hope he'll find the '80 all right."

"That's father's favourite wine; you mean to say that he won't miss it? Then the port and Burgundy and cherry brandy—I won't take the responsibility."

"Nobody asked you. All you have to do is to return the keys to Maggie that you took from her."

"I don't think father will be as angry as you think, Grace; besides there's no drawing back now the invitations are out. I think it would be better to tell him that we had a few friends in for tennis. We needn't tell him who was there—we will suppress the name of the Southdown Road people; and we can take the bottles out from the back. The wine won't be missed for a long time, and we will invent some better excuse before then. We will say that two bottles were drunk at this party and three at that; and further than that we can't remember."

"And what about the peaches? There are only a few ripe, and Sally says she'll want them all. Father has been looking forward to them for weeks and weeks."

"He'll have to do without them; if he wants peaches, he had better bring some down from Covent Garden."

A knock was heard at the door. "Please Miss, Mr. Escott is in the drawing−room."

"Tell him I will be downstairs in a moment," cried Maggie.

"Now off you go, my Lady Mount Rorke," said Sally, who had already begun to regret her promises, and to consider if she had not better break them.

Maggie asked him what train he came down by, then she called the dog; "Come here, my beautiful boy, come and kiss me." The bull−dog growled and wagged his tail.

"He won't hurt you; 'tis only his way of talking."

Maggie laughed, and they walked out on the green sward. "I suppose you've been to a great many balls this season?"

"I don't know that I have; a few, perhaps. I am glad to get away from town. I like no place like this. I don't know if it is the place or the associations."

"You are used to much finer places. I can fancy Mount Rorke—the lakes and the mountains; somehow I think I can see it. Isn't it strange, there are certain things and places you can realise so much better than others, and for no very understandable reason?"

"Yes, that is so," said Frank, obviously pleased by the remark. Then, after a pause, "Mount Rorke is a pretty place, and I don't think I could live long away from it. After a time I always find myself sighing for the bleakness and barrenness of the West. The hedgerows of England are pretty enough; but I hate the brick buildings."

"What kind of buildings do you have in Ireland?"

"Everything is built of grey stone, a cold grey tint on a background of green pasture lands and blue mountains. I daresay you wouldn't like it. It would recall nothing to you, but when I think of it, much less see it, I re−live my childhood all over again. I am a great person for old times. That is the reason I like coming down here. I knew you all so long ago; how well I can remember you—three dark little things. You used to sit on my knee."

"And do you find nothing nice in the present?"

"Of course I do; it is nice to walk in the garden with you, but it seems to me you have all moved away from me a little. Grace is engaged, you are engaged—"

"Who said I was engaged?"

"Ha, ha, you see I hear everything. What is his name—Alfred?"

"I suppose Sally told you."

"I won't tell you who told me, I never betray secrets. You had a desperate flirtation two years ago, and the man had to go away, and you promised to wait for him."

"I don't mind telling you—I did meet a man about two years ago whom I rather liked; I used to see a great deal of him at tennis parties and balls; he used to ask me to marry him. He wanted me to engage myself to him, and I told him it would be much better to wait and see what father would say."

"And what did your father say?"

"Father, he never knew anything about it. You may as well tell me, I know it was Sally. I suppose she told you I was very much in love with him?"

"She said, at least, the person who told me said, that you would never care for any one else."

"So you've been talking about me though you promised you wouldn't talk any more," Maggie said to herself, "All right, my lady—very well, we shall see."

"Grace is waving her parasol to us. Lunch must be ready."

Maggie and Grace had calculated that if they could limit the champagne to half a dozen bottles they would be able to hide the deficit from their father's scrutiny; but the servants seemed to be always filling the glasses of the Southdown Road people, and lunch was not half over when they heard the fourth bottle go pop. Maggie looked at Sally across the pile of peaches, but Sally had no ears for the report, only for Jimmy's voice. Her head wagged as she talked, and Maggie wondered if they were exchanging napkins or rings beneath the table.

At that moment the servant handed a letter on a salver to Maggie, saying, "From Mrs. Horlock; the servant is waiting an answer, miss." Grace trembled. Sally whispered to Jimmy, "What can she want?" In a reassuring voice Maggie said, "She has heard we are having a few people in to tennis, and she wants to know if she may send us round a young man; she will come round herself with the General some time during the afternoon." At the mention of a young man many eyes gleamed, and Sally said, "You had better go at once and write a note and say that we shall be delighted." When they went into the verandah coffee was handed round, and Maggie, as the gentlemen lit their cigarettes, said to Grace, "Nothing could have happened better; father is sure to hear of this, we couldn't have kept it from him: now we can say Mrs. Horlock was our chaperon. None will know when she came, or when she went away." Then turning to her company, Maggie said, "Now gentlemen, as soon as you have finished your cigarettes we will begin."

Sally not only insisted on playing, but on playing with Jimmy; and Grace, who was striving to struggle into the position of Miss Brookes, could do nothing but set the girl in the florid dress and the man who stood next to her to play against them. The garden seemed to absorb the girls, but Maggie, catching sight of Mrs. Horlock, went to meet her.

Mrs. Horlock was sixty, but her figure was like a girl's. She led a blind pug in a complicated leading apparatus, and several other pugs in various stages of fat and decrepitude followed her. It was not long before she raised a discussion on hydrophobia, defending the disease from all the charges of horror and contagion that had been urged against it, narrating vehemently how a mad dog had died in her arms licking her hands and face, and appealing to the General, who denounced muzzling; but when the mangy mastiff came near him he whispered to Frank, "I wish they were all shot. You must come and see us; you must come and see us; I have a pretty little place in the Southdown Road (dreadful place to mention here, they don't like it; of course the people there aren't all quite the thing, but what are you to do, you know?). Lunch at two, dinner at eight—old Indians, you know. I have everything I want. Too many animals, perhaps, but that can't be helped."

"Do you live here all the year?"

"Yes, all the year round. We don't go away much. We have everything here—coach−houses, horses, you'll see when you come. The only thing I want is a little occupation, a little something to bring me out, you know. I read the *Morning Post* every morning, and I have the *St James's* in the evening; but then there is the middle of the day," and, with laughter full of genial kindness and goodwill, the General repeated this phrase: "I want a little something to bring me out, you know."

Forty years of Indian sun! Balls in the Government House in Calcutta! Viceroys, tigers, horse−racing, elephants, jealousies, flirtations, deaths, all now forgotten, and if not forgotten, at rest; and now glad to watch life unfolding itself again in an English village, this old couple sat in the calm sunlight of an English garden, relics of another generation, emblems of an England drawing to a close.

At five o'clock Grace was busy at the tea−table; and very hot and moist Sally threw herself into a cane chair. Maggie, who had suddenly appeared upon the scene, arranged some fresh sets in which she and Frank did not take part—she having promised to walk with him; and they went towards the shade of the sycamores. She had neglected him nearly the whole day, and he was vexed with her. But she excused herself volubly, accusing Sally of indifference to all things except her own pleasures, and impressed upon him that it was her duty to show some politeness to Mrs. Horlock's friend.

"Sally would play tennis, she played two sets, three if I am not mistaken, and she never left Jimmy's side. She took no notice of any one; for that reason I hate having people to the house when she is here; everything devolves upon Grace and me. It is really too bad. Father wouldn't mind our giving this party at all, if it weren't for him. If he hears that he was here, well, I don't know what will happen."

"He doesn't look quite a gentleman, does he? He is a ship's mate, isn't he?"

"Yes, but it isn't that; father cannot bear those Southdown Road people. A lot of young men live there—quite

as good as ourselves, no doubt, but they are all so poor, and father thinks of nothing but money. And Sally meets them. When she goes out driving in the cart she picks them up, and they go off together. Father doesn't know any of them, and he says they laugh at him when he goes to the station in the morning. 'Tisn't true, it is only his imagination; but I can quite well understand his feelings. You know Sally won't give way in anything. Once she ran into the kitchen, and told cook to put back the dinner, so that she might run down the slonk to finish her conversation with him. Of course father was mad at that, coming home tired from the City, and finding that his dinner had been put back. You saw the way they went on at lunch, sitting close together."

"We were all sitting close together."

"Yes, but not like they were. And all that nonsense with their napkins under the table. If you didn't see it, so much the better. I thought everybody saw it. I wish Sally wouldn't do it. Father, as you know, has a lot of money to leave, and if she did really go too far, I fear he would cut her off."

"But she never would go too far."

"No, I don't think so; I am sure Sally wouldn't do anything that was really wrong, but she is very imprudent."

"How do you mean?"

"I don't know that I ought to tell you."

"I promise not to tell any one—you know you can trust me."

"Well, she brings people up to her room."

"You don't mean to her bedroom?"

"She says you can't call it a bedroom, but she sleeps there for all that. She covers up the bed and makes it look like a couch; she keeps birds and dogs there; Flossie had her puppies there. That's her room," said Maggie, lifting one of the boughs. "I shouldn't be surprised if Jimmy were there with her now."

The foliage glinted in the sunset, and as Maggie stood pointing, still holding the bough, the picture flashed upon Frank, and he said: "Oh, how pretty you are now! How I should like to paint you!" And a moment after he said, interested, solely interested in sentimental affection, "Sally's ideas of love seem to me very funny; if she really loves Meason, why doesn't she marry him?"

"He has no money, and father would never hear of it."

"Never hear of it! If I loved a girl, nothing in the world would prevent my marrying her."

"I wonder if that's true," said Maggie, and she let go the bough and stood facing him, her hands clasped behind her back.

"Of course it is. What is life for if it isn't to get the woman we love?"

"It is nice to hear you say so; but I am afraid very few young men think like you nowadays. One woman is the same as another to them."

"I cannot understand any one thinking so. If it were so, the whole charm would be lost."

So the young people talked, and lost in the charm of each thrilling minute, they walked through the shadows and darkening leaves. The soft garden echoed with the sound of a girl's voice crying, "Cuckoo, cuckoo," and the white dresses flew over the sward, and the young men ran after them and caught them. They were playing hide and seek. Excited beyond endurance, Triss barked loudly, and forms were seen flying precipitately.

"Tie him up to this tree," said Maggie.

"No, no, better take him to the house," said Frank; "it would make him savage to tie him up."

When the ninth bottle of champagne had been opened, and the supper table was noisy, Frank whispered to Maggie, "Did you ever see *Macbeth*?"

"Yes, but why?"

"Because I can't help thinking what a splendid occasion it would be for Banquo's ghost to appear."

Maggie pressed his hand and laughed.

Soon after the sound of wheels was heard. Grace turned pale, Sally said: "Who would have thought it?" A moment after Mr. Brookes, with Berkins and Willy behind him, entered. He stood amazed, and seeing that the tears were mounting to his eyes, Maggie said: "Father, how tired and faint you look. We thought you wouldn't be coming home to− night. Do sit down and have a glass of wine." But neither winning words nor ways could soothe this storm, and in reply to a question from Berkins, Mr. Brookes declared passionately that he knew none of the young men who came to his house.

V

“Father's just gone downstairs. I think we had better wait a minute or two. In that way we shall escape a scolding. Father won't miss the ten o'clock.”

“Not a bad idea. You are always up to some cunning dodge. What's the time?”

“Twenty minutes to nine. I'll slip down the passage and tell Grace to go down and give him his breakfast. He won't say anything to her; he knows well that since Fatty went to India she wouldn't see a soul if she could help it.”

“Father never says anything to you either; you tell him a lot of lies, and leave him to understand that I do everything.”

“That's not true; I never speak against you to father; but at the same time I must say that if it weren't for you we could do as we liked. You don't try to manage father.”

“Manage him, indeed! that's what I can't bear in you, you're always trying to manage some one; I hate the word.”

“You got out of bed the wrong side this morning. However, I must go and tell Grace to go down at once, or father will be ringing for us.”

“What did she say?” said Sally, when Maggie returned.

“'Tis all right; I got her to go, and she said she was always being made a cat's−paw of. I assure you it wasn't easy to persuade her to go down to father, but I told her she might be the means of averting a very serious row.”

“I suppose you said there was no counting on what answers I might make to father?”

This was exactly what Maggie had said.

“Very well; you are always objecting to what I do, and the way I do it. I wish you would go and do things yourself. You think of nothing but yourself, or some young man you are after. I wouldn't do what you did yesterday. I wouldn't go sneaking round the garden with a young man I had never seen before.”

Maggie shrugged her shoulders and went on dressing. Sally, who had taken a seat on the bed, watched her. She thought how she might best pursue the quarrel, but her stomach called her thoughts from her sister, and she said: “I don't know how you feel, but I am dying of hunger. What time is it now?”

“Nine o'clock.”

“Another half−hour. I suppose he won't start before the half−hour.”

“Miss,” said the maid, knocking at the door, “Mr. Brookes wants to know if you are coming down to breakfast.”

“Say that we are not nearly ready; that there's no use waiting for us.”

“I think I had better go back to my room,” said Sally.

“I think you had. I wish you wouldn't bring that horrid little dog into my room. She made a mess here the other day.”

“That I am sure she didn't. Flossie is the cleanest dog in the world.”

“Clean or unclean, I would rather not have her in my room. There she is trying to drink out of my jug. Get away, you little beast!”

Sally caught up her dog, and marched out of the room, slamming the door after her.

“At last I have got rid of her,” thought Maggie, and she rolled and pinned up the last plait of her black hair, but she did not go down to breakfast until the wheels grated on the gravel and the carriage was heard moving away. Then she begged Grace to tell her what her father had said.

“He said his children were persecuting him, that he had not had an hour's peace since their poor mother died.”

“Fudge! Mother knew how to keep him in order. Do you remember when she threw the carving knife?”

“Sally, for shame! How can you speak of poor mother so?”

“You know it is true, Hypocrisy. There is no harm in coming to the point.”

“It was very nearly coming to the point,” said Maggie, giggling.

“Well, what else did he say?”

“He said he didn't know what course he should adopt, but that things couldn't go on as they were; he thought he should write to Aunts Mary and Hester, and just as he was going out of the door he said that he'd prefer to sell the whole place up than continue living here and be the laughing−stock of the neighbourhood.”

At these words all looked frightened, even Sally. She flaunted her head, however, and said disdainfully: “I wonder he didn't speak of marrying again.”

“Did he say nothing more?” asked Maggie, who determined to know how matters stood.

“He spoke of Sally; he said it must be put a stop to. I don't know what he has found out, but I am sure he has found out something.”

“Why didn't you ask him?”

“I did. He said the way you were carrying on with young Meason was something too disgraceful, and that every one was talking of it; he said that you had been seen crossing the canal locks, and that you had spent hours with him on the beach, and he spoke about the cart and Bamber—I don't know if you ever drove there to meet him; I couldn't get anything more out of him, for he began to cry.”

“Didn't he speak of the party?”

“Oh, yes, a great deal. He said that henceforth he would have none of the Southdown Road people, male or female, at the Manor House. I thought he was going to curse the Horlocks; but I reminded him of the Viceroys. As for the Measons, I don't know what he would have said if he hadn't been crying.”

“The Measons are just as good as we are, though they mayn't be so rich. I should like to know who has been talking to him about me; I wonder who told him I spent hours on the beach with Jimmy; I met him once there quite by accident, and we sat down for ten minutes. I daresay it was Berkins.”

“No, Sally, don't,” said Grace, clasping her hands. “Father said that Maggie was nearly as bad, and was a great deal too much disposed towards young men.”

“I should think she is indeed; I wonder what father would say if he had seen her walking round the garden out of sight of every one with that fellow, a man she had never seen before.”

“There is no harm in walking round the garden with a man, but I should like to know what father would say if he knew that you brought Jimmy up to your bed−room.”

“My bed−room isn't a bed−room. How dare you make such accusations, how dare you? I should not be surprised if you were at the bottom of all this. I know you are mad with jealousy. Do you think I don't know how you flirted with Jimmy? Do you think I didn't see how you shifted Frank on to me so that you might walk with Jimmy to the station? But I'll tell you what, I'll not stand it, and if you try to come between me and him I'll knock you down.”

Sally sprang from her place and raised her fist. Maggie rushed from the room, or, more correctly speaking, into the arms of Willy.

“What the deuce are you up to?” cried this staid young man, who had been twisted round and thrown against the wall.

“Oh, save me! Sally says she'll knock me down,” cried the girl, clinging for a moment to her brother's shoulder, but as if conscious of the dubiousness of his protection, she loosed him and fled upstairs to her room.

“What damned nonsense this is! The trouble young girls are in a house!—Nothing but pleasure; from one year's end to another, it is nothing but pleasure. I am sick of it.”

Having by such unusual emphasis of manner reduced his sisters to silence, Willy sat down, and chewed with gravity and deliberation. Grace and Sally watched him. After a long and elaborate silence he put some brief questions, and appeared to devote to them the small part of his attention not already engaged in the judicious breaking of his bread. He did not answer nor did he comment; and when he had finished eating he commenced packing up his diary and letters in a brown paper parcel, and for three−quarters of an hour he walked up and down stairs collecting and forgetting; finally he left the house with many parcels.

As some days are sweet and fugitive, others are obtuse, complex, and tortuous as nightmares—difficult to understand and well−nigh impossible to relate. And the day after the tennis party was such a day in the Brookes household, nor did its tumult cease when the lights were turned out in the billiard−room. It was revived with fierce gusts of passion and despair during several succeeding days.

In the afternoon both Sally and Maggie wanted to go out in the cart. The wrangle was a long one, but the argument of the fist eventually brought it to a close, and Maggie was obliged again to shut herself into her room.

Thence Grace's solicitations could not move her, and she remained there until she saw her father coming up the drive; then she ran down to meet him, and made a frank accusation of Sally's treatment of her. But he was enthralled by his own woes, and without even promising her protection and immunity, at least from her sister's right arm, the old gentleman launched forth into more than usual lamentations.

He had had a stormy interview with Berkins going up in the train, and Berkins had so upset him that he had not been able to get through any business in the City. Berkins admitted of no equivocation. He had told him that he would not allow the young lady that was going to be his wife to spend her days feasting and skylarking with a lot of vulgar and penniless young men from the Southdown Road. He had declared that it was time to settle definitely the terms and the day of the marriage. He had been engaged now more than two months, and was prepared to do his share; Mr. Brookes must be prepared to do his, viz., to settle four hundred a year on his daughter.

The idea of parting for ever with so much of his money convulsed Mr. Brookes. He burst into tears, and their bitterness was neither assuaged nor softened by Grace's rather haughty statement that she didn't care at all for Mr. Berkins, and was not at all sure whether she would have him or not.

“So, father, you may be able to keep your money.”

“But did any one ever know me to think of myself?” and he drew his silk handkerchief forth. In the new trouble, suddenly created, all other considerations were lost, and Grace became the centre of many conflicting interests; everybody asked if this marriage so long looked forward to was going to tumble into ruin among so many ruins? At dinner Willy seemed to consider himself called from the problem of perfect mastication, and he said a few words intended to allay this new family excitement; but his efforts were vain, for it had occurred to Mr. Brookes that he might find calm in a bottle of '34 port. There were a few bottles left which he appreciated at their right value. He rang for the wine, and old Joseph announced, with all the intolerable indifference of a well−trained servant, that the young gentleman had drunk it all up yesterday. Mr. Brookes kept his temper better than the girls anticipated, and it was not until he had drunk a bottle of a latter−day wine that he seemed to realise the wrong that had been done to him. He begged of Willy to listen to him, and he talked so vehemently, and cried so bitterly, and laughed so joyously, and declared so often that it would be all the same a hundred years hence, that letters and diary had to be packed away in the brown paper parcel, and all work abandoned for that evening. The next day and the next passed in continual quarrel and argument, and at the end of the week the aunts were summoned.

Aunt Mary's features were sharp, her eyes were bright and she sat bolt upright on the sofa, her hands crossed over a shawl drawn tightly about her.

“Now, my dear James,” she said, “I am very sorry for you; of course I am. I know it is very trying, but there is no use in sitting there lamenting. Put up your silk handkerchief and come to the point. We all know it will be the same a hundred years hence, but in the meantime you don't want your dinner put back, so that Sally may continue her flirtations in the slonk,” and Aunt Mary burst into a merry peal of laughter.

“You are most unsympathetic, I never knew one so unsympathetic; you were always so, you'll never change.”

“Unsympathetic,” said Aunt Mary, shaking with laughter; “how can you say so? I have never done anything all my life but listen to you and sympathise with you. When you were a boy and sold my books to the boys at your school, and when you were a young man and took my poor husband to oyster shops—you remember the stories you used to tell me?”

Mr. Brookes waved his handkerchief, and Aunt Hester, who was a spinster, cast down her eyes and fidgeted with some papers which she had taken from her hand−basket.

“Of course, if my afflictions are only a subject for laughter—”

“I am not laughing at your afflictions, my dear James. I laughed because you said I was not a sympathetic listener. You used to think me so once.” Then becoming instantly serious, Aunt Mary said: “Of course I think this is a matter of great importance—the health, the welfare of my dear nieces, and your happiness.”

“And their salvation,” murmured Aunt Hester.

“If I did not think it important, do you think I would have left home, and at such a time, when I am most wanted? I always said that that big place would kill me, I never wanted to leave the Poplars; a little place like that is no trouble—my greenhouse, a few servants, and just as I had got everything to look nice—I could do it all in a few hours; but now I am never still, there is always something to be done. No one can take up my work. I am behindhand; oh, I assure you when I go back I shall be afraid to go into the greenhouse. I am worn out, I really

am; it never ends. In a big house like Woborn one is always behindhand. The days aren't long enough, that's the fact of it; when one thinks one is getting through one thing one is called away to another. 'Please, mum, the cook would like to speak with you for a moment.' 'There is no tea in the house, mum.' 'What! is all the tea I gave out last week gone?' 'Yes, mum. There was, you remember, the dressmaker here three days, and we had Mrs. Jones in to help. And we shall want another piece of cheese for the servants' hall.' I don't know how it is with you, but at Woborn the cloth is never off the table in the servants' hall. They have five meals a day—breakfast at eight, and they won't eat cold bacon, they must have it hot; of course the waste is something fearful; at eleven they have beer and cheese; at one there is dinner; at five they have tea; and at nine supper. Five meals a day—it really is terrible, it is wicked, it really is! You have had none of these troubles, Hester, and you may think yourself very lucky.

"We have just got rid of our cook; the trouble she gave us, it really is beyond words. She said she was troubled with fits, hysteria, or something of that sort—at least that is the reason she gave for her conduct. I knew there was something wrong, I could see it in her eyes. I said: 'This is not right; it can't be right.' One night she left the dinner half cooked and went roaming all over the country; she came back the next afternoon, and I found her baking. Then there was Robinson. Do you remember the pretty housemaid? You saw her when you were at Woborn. I am sure she must have had gentle blood in her veins; she wasn't a bit like a servant, so elegant and graceful. Those soft blue eyes of hers. I often used to look at them and think how beautiful they were. Well, she fell madly in love with West. Notwithstanding his bandy legs, there was something fascinating about him. He had a way about him that the maid−servants used to like; Robinson wasn't the first. Well, she completely lost her head, perfectly frantic—frantic; her eyes on fire. I saw it at once; you know I am pretty sharp. I just look round, one look round; I see it all, I take it all in. I said: 'This is not right; this cannot be right. Robinson is a respectable girl.' Her people I knew to be most respectable people in Chichester; I had heard all about them through the Eastwicks. I said, 'Robinson, you must go, I will give you a month's wages, but you must go back to your people. You know why I am sending you away; it is for your own good, otherwise I am sorry to part with you; but you must go.'

"Robinson didn't say much, she was always rather haughty, a reserved sort of girl; but soon after—I always hear everything—I heard that she had not gone back to her people, but was living in lodgings in Brighton, and that West used to go and see her. I didn't say anything about it to West, but he saw there was something wrong. When I told him to put the carriage to, he said, 'Yes, mum, where to, mum?' 'Brighton.' I could see he saw there was something wrong, and when I told him not to put the carriage up, but to drive up and down the King's Road, and that I would meet him in about an hour at the bottom of West Street, he looked so frightened that I could hardly help laughing; he did look so comical, for he knew now that I was going to see Robinson. (Here the remembrance of West proved too much for Aunt Mary, and she shook with laughter.) Of course if I had let him put up the horses he would have run round to Robinson's and warned her that I was coming. Oh, I shall never forget that day! It was broiling, the sun came down on the flagstones in those narrow little back streets, and there was I toiling, toiling up that dreadful hill, inquiring out the way. I found the street, it was on the very top of the hill: such a poor, miserable place you never saw. Such a dreadful old woman opened the door to me, and I said, 'Is Miss Robinson in?' She said, 'Yes.' I could hear Robinson whispering over the banisters, saying, 'No, no, no, say I am out.' And then I said, 'It is no use, Robinson, I must see you, and I will not leave this place until I have seen you.' I went upstairs to her room. At first she was rather haughty, rather inclined to impertinence. She said, 'Mum, you have no right to come after me—you sent me away; I am looking out for a place in Brighton—I don't want to go back to my people.' I said, 'Robinson, it is no use trying to deceive me, I know very well why you are in Brighton; no good can come of this, it is nothing but wickedness. You must try to be good, Robinson. West has, as you know, a wife and children, and you must not think of him any more. You have taken this lodging so that you may see him. You must think of your future; this can't last.'"

"No, indeed, this life is but a moment," sighed Aunt Hester. "I wish you had had one of these books to give her."

"I did better, Hester. I told her some plain truths, and she put off her high and mighty airs and began to cry. I shall never forget it. Oh, how hot it was in that little room just under the slates, with one garret window and the sun pouring in. There was scarcely any furniture, and I was sitting on her bed. I said, 'Now, Robinson, you must give me back the presents West made you, and you must promise me to go back to Chichester.' And I didn't leave her until she promised me to go home next day.

“When I stepped into the carriage you should have seen West's face. He didn't know what had happened; I didn't speak to him till next day. As I was going into the garden I called him. I said, 'West, I want to speak to you.' 'Yes, mum.' We went into the back garden; I was planting there. Edward was out riding, so I knew we shouldn't be disturbed. I said, 'West, I saw Robinson yesterday, and I have a parcel for you; she has promised me not to see you, and you must promise me not to see her.' 'Very well, mum, since you say it.' 'This is a very sad affair, West.' 'A bad business, mum—a bad business, mum.' There was always something in West's stolid face that used to amuse me. You should have heard him. 'I don't think she could help it, mum; she never loved another man—I really don't. But I was going to tell you, mum, I once knew a servant, a married man, he was in love with a young woman, and they waited long years, and when the wife died they married, mum.' 'That was all very well long ago, West, but wives don't die nowadays.'“

So Aunt Mary talked, realising and giving expression to both the pathos and the comedy of her story. Then, feeling that she wasdigressing at too great length, she strove to generalise from the particular incident which she had related, and get back to the theme of the conversation.

“I don't know what we shall do, I don't know what we are coming to; servants are getting too strong for us. My last cook gave us no end of trouble; the butler used to have to lock himself up in the pantry; and yet I had to give her a character. Of course it was very wrong of me to enable her to thrust herself upon another family, but what was I to do? I couldn't deprive her of the means of earning her living. She'll give trouble wherever she goes. There is no remedy, there really isn't; I don't know what's to be done unless we ladies combine and refuse to give them characters.”

Here Aunt Mary's thoughts and words began to fail her, for she felt she was not getting back to the point where she had entered on her various digressions, and without further ado, and quite undisconcerted, she said, “But I forget where I was; what were we talking about?”

“We were talking about dear Sally and Maggie, and the need they stand of counsel and help. Their conduct is to be deeply regretted; but theirs is only youthful folly. They have not done anything, I am sure, that—”

“Quite so, Hester; of course. But at the same time a stop must be put to all this nonsense; it cannot be allowed. I have only to look round to take it all in. They are worrying their father into his grave. His position is a very trying one. He has no one whom he can depend on—no one.”

“I am alone since poor Julia—”

Aunt Mary and Aunt Hester looked at each other, and they wondered if the terrors of the carving knife were completely forgotten.

“Poor James,” said Aunt Mary, recrossing her hands, “is obliged to go to London every morning, from ten till, I may say, half−past six.”

“I am never home before seven.”

“These girls are their own mistresses; they go out when they like, they order the carriage whenever they like, and they invite here every one it pleases their fancy to invite without consulting their father. I believe he doesn't even—”

“I know none of the young men who come to my house. All I know of them is that they come from the Southdown Road.”

“Don't be so silly, James, put up that handkerchief. Of course, the Southdown Road is one of the great disadvantages of the place. Those villa residences have brought into Southwick a host of people that a man living in a big place like the Manor House cannot know—little people who have—”

“Not two hundred pounds invested—no, nor yet a hundred.”

“Well, I don't wish to offend them, I'll say small incomes. They are all devoured with envy, and all they think of is what goes on at the Manor House.”

“A lot of penniless young jackanapeses. Every morning I see them at the station watching me over the tops of their newspapers.”

“You must understand, Hester, poor James up in London, toiling, not knowing what is going on in his own home; feasting and pleasure going on morning, noon, and, I may say, night, for when James returned home unexpectedly about ten o'clock at night, he found them—how many were there?”

“About a dozen, the others had gone.”

“Feasting, drinking his champagne—his very best.”

“The last few bottles of '34 port were drunk; the peaches, that the gardener has been forcing so carefully for months past, were all eaten. I returned home unexpectedly; I had intended to spend the night in London—you know I went there to see about starting Willy on the Stock Exchange; he has drawn three thousand more out of the distillery; I hope he won't lose it. Well, I met Berkins in Pall Mall, and he said if I would return by the late train that he would spend the night here, and we would go up to town together in the morning. I suspected nothing; I went into my dining−room, and there I found them all at supper. Had it not been for Berkins it wouldn't have mattered. He was indignant when he saw one of those jackanapeses with his arm round the back of Grace's chair; he says that such company is not fit for the lady that is going to be his wife; and he now insists on fixing the day, the settlements, and everything, or of breaking off the match.”

“Then why don't you fix the day and the settlements?”

“Grace is not willing; she is quite undecided. She says she doesn't know whether she will have him or not. Sally tries to set her against him; she laughs at him, says he is pompous, and imitates him. Of course, it is quite true that he thinks everything he has is betterthan anybody else's. She says he is old, and says that kissing him would be like rubbing your face in a mattress.”

“The fact is,” said Aunt Mary, “Sally ought to have been a man; had she been a man, it would have been all right.”

Aunt Hester, who had spent her life in a vicarage, glanced uneasily at her sister, and fidgeted with the papers in her satchel.

“I suppose it will be all the same a hundred years hence.”

“No, James, it will not,” replied Aunt Hester, with unusual determination.

The conversation dropped, and the speakers stared at each other at a loss how to proceed.

“She is a very difficult girl to manage. If it were not for her we could get on very well; it is she who upsets everything. She can't agree with Maggie; they are always quarrelling. The day after the party she threatened to knock her down if she interfered with her young man.”

“Is it possible! Did she say that? Well, when it comes to young ladies knocking each other down! Young ladies were very different in my young days. It only proves what I said about Sally—she ought to have been a man, she really ought to have been a man. I see it all; I have only to give one look round to take it all in one glance. When she came to meet me in Brighton I understood it all at once; I saw she could not restrain herself, no powers of self−restraint. Her eyes fixed on every man as if she couldn't see enough of him; her black eyes flashing. I wanted no telling—I saw it all; the moment a young man went by her eyes flashed. Here she was—'Aunt Mary, Aunt Mary, there's Meason, there's Meason, Aunt Mary, Meason, Meason, Aunt Mary.' It is not right, it can't be right; and to my thinking Maggie is just as bad—a little more sly perhaps.”

“No, not dear Maggie.”

“I say it is not right; girls in good health could not go on like that. If I were you, James, I would take them up to a first−rate London physician, the very best that can be had for money. Those girls are highly organised, highly sensitive; their nerves are highly strung. They want something to bring them down,” said Aunt Mary; but catching at that moment sight of her sister's face, she laughed consumedly, and, speaking through her laughter, said, “So−and−so, a first−rate man, I can't think of his name—he will give you the very best advice.”

“I think if our dear nieces could be brought to understand the sinfulness of their disobedience. I have here one or two little books which I think it would be advisable for them to read.”

“Later on, my dear Hester; the best thing that James can do is to see to their health. No girls in good health could act as they do; it is radically impossible.”

“I suppose that is what I must do; I don't know if I shall succeed, but I will try to get them to come up to London and have medical advice. Since the death of poor Julia I have been all alone; my position is a very hard one. I have no one to talk to, to assist me, to take my place in any way. I am obliged to go to London every day, and I assure you my heart is all of a flutter in the morning when I take the train, for I don't know what may happen before I return. The girls can do what they like; they are mistresses of this big house, they take the carriage into Brighton when they like, Sally takes the cart. I have thought of getting rid of that cart.”

Although passionately fond of talking, Aunt Mary would with patience, and even with pleasure, cross her hands and settle herself down to listen to one of Uncle James's interminable lamentations, but Aunt Hester, a nervous and timid creature who talked but little, not only declared that she could not bear to hear the same stories

over and over again, but interrupted her brother with firmness and determination. Indeed, it was only on occasion of Uncle James's soliloquies that she had ever shown any strength of will.

"We know very well, James, that your position is a trying one—that since the death of poor Julia you have no one whom you can look to. There is no use in telling us this over again; it is mere waste of time. What we have to do now is by all means in our power to convince dear Sally of the sinfulness of her conduct, and so strive to bring her back to a state of grace."

"Her spirit must be broken, she must be subdued," interjected Aunt Mary.

"Christ is the real healer, prayer is the true medicine, and by it alone is the troubled spirit soothed."

It being impossible to contravene these opinions, the conversation came to a pause, which was at length interrupted by Mr. Brookes, who through the folds of his handkerchief declared again that it would be all the same a hundred years hence. Even Aunt Mary's realism did not offend Aunt Hester as did this un−Christian philosophy; she gathered her strength for a grave reproof, but was cut short by her sister's laughter. All the teeth were glittering now, and peal after peal of laughter came. Aunt Hester's courage died, and her long, freckled face drooped like a sad flower.

"Now let us hear something about Grace. What about this marriage? Is Berkins as amorous as ever? That man does amuse me—his waistcoat buttons are better than any other man's."

"Mary, Mary, I beg of you to remember Mr. Berkins is a man of eight thousand a−year."

"He may make eight thousand a−year, but he has very little money invested," said Aunt Mary.

"That is true," Mr. Brookes replied reflectively, and he was about to rush off into a long financial statement when his sister, who already regretted her joke, checked him with an abrupt question.

"My dear James, is this marriage to be or not to be? That is what I want to know."

"I really can't say, Mary; Sally has contrived to upset her sister; she would have been, I feel sure, glad to marry Mr. Berkins if she had not been upset by Sally."

"Upset by Sally, what do you mean?"

"I told you that Sally tries to turn Berkins into ridicule, laughs at his beard among other things."

"I must see Grace about this," said Aunt Mary; "you must excuse my laughing, but Sally is often very droll."

Choosing the first occasion when Maggie and Sally were absent from the room, Aunt Mary said, "Come, Gracie, dear, tell me about this marriage. I hear that your mind is not made up—that you are not at all decided. This is not acting fairly towards your father. You are placing him in a very false position."

"I don't think so, aunty. No one, so far as I can make out, is either decided or satisfied. Mr. Berkins is not satisfied with the society we see."

"The Southdown Road you mean," interrupted Mr. Brookes, "and very properly, too."

"And father and he cannot agree upon money matters, and I don't like a beard—"

"You never objected to a beard until Sally put you against it."

"Yes, I did, father; I always told you—"

"Never mind the beard, tell me about the money matters that your father and Mr. Berkins can't agree upon."

"Mr. Berkins has offered to settle twelve thousand pounds upon me if father will settle the same amount. But father won't agree to this; he wants Mr. Berkins to settle twelve, but does not want to settle more than seven himself upon me."

"Is this so, James?" asked Aunt Mary.

Mr. Brookes avoided answering the question, and entered into a long and garrulous statement concerning himself and his money: he had made it all himself! he spoke of his investments with pride, and pathetically declared that he would not marry again because he would not deprive his dear children of anything. Aunt Mary crossed her hands over her shawl, and set herself to listen to the old gentleman's rigmarole. Aunt Hester tried several times to cut him short, but this time he would not be silenced.

Then Aunt Mary started the story of a girl whom she had known intimately in early life, which she no doubt thought would help Grace to a better comprehension of her difficulties; but the dear lady lost herself in the domestic entanglement of many families, on the subject of which she contributed much curious information, without, however, elucidating the matter in hand. She wandered so far that at length all hope of return became impossible, and she was obliged to pull up suddenly and ask what she had been talking about.

"What was I talking about, James; you have been listening to me—what was I talking about?"

Mr. Brookes made no attempt to give the information necessary for the blending of her many narratives, and she was forced to seek unaided for the lost thread. Soon after the girls came in with their gin and water. They drank their grog, kissed their relations, and retired to bed.

And the next evening, and the next, and the next, so long as Aunt Mary and Aunt Hester remained at the Manor House, the evenings passed in a similar fashion; and, notwithstanding the doleful faces they occasionally assumed, they found pleasure in lamenting the follies of the young people. The same stories were told, almost the same words were uttered. The only malcontent was Willy. He had no interest in his sisters, and the hours after dinner in the billiard−room when his sisters were in the drawing−room were those he devoted to looking through his letters and filling up his diary; so when Sally's name was mentioned he caught at his short crisp hair and gnashed his teeth.

VI

“My dear fellow, just as I'm settling down to do some work, Aunt Mary comes along the passage; I know her step so well. And then it begins, the old story that I have heard twenty times before, all over again. You have no idea how worrying it is.”

Frank laughed, and talked of something else. These discussions of Sally's character and general behaviour did not appeal to him in either a comic or serious light, and the havoc they made of Willy's business hours did not perceptibly move him; he was full of his good looks, his clothes, his affections, his bull−dog, and the fact that his youth was going by, as it should go by, among girls, in an old English village, in a garden by the sea.

Aunt Mary was a woman that a rarer young man would have been attracted by; indeed the delicacy of a young man may be tested by the sympathy he may feel for women when age has drawn a veil over, and put sexual promptings aside. Her bright teeth and eyes, the winsome little face, so glad, would have at once charmed and led any young man not so brutally young as Frank Escott. It would have pleased another to watch her, to wait on her, to listen to her rambling stories all so full of laughter and the sunshine of kindness and homely wit; it would have pleased him to note that she was gratified by the admiration of a young man; it would please him to hear himself called by his Christian name, while he must address her as Mrs. So−and−so, and in maintaining this difference they would both become conscious of pleasing restraint.

His comprehension of life was invariably a sentimental one, so the aunts were to him merely middle−aged women—uninteresting, and useful only so far as their efforts contributed to render the lives of young people easy and pleasurable. In abrupt and passing impressions he concluded that Aunt Mary was bright and pleasant, but tediously voluble, given to wasting that time which he would have liked to spend talking to the young ladies of poetry and Italy.

He scorned poor Aunt Hester. She shrank from him, frightened by his harsh, blunt manners; she was afraid he led a sinful life in London. Aunt Mary had few doubts on the subject, and her comments made her sister tremble. She spoke of him as a most desirable husband for Maggie. “He will be a peer, my dear James. Lord Mount Rorke will never marry again. He is the acknowledged heir to the title and estates.”

And the young man went as he came—full of himself, his clothes, his good looks; bumptious and arrogant, effusive in his love of his friends, and yet sincere. He looked out of the railway carriage window to seize a last look of the green, with its horse pond and its downs, and the cricketers all in white, running to and fro (young Meason had just made a three, and Sally was applauding). The porches of the Southdown Road he could just see over the fields, and Mr. Brooke's glass glittered amid the summer foliage. At that moment he loved the ugly little village, with its barren downs and all its anomalous aspects of town and country. He thought of his friends there, and his life appeared to be theirs, and theirs his, and he wished it might flow on for ever in this quiet place. He seemed to understand it all so well, and to love it all so dearly. He accepted it all, even its vulgarest aspects. Even pompous Berkins appeared to him under a tenderer light—the light of orange−flowers and married love. For Aunt Mary had smoothed away all difficulties, hirsute and monetary, and the wedding had been fixed for the autumn. The gaiety of the day he had spent with the girls, its feasting and its flirtation, arose, memorised in a soft halo of imagination—a day of fruit, wine, and light words, and the dear General, with his St James's politics and his only desire—“a little something to do—something to bring me out, you know.” The pugs, the mangy mastiff, the hospitable house always open, its ready welcome, and, above all, the air which it held of the lives of its occupants; its pictures of white arab horses, and elephants richly caparisoned; the wonderful goats in the field, and the tropical birds and animals in the back garden! Above all, the walks on the green with the chemist's wife, and the annoyance such familiarity caused Mr. Brookes—how funny, how charming, how amusing! He was smiling through the tears that rose to his eyes when the train rolled into Brighton.

On arriving in London he drove straight to the Temple. The creaking, disjointed staircases, with the lanterns of old time in the windows, jarred his thoughts, which were still of Southwick; and when he entered his rooms their loneliness struck him with a chill. He pictured Maggie sitting in the arm−chair waiting for him, and he imagined how she would lay her book aside and say, “Oh, here you are!” He sat down to read his letters. One was

from Lord Mount Rorke, enclosing a cheque, another a daintily cut envelope, smelling daintily, came from Lady Seveley.

"DEAR MR ESCOTT,—I have not seen anything of you for a very long time; you promised to lunch with me before you left town, but I suppose amid the general gaieties and friends of the season you were carried far away quite out of my reckoning. However, I hope when you return you will come and see me. I got your address from Mr. —−, but you need not tell him that I wrote to you; he is, as you know, a dreadful chatterbox, and somehow or other, without meaning it, contrives to make gossip and mischief out of everything.

"The weather here is delicious—perhaps a trifle too hot; and sometimes I envy you your cool sea−side resort. I wonder what the attraction is? It must be a very special one to keep you out of London in June.

"Should you be in town next Thursday, come and dine; I have a box for the theatre. And as an extra inducement I will tell you that I have two very nice girls staying with me, who will interest you.—Yours very truly, HELEN SEVELEY."

Some men of thirty would have instantly understood Lady Seveley's letter. But age gives us nothing we do not already possess, the years develop what is latent in us in youth, and it is certain that Frank at thirty would have understood the letter as vaguely and incompletely as he did to−day. We read our sympathies and antipathies in all we look upon, and Frank read in this letter an old woman with diamonds and dyed hair. He had met her twice. The first time was at a ball where he knew nobody; the second was at a dinner party. She had fixed her eyes upon him; she had prevented him from talking after dinner to a young girl whom he had admired across the table during dinner. He did not like her, and he thought now of the young girls he would meet if he accepted her invitation. Lady Seveley was a shadow; and when the shadow defined itself he saw the slight wrinkling of the skin about the eyes, the almost imperceptible looseness of the flesh about the chin; but, worse to him than these physical changes, were the hard measured phrases in which there is knowledge of the savour and worth of life. He unpacked his portmanteau, and, dallying with his resolutions, he wondered if he should go to Lady Seveley's: conclusions and determinations were constitutionally abhorrent, self− deception natural to him. Were he asked if he intended to turn to the right or the left, although he were going nowhere and an answer would compromise him in nothing, he would certainly say he did not know; and if he were expostulated with, he would reply rudely, arrogantly. This is worthy of notice, for what was special in his character was the combination it afforded of degenerate weakness and pride, complicated with a towering sense of self−sufficiency. Youth's illusions would not pass from him easily; in his eyes and heart the hawthorn would always be in bloom, young girls would always be beautiful, innocent, true to the lovers they had selected; nor was there of necessity degradation nor forced continuance in any state of vice. Love could raise and purify, love could restore, love could make whole; if one woman were faithless, another would be constant; if to−day were dark, to−morrow would be bright. Life had no deep truth for him, no underlying mysteries; it was not a problem capable of demonstration, capable of definition; it was not a thing of limitations and goals and ends; he could feel nothing of this—the philosophic temperament was absent in him. Life had no deep truth for him, no underlying mysteries; he did not dream of past times, and he placed few hopes in the future; life was a thing to be enjoyed in the moment of living, and the present moment was a very pleasant one. He leaned over the doors of the hansom resting his gloved hand upon his crutched stick. He was struck with the pride we feel when we are dressed for amusement and contemplate those in workaday garb; and in these sensations of pride he leaned forward, proud of his good looks, his shirt front, his shirt cuffs, his glazed shoes; he pleasured in the knowledge that many saw he was going to elegant company, to amusement. He was full of scorn for the women loitering, for the clerks hurrying, and especially for the crowds pressing about the entrances of the theatres.

London opened up upon a little black space of asphalt; crimson clouds moved over the many windowed walls of the great hotels, the black monumented square foamed with white water, children played, and the gold of the inscriptions over the shops caught the eye. London was tall on the heavens. Regent Street was full of young men as elegant as himself driving to various pleasures, and Frank wondered what sort of dinners they would eat, what kind of women they would sit by. Then as he drove through Mayfair he thought of his own party. He wondered what the girls would think of him.

Lady Seveley lived in Green Street. When he had rung the bell he listened impatiently for approaching steps, for he tingled with presentiment that he would somehow be disappointed, and he dreaded dinner by himself and his lonely lodgings. Nor was he wholly wrong. The butler who opened the door seemed surprised at seeing him,

and in reply to his question if Lady Seveley was at home, replied hesitatingly:

"Her ladyship is at home, but she is not at all well, sir. She is, I think, in her room lying down, sir."

"Oh, but did she not expect me? I was to have dined here to−night."

"I heard nothing about it, sir; but I'd better ask. Will you come in, sir?"

Lady Seveley's house was a house of scent and soft carpets. The staircase was covered with pink silk, and in the recess on the first landing, or rather where the stairs paused, there was an aviary in which either hawks screeched or owls blinked; generally there was a magpie there, and the quaint bird now hopped to Frank's finger, casting a thievish look on his rings. The drawing−room was full of flowers. There was a grand piano, dark and bright; the skins of tigers Lord Seveley had shot carpeted the floor, and on their heads, Helen rested her feet, showing her plump legs to her visitors. On the walls there were indifferent water−colours, there were gold screens, the cabinets were full of china, there were three−volume novels on the tea−table—it was the typical rich widow's house, a house where young men lingered. Frank stood examining a portrait on china of Lady Seveley, it was happily hung with blue ribbon from the top of the mirror. It represented a woman inclined to stoutness, about three and thirty. The chestnut hair was piled and curled with strange art about the head. Above the face there was a mask, roses wreathed, and a swallow carrying a love missive, butterflies and arrows everywhere, and below the face there was a skull profusely wreathed and almost hidden in roses. This portrait would have stirred the imagination of many young men, but Frank thought nothing of it—the theatrical display displeased him, it seemed to him even a little foolish. He crossed over to the flowers.

"Lady Seveley will be down in a moment, sir," said the maid. A few minutes after the door opened.

"How do you do? I am so glad to see you. Won't you sit down? I have been suffering terribly to−day—neuralgia; nothing for it but to lie down in a dark room."

"I hope you are better now."

"Oh, when I have had some champagne I shall be quite well. Now tell me something; talk to me."

Helen was sitting thrown back on the little black satin sofa; she had crossed her legs, and her foot was set on a tiger's head. The ankle was too thick, the foot slightly fat, but stocking and shoe were perfect, and these drew Frank's eyes too attentively. Helen noticed this and was glad.

"So you like Maggie the best?"

"Oh, yes, I like her the best, Sally is too rough. How those girls do worry their father. He has to go up to town every day; he is in the City, and the girls give tennis parties, and drink his best wine. There was an awful row there the other day about the peaches; he had been going in for forcing, and was counting the days when they would be ripe. The young men ate them all."

Helen laughed. "A sort of comic King Lear."

"Just so, the girls will have large fortunes at their father's death. I have known them all my life. I used to spend my holidays with them when I was a small boy."

"And you haven't seen them for a long time?"

"No, I was in Ireland two years, and then I went to Italy. This was the first time I saw them since they were really grown up."

"And you say they are beautiful girls and will have large fortunes."

"Yes, I suppose Maggie is a good−looking girl; she is more a fascinating girl than a beautiful girl." A sudden remembrance of Lizzie Baker dictated this opinion of Maggie Brookes.

"Dinner is on the table, my lady."

"I think you said in your letter that you were going to have two young girls staying with you."

"Yes, but they could not come; they were to have been here on Monday. I am very sorry; had I known for certain that you were coming, I would have arranged to have some one to meet you."

"I am very glad you didn't." The conversation dropped. "You said you were going to the theatre. What theatre are you thinking of going to?"

"My neuralgia put all thoughts of the theatre out of my head. I have a box for the Gaiety. We will go if you like."

The name of the theatre reminded him of Lizzie Baker, and he compared the pale, refined face of the bar girl with the over−coloured woman— his hostess. He had not seen Lizzie for a long time. Why had he not gone to the bar room the last time he was in London?

“You have not answered me—would you like to go to the Gaiety?”

“I am sure I beg your pardon,” and then, in a sudden confusion of memories and desires, he said: “I don't know that I care much about going to the theatre. You are not feeling well.”

“My neuralgia is almost all gone. There's nothing like champagne for it. Hardwick, Mr. Escott will take some more champagne.”

There were engravings after Burne Jones and Rossetti on the walls, and Frank stopped to look at them as he followed Lady Seveley upstairs. She went straight to the piano.

“Are you fond of music?” she said.

“Yes; there is nothing I like more than fiddling at the piano.”

“Then do play something.”

“Oh, no, not for worlds. I only strum, I don't know my notes. I strum on the piano as I strum on the violin.”

“Do you play the violin?”

“I can't call it playing, I was never taught.”

“How did you learn, then? It is a most difficult instrument; I couldn't get on with it at all; I will get mine out if you will play something.”

“If you promise not to laugh, I will try, but I assure you I know nothing about it. I borrowed a violin once, and I taught myself to play a tune; then I bought a violin, and I amuse myself when I am alone.”

“How very clever of you. There, you will find it under the piano behind that music; do play something, it will be so good of you.”

“What shall I play?”

“Anything you like.”

Frank had no knowledge of the instrument, but his ear was exquisitely just and appreciative; his artistic desire was febrile and foolish, but you thought less of this in his music than in his painting and poetry. His soul went out in the strain of melody sentimentally; and it leaned him in varying and beautiful attitudes. The sweeping, music−evoking arm was beautiful to behold, and the music seemed to cry for love; all about him was shadow; only the light fell on the long throat, so like a fruit to the eye; the charm was enervating and nervous. Helen looked at him again, and shuddering, she rose from the piano.

“What did you break off like that for? Was I playing so badly?”

“No, no—come and sit down here, come and sit by me. I want you to talk to me.” She stretched herself in a low wicker chair by the open window. There was a church opposite, the painted panes were now full of mitre and alb, and the vague tumult of the service came in contrast with the summer murmur of London and the light of the evening skies. The woman's body moved beneath the silk, and the faint odour of her person dilated the nostrils of the young man. “Talk to me.”

“I don't know what to talk to you about. You would not care for my conversation any more than you do for my music—one is as bad as the other.”

“No, pray—I assure you—I would not have you think that, no.” Helen made a movement as if she were going to lay her hand on his arm; checking herself, she said: “I do not think your playing bad; on the contrary, perhaps I think it too good. How shall I explain? There are times when I cannot bear music; the pleasure it brings is too near, too intense, too near to pain; and that 'Chanson d'Eglise' seems to bear away your very brain; you play it with such fervour, on the violin each phrase tears the soul.”

“But it is so religious.”

“Yes, that is just it; no sen—no; well, there is no other word; no sensuality is so terrible as religious sensuality.”

“I don't know what you mean. I can understand any one saying that Offenbach is sensual, but I don't see how the term can be applied to a hymn.”

“Perhaps not to a hymn, although—but 'La Chanson d'Eglise' is not a hymn.”

Her arm hung along the chair, the flesh showing through the silk as soft as a flower. He might take it in his hands and bear it to his lips and kiss it; he might lean and loll and kiss her. He wondered if he might dare it; but her air of ladyhood was so marked that it seemed impossible that she would not resent. He could not quite realise what her looks and words would be afterwards.

“I do not wish to flatter you, but I think you play beautifully. I do not mean to say that I have never heard any

one play the violin better—that would be ridiculous. Your playing is full of emotion. That lovely passage thrilled me; I do not know why, nor can I exactly explain my feeling—nerves perhaps. Now I come to think of it I am ashamed. It was the summer evening, the perfume of those flowers; it was—" Helen fixed her eyes on Frank, as if she would like to say, "It was you." With a sigh she said: "It was the music." Then as if she feared she was showing too plainly what was passing in her mind, she said: "But it is nearly nine o'clock. Perhaps you would like to go to the theatre, the ticket for the box is on the table. I should not be more than a few minutes changing my dress. Would you like to go?"

"I don't much mind, just as you like. I heard that the new burlesque was very amusing."

"Then let us go."

Both regretted their words; and, embarrassed, each waited for the other to say No, let us stay here, it is far sweeter here. But it was difficult to draw back now without avowal. Helen had rung for her maid. She put on a white satin. Her opera cloak was edged with deep soft fur, and she came into the room putting on her long tan gloves.

"Were you ever in love?" Helen asked, and she leaned back behind the curtain of the box out of sight of the audience.

"I suppose I have been in love; but why do you ask?"

"It just occurred to me."

"I have never been in love with a ballet girl, if you mean that."

In blue tights and symmetrical rows the legs of the chorus ladies were arranged about the stage; the low comedians cracked jokes close to the footlights; the stalls laughed, the pit applauded.

"Haven't you? Is that really so? I shouldn't think it would be nice. And yet, if all we hear is true, young men do make love to low women; I'm not speaking now of ballet girls, but of cooks and housemaids. A lady, a friend of mine, cannot keep a housemaid under fifty in her house on account of her son, and she sent him to Eton."

"Yes, I know; I have heard of such things, but I never could understand."

"I am glad. But you say you have been in love. Tell me all about it. I want to know. What was she like? Was she fair or dark?"

"Fair. She used to wear a Gainsborough hat."

"Did you like those great hats?"

"I did on her."

"I suppose she was tall, then."

"No, she was short."

"Then I don't see how she would wear a Gainsborough hat."

"She did, and looked exquisite in it too."

"I suppose you were very much in love with her?"

"Yes; we were engaged, and going to be married."

"Why was it broken off?"

"Her father was a brute."

"Fathers generally are brutes on such occasions, and there are generally excellent reasons for their brutality."

"Husbands, too, are brutes, and if all I have heard is correct, there are excellent reasons for their brutality."

Lady Seveley turned pale. "I did not come to the theatre to be insulted," she said, hesitating whether she should rise from her seat. Frank Escott was constantly guilty of such indelicate and stupid speeches, and it would be easy to cite instances in which his conduct was equally unpractical. Were friends to speak ill of any one he was especially intimate with, he would answer them in the grossest manner, forgetful that he was making formidable enemies for himself without in the least advancing the welfare of him or her whose defence he had undertaken. With some words and looks the storm was allayed, and they felt that the wind that might have capsized had carried their craft nearer the port where they were steering. Their eyes met, and for a moment they looked into each other's souls. Her arm hung by her side, white and pure, could he take it and press it to his lips the worst would be over—he would have admitted his desire. But the box curtain did not hide him, and the faces opposite seemed to watch; and then she spoke, and with her words brought a sense of distance, of conventionality.

"Tell me, did you fall in love with her the first time you saw her?"

"I think so."

“Tell me all about it. When did you see her for the first time?”

“It was on the Metropolitan Railway. We were in the same carriage, she sat opposite to me; for some time we were alone, and I thought of speaking to her, but was afraid of offending her.”

“Are you always afraid of offending people?”

“I don't know—I don't think I am.” Then it struck him that she was alluding to his rudeness, which she declared she had forgiven, and he said: “I am sure I can't do more, I told you I was sorry—that I did not mean—”

“Oh, never mind, that is forgiven; tell me about her.”

A little perplexed, he continued: “She was dressed in white, and her face was like a flower under the great hat.”

“It is clear that you can admire no one who doesn't wear a Gainsborough hat. What will you do now that they have gone out of fashion? I am sure I can't gratify you.”

“I wondered where she was going. I wished I was going to the same house, I imagined what it would be like, and so the time went till we got to Kensington. She turned to the right, so did I; I hoped she did not think I was following her—”

“You were both going to the same house?”

“Yes. There were some carnations behind her in a vase, and you know how I love the perfume of a carnation—so did she. She told me of the flowers they had in their cottage at Maidenhead. I love the river, so did she, and we spoke of the river all the afternoon. And when the season was over I went up to Maidenhead too. I had my boat there (I must show you my boat one of these days, one of the prettiest boats on the river). We used to go out together, and, tying the boat under an alder, I used to read her Browning. Oh, it was a jolly time.” The conversation came to a pause, then Frank said “Were you ever in love?”

“I suppose I was.”

“With your husband?”

“No, I was not in love with my husband, he was twenty years older than I. When I was eighteen I was very much in love with a young fellow who used to come to play croquet at our place. But my parents wouldn't hear of it. I was not at all strong when I was a girl; they said I wouldn't live, so I didn't care what became of me. Lord Seveley admired me; it was a very good match, I was anxious to get away from home, so I married him. You are quite wrong in supposing I treated him badly.”

“Forgive me, don't say any more about that.”

“We had rows, it is true; he said horrible things about my mother, and I wouldn't stand that, of course.”

“What things?”

“Oh, I can't tell you—no matter. Once I said that I wouldn't have married him only I thought I was going to die. He never forgave me that. It was, I admit, a foolish thing to say.”

At that moment the curtain came down, and the young men moved out of the stalls. “There are two men I know,” she said, fixing her glass. “Do you see them? The elder of the two is Harding, the novelist, the other is Mr. Fletcher, an Irishman.”

“I know Fletcher—or, rather, I know of him. His father was a shopkeeper in Gort, the nearest town to Mount Rorke Castle.”

“He is a journalist, isn't he? I hear he is doing pretty well.”

“In London, I know, you associate with that class, but in Ireland we wouldn't think of knowing them.”

“I thought you were more liberal−minded than that. If they come up here, what shall I do? I mustn't introduce you?”

“I don't mind being introduced. I should like to know Harding.”

“I can't introduce you to Harding and not to his friend.”

“I don't mind being introduced to Fletcher; I'll bow and slink off to smoke a cigarette. Is it true what they say about him, that he is irresistible, that no woman can resist him? I don't think he is good−looking—a good figure, that's all.”

“He has the most lovely hands and teeth.”

“I see; perhaps you are in love with him?”

A knock came at the door; the young men entered. Lady Seveley introduced them to Frank; he bowed coldly, and addressed Harding. But Lady Seveley said: “O Mr. Harding, I want to speak to you about your last novel; I

have just finished reading it."

"What do you think of this piece?" Fletcher asked Escott, in a hesitating and conciliatory manner.

"I am afraid he will not be able to tell you; he hasn't ceased talking since we came into the theatre."

"I should have done the same had I been in his place."

Lady Seveley smiled, Frank thought the words presumptuous. "Who the devil would care to hear you talk—and that filthy accent." And at that moment he remembered Lizzie Baker. Fletcher and Harding were now speaking to Lady Seveley, and taking advantage of the circumstance he slipped out, and, lighting a cigarette, entered the bar room. Behind the counter the young ladies stood in single file, and through odours of cigarettes and whisky their voices called "One coffee in order," and the cry was passed on till it reached the still−room. Frank remembered having read a description of the place somewhere, he thought for a moment, and then he remembered that it was in one of Harding's novels. He could detect no difference in the loafers that leaned over the counter talking to the barmaids; they were dingy and dull, whereas the young men from the stalls of the theatre were black and white and clean; but the keenest eye could note nothing further, and a closer inspection showed that even a first division rested on no deeper basis than the chance of evening dress. Civilisation has given us all one face and mind. He walked to where Lizzie was serving; soldiers were ordering drinks of her, so he was obliged to apply to the next girl to her for his brandy and soda. He drank slowly, hoping her admirers would leave her, but one soldier was stationery, and this spot of red grew singularly offensive in Frank's eyes, from the clumsy, characterless boots, to the close−clipped hair set off with the monotonously jaunty cap. The man sprawled over the counter drinking a glass of porter. Frank tried to listen to what he was saying. Lizzie smiled, showing many beautifully shaped teeth, so beautifully shaped that they looked like sculpture. Behind her there were shelves charged with glasses and bottles, gilt elephants, and obelisks, a hideous decoration; she passed up and down with cups of coffee, she filled glasses from various taps, she saluted Frank.

"How are you this evening? Come to see the piece again?"

"Come to see you."

"Get along; I don't believe you," she said, and she passed back to her place, and continued talking to the soldier as steadily as her many occupations would allow her.

A few moments after the bell rang, and Frank went upstairs annoyed.

"Oh, so it is you; you have come back," said Helen, turning; "sit down here. Nellie Farren has just sung such an exquisitely funny song; they have encored it; just listen to it, do," and Helen fixed her opera glass on the actress. The light and shadow played about her neck andarm in beautiful variations, but noticing nothing, Frank leaned forward.

"Isn't it funny; isn't it delightfully funny?"

"Yes, it is funny."

Having heard one song they listened to the rest of the act. "Now give me my cloak. Thank you, and now give me your arm." Frank complied. "You will come home to Green Street with me, and have some supper?"

"I am afraid, I am sorry I can't; I must get home early to−night."

"You have a key, you surely can get in at any hour."

"Yes, but I am afraid—the fact is I am dreadfully tired."

"Oh, just as you like."

Then at the end of an irritating silence, "I am afraid you will have to wait, I do not think I shall be able to get your carriage yet awhile; in a few minutes this crowd will disperse. No use getting crushed to death! What became of Harding and Fletcher? Did they remain long with you?"

"No, not very, they went away just before you came. There is Mr. Harding. How did you like the piece, Mr. Harding?"

"I always enjoy these pieces, they are so conscientiously illiterate; what I can't bear is unconscientious illiterateness. Nellie Farren has caught something of the jangle of modern life; she has something of the freshness of the music−hall about her that appeals to me very sharply."

"Do you like music−halls? I have always heard they were so vulgar."

"Vulgarity is surely preferable to popularity. The theatre is merely popular."

While Harding was thus exerting himself with epigram, Fletcher stood tall and slender, with a grey overcoat hanging over his arm, and his intense eyes fixed on Lady Seveley. His gaze troubled her, and when he withdrew

his eyes she looked at him, anticipant and fearing. He spoke to her until Frank, feeling that he was receding out of all interest and attention, said abruptly, “If you will come now, Lady Seveley, I think I shall be able to get you your carriage. May I see you home?” he said, holding the door.

“No thank you, I will not take you out of your way. Go home at once and get rested, and come and see me one of these days; don't forget.” Lady Seveley smiled, but Frank felt that she was annoyed.

“I wonder if she wanted me to go home with her. That impertinent brute Fletcher daring to come up to speak to us! I was very nearly telling him to go and fetch the carriage.”

He pushed open the swinging doors with violence, nearly upsetting the fat porter. The bar was nearly empty, and he found Lizzie disengaged.

“You look very vexed. Has any one been pinching you?”

“I am not vexed.”

“What will you have to put you straight?”

“Well, that is a question. Let me see. I don't care about another brandy and soda, and if I have coffee it may keep me awake.”

“Have half milk.”

“Very well.” He hesitated, but the inclination to speak soon overpowered him. “I call it bad form, when you are with a lady for another fellow to come up and speak to her.”

“Three of Irish, miss.”

“Why, didn't he know her?”

“Of course he knew her, but that doesn't give him a right to come up and enter into a long conversation when I am with her. I wish I had knocked him down.”

“He might have knocked you down.”

“A glass of bitter, miss.”

“I should have had to take my chance of that. In London people don't seem to me to mind whom they speak to—a low−bred Irishman, who never spoke to a lady until he left his own country.”

“Oh! what a rage we are in.”

“No, I am not in a rage,” said Frank, who at that moment felt the folly of these confidences. “I don't care a hang. It isn't as if it were a woman I cared about. Had it been you—”

“Get along, don't you tell me.”

“I assure you I speak only in a general way, and you must admit that if you go out with a fellow it would not be nice of you to begin talking to some one else.”

“Oh! I never do that.”

“There, then you admit I was right, I was sure you would; I don't care a hang for the lady I was with, but I don't intend to allow any one to insult me. But I wonder how you can speak to soldiers.”

“They are no worse than the others. Besides, in our business we have to be polite to every one.”

“Polite, yes—but I wanted to speak to you, I came down from my box on purpose to speak to you, and I couldn't, you were so engaged with that soldier.”

“He was here before you; you would not like it if you were talking to me, and I were to rush off to speak to some one else.”

“One Scotch and three Irish, miss, and out of the bottle please, our friend here's most particular, he would like it in a thin glass, too— wouldn't you, Ted? and if he could have a go at that pretty mouth he would like it better still. A rare one after the ladies is Teddy. Aren't you, old chap?”

Full of scorn Frank watched this noisy group. Lizzie remained talking with them for some little time, and she did not return until he called to her twice for a cigar.

“How very impatient you are,” she said, handing him the box.

“You were talking to me, and you go away to talk to those cads.”

“I must serve the customers, you naughty man. You can't have me all to yourself. I believe you would like to.”

“That I should. I wish you would come out with me. I wish you would come to dinner.”

“And what would the lady say who you went to the theatre with to−night, and were so mad because some one spoke to her?”

“I assure you she is nothing to me, a mere acquaintance. I was angry because I thought it a piece of

impertinence of the fellow to come intruding his conversation when it wasn't wanted; but as for the woman I don't care a snap for her; never did, I assure you: she is nothing to me. I suppose you don't get out much here."

"We are off duty for so many hours every day; but we must be in at a certain time."

"But you have got Sundays."

"We get Sunday in our turn."

"When will your turn come?"

"I am going out next Sunday."

"I wish you would come with me; I would take you up the river. You know the river?"

"No, I don't know even what you mean."

"You mean to say you have never been up the river, not even so far as Twickenham?" "No."

"Well, then, you have a treat. The most beautiful thing in England is the Thames—perhaps in the world. Last year I spent nearly three months at Marlow and Maidenhead—we positively lived in a boat. I have a beautiful boat. I should like to take you out—you would enjoy it. Are you fond of boating?"

"I love it. I haven't been in a boat since I left Wales."

"So you are a Welsh girl. My boat is now at Reading. If you could get away early in the morning we might manage to catch the nine o'clock express that takes us down in a little over the hour. I'd have the hamper packed, and we would have our lunch up in Pangbourne Woods. It would be so jolly. I wish you would come."

"I should like it immensely; I don't know if I could manage it."

"Do you say you will come, do."

Lizzie stood hesitating, her finger on her lip. A girl entered the bar and whispered something to her as she passed.

"I must go away now, I'm off duty."

"Say you will come."

"I can't say yet; I shall see you again."

As Frank turned to go he caught sight of Harding and Fletcher. He did not see that they had been watching him, and when they called him he went over to their table.

"What will you have?" said Harding.

"Nothing, thanks, I could not drink anything more."

"Have a cigarette."

"Thanks, I will; I cannot smoke this beastly cigar. I do not know why I asked for it."

"Sit down."

The conversation turned on the play, but at the first pause in the conversation, Harding said: "Pretty girl, that girl you were talking to at the bar."

"Yes; is she not? I think she is one of the prettiest girls I ever saw in my life."

"Far better looking than Lady Seveley."

"I should rather think so; Lady Seveley is over thirty."

"The choice would be a nice test of a young man's moral character."

"Did you write that this morning, or are you going to write it to−morrow morning?"

"You have not told me which, when you do—"

"I see you are not in a hurry to bring your book out."

Harding laughed, and Frank was pleased at the idea of getting the better of Harding; Fletcher sat with his eyes glittering and his lips slightly parted. Who would hesitate between a lady of rank and a barmaid? She might be a pretty girl, but what of that? There are hundreds as pretty. He had never been the lover of a lady, and his heart was aflame. Soon after the men parted in the street, and Frank went from them, fearful of his lonely rooms, and longing for his friends at Southwick.

He lunched every day at the Gaiety, and he at length succeeded in persuading Lizzie to come to Reading with him.

Town was miserably Sunday when he drove up to Paddington at a quarter past eight. "If it should rain, if it should turn out a pouring wet day, what should I do? That would be too terrible!" He felt the boat alive beneath his oars, the river placid and gentle, and all the charm of the rushes, the cedars, the locks, and the blonde beautiful girl in the stern with the parasol he had bought her aslant. Let him have this day, and he didn't care what

happened! He wanted to show her the river, he wanted to joy for a day in her presence.

He was more than a half an hour in advance. Would she come? She had promised, but she might disappoint. That would be worse than the rain. He would wait till ten o'clock. There was another train at ten, but if they missed the ten to nine the day would be spoilt, lost. Supposing she did not come, what would he do?—drive back through dingy London and eat a lonely breakfast in that horrible brick Pump Court? He could scarcely do that. Would he go to Reading by himself? The light of the flowing stream, the secrets of the rushes and murmuring woods died; nature became voiceless.

"It will be a pity if she doesn't come. We shall have a fine day, I am sure it is going to be a fine day, but we shall miss that train. I wonder if I can see anything of her. I don't know what side she will come from. I suppose she'll take a cab. Perhaps she won't come at all; will she come?—she promised me. By Jove, twenty minutes to nine. If she isn't here in five minutes we shall miss the train." His passion grew in intensity, and hope was dead, when he heard sounds of running footsteps, and saw the great girl holding her hat with one hand and her dress with the other. The torture of expectation was worth the rapture of relief, and he said, delighted: "So you have come, have you? One minute more and you would have been late."

"Why, were you going?"

"No, but the train is. We have three minutes. I'll run and get the tickets. How is it that you are so late?"

"I just missed the train."

"What train?"

"The Metropolitan."

"The Metropolitan? What nonsense! Why didn't you take a cab?"

She had been afraid of spending the money, fearing she might not see him after all; and out of breath she followed him along the platform. "No, not in there; I don't like travelling alone with gentlemen." Frank looked at her in amazement, and they got into a carriage where an old gentleman was sitting.

"So you thought I wouldn't come, you naughty boy?"

"Oh, I should have been so disappointed. I don't know what I should have done."

Lizzie watched the young aristocratic face; his earnestness drew her towards him, and she wondered she did not like him better. "Now tell me what we are going to do. I had such difficulty in getting away. It is against the rules; and the manageress (the fat woman who stands at the end of the bar and goes round and collects the money) hates me. She would have stopped me if she could, but I went to the manager; he is a friend of mine."

"That fellow with the long fair moustache that walks about at the rate of seven miles an hour, with his frock−coat all unbuttoned. Harding the novelist—the fellow I was sitting with the other night, said such a good thing—he said he was a sort of apotheosis of sherry and bitters. I don't know why it is good, but it is; whether it is the colour of his face and moustache—"

"He is very proud of his moustache, and your friend is quite right; he is very fond of sherry and bitters—too fond. I have served him with as many as three in an afternoon, and I am sure he wouldn't have refused another if he could have found any one to stand it. Oh, look at the country! How pretty it is!—the cows, the corn growing, the birds and all the light clouds; we are going to have a lovely day. Shall we see much of the country at Reading? Tell me, where are you going to take me? Shall we go for a walk in the woods? Are there any woods? I hope there are."

"The most beautiful woods in England—Pangbourne Woods. We shall arrive in Reading about a quarter to ten. We'll walk down to the river, or drive if you like; it is only a few minutes to walk to the boat−house. My boat is there—such a beauty! We'll row up to the—and that reminds me, I ordered the luncheon basket at the best place in London, you know; it was to have been at my place last night at eight o'clock, and they never sent it. We shall have to lunch at the hotel. Such a beautiful hotel, high up, overlooking the river; I hope you are not disappointed, it really wasn't my fault. We shall have an excellent lunch, I assure you, at the hotel."

The miles fled away, and in the comfort and speed of the broad gaugeline, an hour and a half seemed to them like a minute.

"What kind of town is Reading?" said Lizzie, springing from the carriage.

"Not much more than a biscuit manufactory. A lot of red brick pill−box looking buildings scattered over a flat piece of ground. We shan't see the town. It is a mile from here. Huntley and Palmer, you know—"

"Oh, yes, we deal with them."

“Catch hold of this rug while I get the tickets out. Shall we walk or drive?”

“Let's walk.”

They stepped along gaily, and they were soon standing on the wharf, Frank criticising the boats and the rowing, Lizzie all white in the sunlight, a little dumbfounded and astonished. Then he turned into the boat−house, and reappeared soon after, his arms bare, the sun on his neck.

“You got my telegram? My boat is ready?”

“Yes, sir, we got her out this morning.”

“I suppose a lot of people wanted to have her, they all went for her, I'll bet.”

“Yes, sir, a good many gentlemen asked if they could have her.”

It seemed to please Frank that he had caused so many to be disappointed. “Well, get her out, we have no time to lose.”

The man stepped from one fleet of skiffs to another, he caught at several boats with his boat−hook, but Frank's boat could not be found. He shouted to his man who was sculling towards an island opposite: “What has become of Mr. Escott's boat? I took her out myself this morning.”

“I should like to know what is the use of my sending you telegrams if I am delayed in this way?”

“My man will be here in a second, sir.”

“Now, then, do be quick, stir yourself, I don't want to stand about here all day.”

The assistant scratched his head. Finally it transpired that that party down the river—that party just gone away—must have had the boat. He didn't know anything about it, it wasn't his fault. They said they had engaged that boat over−night.

“My boat let out for hire! How dare you do this? I never heard of such a thing; I shall write to the papers.”

“I will give you just as good a boat, sir—”

“As good a boat! You haven't a boat like it. How do I know you don't let my boat out for hire every day?”

“No danger of that, sir; I will give you another boat, one that you will be pleased with.”

“My boat knocked about by some cad! He won't be back till nine o'clock to−night, perhaps. I never heard of such a thing. Which is it?”

“That one with the lady in the stern—the red parasol.”

“He must be caught up, he must. Have you got an outrigger?” Assuring Lizzie that he would be back in less than half an hour, Frank bent to his work.

“If he rows like that he will run down some one,” muttered the boatman. “Confound him and his boat!”

The outrigger shot through the water; the various craft paused, surprised at such furious rowing. Lizzie watched the race, asking the boatman if there was danger.

“Danger? No; but he'd better not say too much to that gent when he does catch him up, or there'll be a row, I expect. He's going round the bend; if he doesn't run into something, he'll catch them,” said the boatman. “Would you like to look through my glass, miss? They'll be coming back presently.”

Angry language was indulged in, but the apologies of the boatmen saved the young men the unpleasantness of blows, and, elated at his success, Frank handed Lizzie into the truant boat and paddled out into the stream. When he had got out of earshot and out of the notice of the boat−house he rested on his oars. “Did you see me overhaul them?”

“No, you passed out of sight round the bend.”

“Yes, by George! I had a good pull for it. There are a lot of red parasols up higher, and I had to look out for my boat. What did they say about my rowing?”

“They said you'd catch them if you didn't run into something.”

“Did they? I was wild; and—would you believe it?—when I did catch them up the fellow began to object; he didn't want to come back, if you please. He said he had hired the boat, that he did not know the boat was mine—no proof. I said, 'I will give you proof,' and so I would have.”

“I was afraid. I began to regret that I had come out with you.”

“What nonsense! Done the fellow good if I had punched his head. Well, it has taken it out of me a bit. I had to put on a bit of a spurt to catch them; they had such a start, and they were going along a pretty fair pace, too. It has made me feel a bit peckish, a pull like that on an empty stomach; it must be close on twelve o'clock. What do you say, are you beginning to feel that it is lunch time?”

“I am not very hungry, and you forgot the luncheon basket. I ought to have reminded you to get some sandwiches at the railway station.”

“Sandwiches! I don't want sandwiches; I want something more substantial than sandwiches. I'll paddle on; we aren't more than a tenminutes' paddle from the 'Roebuck,' a ripping nice hotel, I can tell you.”

“Couldn't we have something to eat without going to an hotel?”

“I don't think so. I want a bottle of fizz, and the fizz there is excellent; one of the best hotels on the river; splendid gardens and tennis grounds, a great room overlooking the river; the best people go there; sometimes one can't get a table.”

“I don't think I am well dressed enough.”

“You look charming, a cotton dress and a parasol is all one wants for the river.”

“You are not ashamed of me, then; you'll take me as I am?”

“Ashamed of you! Steer straight for that post—that's it, bravo!” Frank shipped the oars, and when he felt the girl's arm laid on his as he helped her to land, it seemed to him that all the world was happiness. The spirit of the river, the fields and sky, leaped to his eyes. He assisted her to ascend the steps cut in the hillside. She laughed and laughed again, and stopped to rest. At last they stood on the railway line. It swept round another hill all overshadowed and dark with cedars.

“Here comes a train, let's wait. I must see it go round the curve.”

“You should see the Bath express come along the broad gauge at the rate of sixty miles an hour.”

“This is not an express?”

“No.”

The luggage train came with an interminable rumble and jingle, and Lizzie waited till the last truck passed under the branches. Then they went to an hotel full of daylight and stained wood, with glimpses of barmaids far away, and waiters running about; the rooms glistened with table linen; the waiters carved at a sideboard covered with pies, sirloins, hams, tongues. Only one table was occupied, and the waiters were lavishing all attention upon it. Lady Seveley leaned back smoking a cigarette. Fletcher sat next to her, alternately affecting indifference and fixing her with his eyes. Harding was voluble and observant. There was about them an air of thirty and the dissipations of thirty. And, not in the least ashamed of Lizzie, Frank bowed to Lady Seveley; she returned his bow by a slight nod; and Lizzie, very much embarrassed, nodded to the men; they smiled in return.

“Who is that lady you saluted?”

“Lady Seveley; the lady I told you about, who I went to the theatre with the other night.”

“Fancy a lady like that smoking a cigarette!”

A waiter approached with the bill of fare. “We had better not have anything hot, we shall lose the whole day. What do you say?”

“Cold sirloin of beef is excellent, sir; pigeon pie is also very good —young birds.”

“Shall we try the pigeon pie? Get me the wine list. Take off your hat, Lizzie, do.”

“I am afraid my hair will come down.”

“Never mind, so much the better.”

With some difficulty she extracted her hat from the hairpins, and the bright hair hung loose about her white plump face. Frank drank a glass of champagne; he was proud of her beauty.

“By Jove, how this does pick one up! not half bad tipple, is it?”

They hastened through their lunch, unconsciously avoiding the too critical looks of those at the far corner table; nor did they suspect, as they descended the hill and got into their boat and rowed away, that they were still the subject of conversation.

“She is no doubt a very pretty girl. He seems very fond of her. I hope he won't make a fool of himself.”

“I think he is 'mashed.' We saw him the other night in the bar. He was paying her a great deal of attention—the night we saw you at the theatre.”

Lady Seveley's face slightly altered. Harding noticed the change of expression, and he said: “She is called the belle of the bar. Hers is the kind of prettiness that appeals to a young man, for somehow, I cannot explain, it is a thing you must feel; she epitomises as it were the beauty of the English girl; she is the typical pretty English girl; all that English girls have of charm, she has; and the co− ordination is an irresistible force against some young men; their natures demand the freshness the spontaneity, the innocence of—”

“Of the Gaiety bar! I have never been there, but from what you tell me of it, it is the last place to find innocence and freshness.”

“That may be or not be. We find a rose blooming in very out−of−the−way places; but, as a matter of fact, I made no accusation of virtue; vice does not rob a youth of its spontaneity. You may rouge the cheeks of May and blacken her eyes, but she is May nevertheless. I say that the lover of the young girl cannot love the woman of thirty. Her charms touch him not at all; but there are others who may love only the woman of thirty, and, strange to say, they are only loved by the woman of thirty. The universal Don Juan is a myth, and does not exist out of literature. There is the Don Juan who plays havoc among the women of thirty, there is the Don Juan who plays havoc among young girls, but— “

“And you think our friend Frank Escott belongs to the latter class?”

“No, I don't. He is good−looking; he is to all appearance a young man that any woman would like, but I don't think you'd find this to be so if it were given to you to see into his life. Every man of the world must have noticed that there are times when, speaking generally, every second woman will run after him—ladies of rank, prostitutes, maid−servants—when he may pick and choose his mistresses, and change his mind as often as he pleases; there are other times when he finds himself womanless, when none will look at him, when in fact without an allusion to rings, and sometimes a very direct allusion is required, he will not be able to persuade a chorus girl to come out to supper with him. He thinks he is getting old, he looks in the glass with fear.”

“You mean to say there are men who look in the glass with fear?”

“Of course, after five−and−thirty the glass whispers as awful truths to the man as to the woman—worse, for woman's youth is longer than man's. The contrary is the received opinion, but, like all popular opinions, it is wrong; a woman is frequently loved after forty, a man never. I was saying that a man often thinks he is getting old because the chorus girl took an early opportunity of speaking of rings, because the lady of fashion begged of the old gentleman who had taken up his hat to go to stay a little while longer, because the chamber− maid did not look lusciously round the corner when he passed her in the passage. He looks in the glass and imagines all kinds of monstrous changes in his person. His fears have no foundation in fact—or should I say in the flesh? A year after the duchess makes overtures, the chorus girl threatens to throw up her engagement for him, and the chambermaid pesters him with unnecessary questions concerning baths and towels. These facts tend to show, indeed I think they prove, that love is a magnetism, which sometimes we possess in almost irresistible strength, and which sometimes fades away into powerless and apparent extinction.”

“Then you think that good looks have nothing to do with the faculty of making oneself beloved?” said Fletcher.

“The phenomenon of love has hitherto eluded our most eager investigation; when we have traced each desire to its source, and classified—”

“We women will have ceased to take any interest in the matter. What a humbug you are, Mr. Harding; one never knows when you are serious. But what has all this to do with that poor boy who has gone off with his barmaid?”

“This: he is unquestionably good−looking, but I don't think he possesses at all the magnetism, the power—call it what you will—that I have been speaking of. He will never influence either men or women, he will never make friends; that is to say, he will never make use of his friends. He will, I should think, always remain a little outside of success. It will never quite come to him; he will be one of those muddled, dissatisfied creatures who rail against luck and bad treatment. I cannot see him really successful in anything; yes I can, though, I believe he would make an excellent husband. I have spoken a great deal to him. He has told me a lot about himself, and I can see that he asks and desires nothing but leave to devote himself to a woman, to pander to her caprices. All that violent exterior will wear off, and he will yield to and love to be led by a woman. He writes a little, and he paints. I don't know if he has any talent; but he never will be able to work until he is obliged to work for a woman.”

“Then you think he will marry that barmaid?”

“Most probably. He will struggle against it; but unless chance intervenes—she may die, she may run away with some one to−morrow, for she does not care for him—he will be sucked into the gulf.”

“He is Lord Mount Rorke's heir; he will have twenty thousand a year one of these days.”

“Mount Rorke will never forgive him a bad match. I know Mount Rorke,” said Lady Seveley, “and you do, too, Mr. Fletcher.”

“Yes, a little.”

Unfearing prophecy and oracle launched from the windows of the hotel, the young people rowed, lost to all but each other, amazed at the loveliness of the river. They floated amid the bulrushes. Cries and regret when Frank's oar crushed the desired blossom. Never before were lilies as desirable as those that were gathered that day—that bud, it must be possessed, that blown flower must not be left behind. Lizzie dipped her arm to the elbow, and rejoiced in the soft flowing water. The river rose up into what beautiful views and prospects. The locks, the sensation of the boat sinking among the slimy piles with Frank erect holding her off with the boat−hook, or the slow rising till the banks were overflowed, and the wonderful wooden gates opened, disclosing a placid stream with overhanging boughs and a barge. And the charming discoveries they made in this water world, the moorhen's indolence, and the watchful rat swimming for its hole; each bend was a new picture. How beautifully expressive of the work of the field were the comfortable barns. If life is never very fair, a vision of life may be fair indeed, and once the tears came to the bar girl's eyes, for she, too, suddenly remembered her life of tobacco and whisky; long weary hours of standing, politeness, washing glasses, and listening to filthy jokes. Would there be no change? If she might live her life here! She thought of the morning light, and the home occupations of the morning, and then the languid and lazy afternoons in this boat, amid the enchantment of these river lands.

Frank laid by his oars, and as regardless as a shopboy of observers, he took her hand and begged of her to confide in him. He thought, too, of seeing her daily, hourly, of her presence in his daily life; he saw her amid his painting and poetry, and this pleasant scenery. Then the vision vanished like the shine upon the stream, she withdrew her hands, a shadow had fallen.

They passed a summer−house where three girls were sitting; one sat on the edge of a table and sang the ballad of “Biddy Malone.” There was a house so red, and so full of gables and narrow windows, that Frank said it was a perfect specimen of Elizabethan architecture; and he treated Lizzie to all he could pretend to know on the subject, and he condemned the owner for the glaringly modern garden benches with which the swards were interspersed. The sun was setting, there was lassitude in every passing boat, the girls leaned upon the arms of the young men, and the woods stood up tall and contemplative, as beautiful in the deep blue river as upon the pale sky.

They landed at Pangbourne Woods by the wide grassy path between the reedy river and the spreading beeches. There a man was boiling a kettle. He spoke to them; he instructed them in the life of camping out, and he invited them to tea. Lizzie went into the tent and got out the tea−things. Two men came up, jolly fellows enough; and such little adventures endeared and memorised the day.

They climbed, oh! what a climb it was, Lizzie's ankles and courage giving way alternately; but at last they reached a pathway, and they walked at ease into the green solitudes of the wood. It seemed endless, so soft and so still. He spoke to Lizzie, whom he now called Liz, of her past, of the reasons that had led her to leave home and “go to business.” Her brother, she said, was a painter, a celebrated bird−painter.

“Then we should know each other, I am a painter.” He told her of his ideas and projects, of how he had been to France; he might go there again, unless something happened to keep him in England. He wrote a little too, in the papers, and he might do something to help her brother—a paragraph in *Fashion*, he could get one in. For fear of wounding her he did not ask if her brother was a decorative painter, employed by a firm, or an artist who exhibited pictures. Her father had married again. She did not like her stepmother, and that had determined her to go into business.

Had she ever been in love? Yes, she supposed she had; but it was all over now. The last words sounded, and died away in a great abyss of soul.

Parts of the path were marked “Dangerous.” The earth had given way, creating fearful chasms, over which trees leaned dangerously or hung out fantastically by a few roots. In the dell below there stood a small green painted table, and the young people leaning on the protecting railing wondered at this mysterious piece of furniture. There was in them and about them an illusive sense of death and the beauty of life. One slight push would hurl them headlong hundreds of feet down to the painted table.

The silver of the river sparkled through silence and the foliage of June, and the songs of the boatmen came and went like voices in a dream.

The days of youth are long, and in tender idleness the hours lingered, their charm unbroken in the rattle of London; and happy with love and tired with the great air of the river and its leafy scenery, Frank fell asleep that

night.

VII

One of the French artists he had met in Rome wrote to him from Paris. Why should he not go there? There was nothing for him to do in London; Lizzie Baker had disappeared, and in the year and a half that he spent in Paris learning to draw he forgot her and his friends in Southwick. Nor did he remember them when he returned to London; not until one evening, strolling down Regent Street, he came upon Willy Brookes suddenly.

"How do you do, my dear Willy? I haven't seen you for—for—how long?"

"I should think it must be now, let me see, I have got it down somewhere; when I get home I'll look it up."

"Hang the looking up; better come and look me up."

The young men laughed.

"It must be nearly a year and a half."

"I should think it must. Where are you staying? I am staying at Morley's Hotel, Trafalgar Square. Come and dine with me to−night."

Willy reflected. He stroked his moustache reflectively.

"No," he said, "I am afraid I can't. I have something to do."

"Nonsense! I don't believe you. What have you to do?"

"I have some cheques to write."

"That won't take you a moment. You can do that at my place."

"I couldn't, I assure you. I must have my books and my own pen. I wouldn't write a cheque in that way for worlds."

"Why not? We'll go to a music−hall afterwards."

"I am very sorry, but I really couldn't—not to−night."

"You never go in for amusing yourself."

"Yes, I do; but what amuses you doesn't amuse me. I assure you I would sooner stay at home, write my cheques, and enter them carefully, than go to a music−hall."

Frank looked at Willy for a moment in mute amazement. Then he said: "But what's that you have under your arm in that brown paper parcel?"

Willy laughed. "A leg of mutton; I have just been to the stores."

"You mean to say you buy legs of mutton at the stores, and carry them home? Supposing you met some one, if we were to—"

"Not very likely, a foggy night like this. I have a small house in Notting Hill. I take the 'bus at the Circus. I shall be very glad if you will come with me; so will the missus."

"I forgot to ask about her, how is she?"

"Very well. Come and see for yourself. Come and dine with us to−morrow. I can't give you one of your restaurant dinners, but if leg of mutton will suit, all I can say is that I shall be very happy."

"I'll come whenever you like."

"Can you come to−morrow?"

"Yes. We might go to the theatre afterwards."

"We might. Be at my place at half−past six, that will give us plenty of time."

"What a queer fish he is," thought Frank, as he walked down Regent Street, looking at the women. "Can't come and dine with me because he has two or three cheques to write, must have all his books out to make entries—what a clerk for the Government—an ideal clerk! What a genius for red tape!"

Willy was standing on the steps of the little house, and he commented on his friend's extravagances as he welcomed him.

"You might have come here for ninepence, third class. You paid that cabman three shillings, and you took, I don't mind betting, half an hour longer. Now, don't make a mess, do wipe your feet; we don't keep a servant, and it gives the missus a lot of trouble cleaning up."

Not a book nor a picture nor a single flower, and every worn carpet suggested the bare necessaries of life.

There was the drawing−room, kept for show, never entered, barren and blank; there was the room—a little more alive—where Willy smoked his pipe and kept his accounts, but there the crumbs, three or four, seemed to speak of the dry, bread−like days that wore themselves away; life there was too obviously dry and bare, joyless and mean.

Had Frank's mind been philosophic and deep−seeing, he would have mused on the admirable patience of the woman who lived here, seeing no one, making entire sacrifice of her life; he would have contrasted the humbleness, nay, the meanness, of this unknown house with the reception rooms of the Manor House; one life wasting in darkness and poverty, another burning out in light and riches; timeworn truths float on the surface of this little pool of life, and so modernised are they that they appear for a moment “new and original.” But further than a regret that there were no flowers in the window, and a sense of the horrible when his eyes fell on a piece of Swiss scenery, his thoughts did not wander; they soon were fixed and absorbed in the consideration of the happiness that Willy had attained by “doing the right thing by the woman.” He was hers, she was his. Dreams of things marital, the endearments of husband and wife, are the essence of the being of some men and women, and are to them a perennial delight. Frank was such a one.

He had brought Cissy a doll, and the child came and sat on his knees, and put her arms round his neck. He kissed the long face, hollow−eyed, and stroked the beautiful gold ringlets that cloaked the shoulders.

They went to the theatre in a 'bus. Frank carried Cissy, and he called indignantly to the crowd not to press him. “Did they not see that he was carrying a child?” He did not think that his friends might recognise him, nor would he have felt any shame had he caught sight of some face in the stalls he knew. He would not have put Cissy aside; nor would he have pretended that he was not with the pale, worn, shabbily−dressed woman by his side. He was wholly filled with his friends, their interests and concerns; so complete was the investment of himself that Lizzie Baker did not snatch a fugitive thought from them; and it was not until he sat smoking with Willy in the back parlour that he said:

“I wonder what has become of her? She was a nice girl.”

“You mean Lizzie Baker? You lost sight of her all of a sudden, didn't you? Do you think she went off to live with some one?”

“No, I don't think she was a girl who would do that. By Jove, she was a pretty girl! Once I took her up the river, up to Reading. We had such a jolly day in the woods and on the water—amid the water−lilies and bulrushes, or the shade of the cedars. I wonder you never go up the river.”

“I have no time. Besides, I hate the water. I never go on the water if I can help it—I am too nervous.”

“How odd! Oh, we had a jolly day!”

“But I never understood how it was you lost sight of her. You said in your letter that she had left the bar; but she must have gone somewhere. I am sure you didn't make sufficient enquiries. You are too impatient.”

“I did all I could. One girl told me that a lot of them—Lizzie among the number—had suddenly been transferred to Liverpool Street. That was true, for I saw at Liverpool Street several girls I had known previously at the 'Gaiety.' Those poor bar girls, how pitiful they look! all over London they stand behind their bars! Breathing for hours tobacco smoke, fumes of whisky and beer, listening to abominable jokes, the subjects of hideous flirtations; and then the little comedy, the effort to appear as virtuous young ladies—'young ladies of the bar.' It is very pitiful. In such circumstances how do you expect a girl to keep straight? I do not think it is the men who do the harm. There are, of course, a few blackguards who crack filthy jokes over the counter, but if a girl likes she needn't listen—a girl can always keep a man in his place. Then if a man flirts with a girl he always loves her, likes her, if you think 'like' a better word; but you must admit that in the most beery flirtation there must be a certain amount of liking. There is, therefore, something to save a girl. I feel sure that it is girls, not men, who lead innocent girls astray. Those poor bar girls are quite unprotected; they have a sitting−room into which they may not bring a friend—a man, I mean. In the bedrooms there is always a lot of illicit talking and drinking going an. A girl who has gone wrong herself is never content until she has persuaded another girl to go wrong; a girl is so mean! I feel very much on this subject. I am thinking of writing a book on the subject. Did I ever tell you about the novel I intended to write?”

“You told me once in Brighton about a novel you intended to write. I forget what it was about, but you said you were going to call it 'Her Saviour.'“

“Oh, that is another book. I was thinking of writing the story of a woman who is led into vice. They get her to

throw over the man who loves her; he follows her, never loses sight of her until at last, determined to save her, and although he knows that he is wrecking his own life, he marries her. What do you think?”

Being pressed for an answer, Willy stroked his moustache with great gravity. “I really can't say, my dear fellow; you know I never like giving opinions on questions I do not understand.”

The conversation came to a pause, and Willy began to whistle.

“Just a little flat—quarter of a note wrong there and there!”

“Do you whistle it? Oh, yes, that's it! I can hear the difference! I wish you had your violin. I should like to hear you play it.”

“What, with the missus overhead?”

“She doesn't know anything about it. How prettily *she* used to sing it; a pretty tune, isn't it? Good old days they were! Do you remember when you used to come to the Princess's with me? Didn't she look pretty?”

“You never told me why you didn't marry her; I never heard the end of that story.”

“There is nothing to tell. It's all over now. Do you remember how I used to dress myself up to go to the theatre? We used to go to supper at Scott's afterwards. I did not mind what I ate in those days.”

“You hardly ever go to the theatre now, do you?”

“Hardly ever. I shouldn't have gone to−night if it had not been for you. I don't know how it is, but I don't seem to enjoy myself as I used to.”

The men ceased talking. Presently Frank broke the silence.

“I hope you are getting on all right on the Stock Exchange. You haven't mentioned the subject.”

“I don't know that there is much to say. Times are very bad just now. I don't think any one is doing much good.”

“But you are with a very good firm. Nothing is going wrong, I hope.”

“I don't think any one is making money. We have all been hard hit lately—war scares. But I daresay it will all come right.”

“I never understood what you ever wanted to go into the business for. What do you, with your handsome place at Southwick, and your father with his thousands and thousands, want to turn yourself into a city clerk for?”

“You see, you don't care about making money; I do—it was bred in me. Besides, I am an unselfish fellow. I never think of myself; I like to think of others. If I were to make a good thing out of this, I should be able to leave the missus independent.” Then, after a slight pause, Willy said: “But, by the way, I was forgetting. I got a letter this morning saying that if I met you in London I was to tell you that you were to come to Southwick for a ball.”

“What ball?”

“A subscription ball at Henfield—a county ball. Will you come?”

“Yes, I don't mind. It should be rather fun. Are you going?”

“Yes, I must go, worse luck, to chaperon my sisters.”

“How do you go? Will the governor let you have the horses?”

“Not he! We generally have a large 'bus. I am going down to−morrow by the twelve o'clock train. Will that be too early for you?”

“Not if I go home now and pack up.”

“You won't like that. You had better sleep here and get up early in the morning; your room is all ready.”

“I couldn't manage it. I never could get back to the Temple, pack up, and meet you at twelve at London Bridge.”

“It will be rather a cold walk for you; you are too late for the train, and the last 'bus, I am afraid, has gone.”

“I shall have a hansom. The only thing that worries me is not being able to say good−bye to the missus.”

“She's fast asleep. She won't mind—I'll make that all right.”

“Then, at twelve o'clock at London Bridge!”

VIII

Sally rushed down to meet him, and she took him off for a walk in the garden.

"What a time it is since we have seen you. What have you been doing— amusing yourself a great deal, I suppose?"

"I have been the whole time in Paris. I have been studying very hard. I only returned home about two months ago."

"I don't believe about the studying."

"I have been working at my painting. I worked morning and afternoon in the studio from the nude. Last summer I had a delightful time. I took a little place on the Seine—a little house near Bas Meudon. I had a garden; I used to breakfast every morning in the garden—fresh eggs, new bread, an omelette, such as only a Frenchwoman can make, a cutlet, or a piece of chicken. The wine, too, so fresh and generous. I don't know how it is, but Burgundy here is not the same as Burgundy on the banks of the Seine. I worked all day in my garden, or down by the river. I was painting a large picture. I haven't finished it yet. I must go back there in the summer to finish it."

"Why can't you finish it here? Haven't you got it here?"

"Yes, but the Seine is not here."

"Wouldn't the Adour do? The river at Shoreham?"

"No; but the Thames might. My picture is really more English than French. There were a lot of willow trees there, and my picture represents a girl lying in a hammock, foot hanging over, showing such a pretty piece of black stocking. There are two men there, they are both swinging the hammock, but while one is looking at her ankle the other only sees her face."

Sally laughed coarsely and evasively.

"What are you laughing at?" he asked, feeling a little nettled.

"Don't you think people will think it rather improper?"

"Not at all. Why should they? The idea I wish to convey is that one man loves her truly for herself alone, the other only loves her because she is a pretty girl. I have composed some triolets for the picture, which will be printed in the catalogue—

"In a hammock I swing,
My feet hanging over;
'Neath Love's bright wing,
In a hammock I swing,
Loves come and they bring
A truth to discover,
In a hammock I swing,
My feet hanging over.

"That is the first stanza. There are six, and they tell the story of the picture. I will copy them into your album, if you like."

"Will you? That will be so nice, if you will. The only thing is, I haven't an album."

"Haven't you? I'll get you one. I'll send you one from London."

Sally asked him to explain the triolets, and very loyally she strove to understand.

"Ah, I see a thing when I am told, but I never can understand poetry or pictures until they are explained to me."

Mollified, Frank thought of going upstairs to fetch the copy book in which he wrote such things, but speaking out of an unperceived association of ideas, he said: "What a clever girl your sister is. I had once a long talk with her about pictures and poetry, and I was surprised to find how well she talked. She understands everything."

"Maggie is a clever girl; I know she is far cleverer than I am; but if you knew her as well as I do, you would find she did not understand all you think she understands."

“How do you mean?”

“Maggie's cleverness lies in being able to pretend she understands what she knows nothing about; I have often caught her out.”

“Really; but how do you get on together now?”

“Pretty well! I don't think there is much love lost on either side. I don't know why—I never could understand Maggie. You have no idea of the reports she spreads about me all over the place—the stories she tells the Grahams, the Prestons, the Wells. She told Mrs. Wells that I fell in love with every young man that came to Southwick. She said awful things about me. As for that story about telling cook to put father's dinner back, I don't think I ever shall hear the last of it. What made father so angry was because he thought it was to talk to Jimmy in the slonk.”

“You told me the last time I was here that you wanted to finish a conversation with him in the slonk.”

“I may have told you that it was to speak to him about his sister Fanny,” Sally replied evasively. “I would not care if I never saw him again; but I couldn't get on if I weren't allowed to see Fanny. Father wanted me to promise never to enter the house again!”

“But you have flirted with him?”

“I don't know that I have; certainly not more than Maggie. Last summer she was hanging round his neck every evening under the sycamores. I caught them twice.”

“I don't see any harm in going under the sycamores. I daresay Maggie has allowed him to kiss her; so have you!”

“That I assure you I haven't.”

“You mean to say a man never kissed you?”

“I didn't say that. I haven't kissed any one for years.”

“Who did kiss you?”

“You don't know him. I was only eighteen. He was a married man; it was very wrong of me.”

“I wish I had been he.”

“Do you? I hate him; he was a beast for doing it.”

Sally often indulged in these half confessions; one of her aunts used to call them her “side lights.” By their aid she succeeded in interesting Frank. “How candid she is to tell me—to confide in me!” Sally was handsome now; the evening suited her dark skin and coal black eyes, and her strong figure was rich and not ungraceful in a dress of ruby velvet. Should he kiss her? What would she say? He threwhis arm about her.

“I am surprised. Certainly not!”

“I don't see any harm.” Then, with a sensation of saying something foolish, he said: “You told me you kissed a married man.”

“That was ages ago—I was very silly. I shouldn't think of doing sonow.”

In the silence which followed Frank wondered why he had tried to kiss her. Decidedly he liked the other better.

Now every evening Maggie went to the writing−table, and all knew what it meant. Mr. Brookes occasionally lamented in a minor key, but without having recourse to his handkerchief. Willy said nothing; his losses on the Stock Exchange had been heavy; and owing to a conversation Frank had drawn him into during dinner the other day, his digestion, he feared, was not quite up to the mark. So on the night of the ball he only answered with an occasional monosyllable the splendid young man of the embroidered waistcoats who related his pleasures in a deep bass; nor did he pretend to take any interest in the crude militia officer who sometimes broke the silence by a declaration that he did not care for politics or poetry, that he liked history better. The young ladies listened devoutly to all that the young men said; Mr. Brookes carved valiantly at the head of the table and appeared resigned. Bouquets were fixed in button−holes in the billiard−room and the 'bus was announced. A greasy oil−lamp hung from the roof. Sometimes Sally rubbed the windows and said she could tell by the bushes where they were, and the embroidered waistcoat continued to drone out the measure of his amusements. He would have to run up to London, then he must have a shy at *trente et quarante* at Monte Carlo, then he must get back for the spring meeting at Newmarket. Frank asked him if he didn't think he could manage to amuse himself without talking it all out beforehand. But undaunted and unchecked he wandered from Homburg to Paris, and from Paris to Ross−shire, until the 'bus drew up among a small crowd of people.

The ball was a failure. When they entered the rooms there were scarcely twenty people present. It was very cold, and the men said; “How can the women bear it with their naked shoulders?”

“We shall never get near this fire,” said Sally, looking in dismay on the circle of damsels who stood warming themselves, their dresses relieved upon the masses of laurel with which the room was decorated; “there is a beautiful fire in one of those little rooms at the end.”

“Very well, let us come and sit there; or shall we dance this waltz first?”

“Let's dance it.”

They danced, and Frank shuddered in his evening clothes as he danced.

“Did you notice,” said Sally, as they hurried to the retiring room, “how upset father seemed at dinner? I thought he was going to cry, but he bore up to the end better than I expected.”

“So he did, but I don't see what there was particularly to upset him this time. Meason is away at sea, and you have promised not to see him any more.”

“Oh, I wasn't thinking about the Measons—but haven't you heard? I only heard it through a friend, but I know for a fact that Willy has lost nearly all his money on the Stock Exchange.”

“You don't say so; I am so sorry.”

“Father hasn't heard it all yet; if he had he wouldn't have come down to dinner. I don't fancy he knows more than that things have not been going well, and that Willy has been a loser.”

“But how can he have lost? I thought he was junior partner in an old established business.”

“So he is. I can't tell you how the mischief was done, but I know he has lost all his money.”

“What do you mean by all his money?”

“All the money—three thousand—that father let him draw out of the distillery.”

“This is very sad.”

“Yes, isn't it? And particularly for a fellow who has so few amusements, and only cares about making money. Just look at him now; he wanders about speaking to no one. Come, let's dance this dance—are you engaged?”

“No!”

This news about Willy fixed the Harfield ball in Frank's thoughts, and he remembered the pretty girl in white of whom he could make nothing, of the raw just−brought−out girl who had bored him, of the communicative girl who had amused him by her accounts of her dogs and horses; he remembered, too, how he had seen Maggie disappearing down the ends of certain passages with a young man whose name he did not catch, and whose face he had not noticed. He had danced twice with her, only twice; she was distracted, she did not look at him, her eyes wandered all over the room, she answered his questions indifferently. Sally, on the contrary, had devoted herself to him, and on several occasions he thought that her blunt straightforward manner was better than the other's slyness. The 'bus came with its draughts, its sickly lamp and its doleful jolting. Sally was too tired to rub the windows and declare how far they were from home, and the dancers endured their discomforts almost in silence; even the embroidered waistcoat occasionally ceased to talk about Homburg; and in all the extreme bitterness and greyness of a March morning they pulled up before the door of the Manor House.

“I beg of you not to make a noise. If you wake up father he will never let us go to a ball again. Is there a fire in the billiard−room, Gardner?”

“Yes, miss, there's a lovely fire; the decanters are on the table and the kettle is on the hob.”

“I think you would all like a glass of something hot,” said Maggie.

“Rather!”

“But don't make a noise, please.”

They stole along the passages to the billiard−room shivering, their feet aching, feeling very uncomfortable indeed. The waistcoat was now considering if it would be good form to come forward in the Conservative interest at the next election; but every one was too tired, they could not laugh, and amid a few general remarks the young ladies drank their gin and water, casting sheep's eyes at the young men, and then, glad and yet loth to part, all retired limping to their rooms.

Breakfast was a pleasant meal—full of laughter and anecdotes of the ball, and, laden with Gladstone bags, the young men departed in ones and twos. Frank was going with Willy to London, and when they disappeared among the laurels Sally and Maggie turned indoors, conscious of reaction, and wondering what they should do with the long day that stretched before them. Maggie walked upstairs; she lingered, undecided, and then went down the

passage to Frank's room. He had forgotten a shirt stud; on the chest of drawers there was a crumpled white tie and a soiled pair of white gloves. “How careless he is!” she thought, “I must send him this,” and she put the stud in her pocket. She straightened out the gloves and determined to send the necktie to the wash. Next time he came down she would have it to give him, nice, clean, and white—she must see that it was beautifully made up. Then she found his ball programme. He had danced four times with Sally— only twice with her—what a fool she had been; she had wasted her whole evening with that other fellow. It did make her feel so angry. Then the housemaid entered and turned the bed down.

“What a lot of washing there will be this week, Gardner.”

“There will indeed, miss. Three pairs of sheets, and only slept in once.”

“Yes, isn't it a pity? It seems absurd to send these sheets to the wash, doesn't it?”

“It do, indeed, miss.”

“Absurd!” said Sally, who had just come in. “I want a pair of fresh sheets for my bed. I'll have these.”

“No you won't—I was going to take them.”

“I should like to know what right you have to them more than I.”

“You promised not to interfere with me, and you have done nothing else. You did nothing at the ball but ask him for dances.”

“That's a lie! I didn't ask him for a dance. You went off to hide; no one saw anything of you all the evening.”

“You mean to say you didn't promise?”

“I never promised anything; if I did I should keep my promise. I am not like you. I want a pair of sheets, and I mean to have these.”

“They are too big for your bed.”

Sally seized the sheet and strove to drag it from Maggie, who, although the weaker, held her own bravely for some time. Finding her strength failing her, she loosed her hold, letting her sister fall against the wall, and taking up the pillow she launched it with her full force. “If you want what he slept in, you can have it all.”

“I'll give it to you, my lady,” cried the bully, making a rush round the bed, but Maggie fled through the dressing−room, shutting the door behind her, and locked herself into her room.

IX

As Willy would not pay the extra fare, Frank had to travel second class. He was telling his friend of the Stock Exchange, and his losses—nearly four thousand pounds. He had suspected that the firm of which he was junior partner had not played fair with him. Anyhow, he was going to get out of the business, having something better in view —a shop in Brighton. Yes, a shop in Brighton, a greengrocer's shop. No one had any idea, until they went into the calculation, of the amount of profit that was made on vegetables. Lord This and Lord That, every one who had a handsome place with large gardens, counted on being able to pay his gardener's wages by the sale of the surplus carrots, artichokes, potatoes, parsley, onions, tomatoes, especially tomatoes— every one nowadays ate tomatoes. He had it all down in figures, and was perfectly astonished at the sums of money that could be made. Grapes had been overdone, that was true; but a profit could be made out of everything else. Flowers, especially gardenias, were sold in the London market at two shillings apiece. Now, there was he within five miles of a large town like Brighton; the rent of a shop in the Western Road would not come to more than seventy or eighty pounds a year; the missus he would put in as shopwoman, and, there was no doubt of it, she would make as good a shopwoman as you could find, after a little practice; the child could run on errands, so it should be all profit. “I shall have none of the expenses that other people have to contend with. In the garden at the Manor House about three times as much stuff is grown as required. I shall buy all the fruit, vegetables, and flowers from my father at cost price, or a little over, and shall sell in my shop at retail price, that is, twenty or thirty per cent more. There is, therefore, no reason why the shop should not bring in from three to four hundred a year. And—would you believe it?—my father, who will be benefited by my scheme, if not more, quite as much as I shall be, is opposed to it; he will get a fair price for a lot of things for which he now gets nothing. But no. He cannot, or will not, see it. I never saw any one like my father. He will not help himself and you can do nothing to help him. The distillery business is going very badly. He had a bad year last year. I know for a fact that he did not make five per cent on his capital. Putting these things together, I should have thought that he would have been glad to make a little money to retrench; but no! he prefers to go on in the old way. He made money in the old way, and he doesn't see why he shouldn't make money again in the old way. Odd man my father is, isn't he?”

It appeared to Frank that Mr. Brookes had managed to help himself very liberally indeed to all the good things in life; but with his false, facile, Celtic nature, he had no difficulty in re−adjusting his ideas and adopting a view of Mr. Brookes more in harmony with Willy's. He was, as usual, enthusiastic about his friends, and was effervescing with love and goodwill. He saw nothing of their faults—they were the best and truest people he had ever known, and he could not love them too much. Indeed he was angry, and regretted the limitations that nature has set on the human heart, and would if he could have lost himself in one immense and eternal love of the Brookeses.

When he bade Willy good−bye at London Bridge, and wished him well with his shop, these sentiments ceased to be active forces in him, and they lay latent in his life of restaurants and bar rooms until the summer returned, and he received an invitation from the Manor House to come down for a garden party at Mrs. Berkins's. When he opened the letter he basked in thoughts of them—of Maggie and her fascinating subtleties, of Sally's blunt speech and sturdy good looks, of Willy, and all the quiet talks they would have together. He counted the tunnels, and, striving to recall the landscape, guessed extravagantly the number of miles that separated him from them. He walked up the drive with a beating heart, looking for the girls between the laurel bushes. He found them, and their habits which endeared them to him, unchanged; and to slip back into the old ways without experiencing the slightest difficulty or jar was like waking from a dream and entering again on a pleasant reality. There was the excellent dinner and the usual complaints about the Southdown Road, the cigars in the billiard−room, conversation about pictures and investments, gin and water, and then a long yarn with Willy in his bedroom. Life moved at the Manor House without any spring creaking, without jolt or jar, and it was this beautiful regularity that made Frank feel so healthily and so unexpectedly happy. He loved the desolation of Ireland. This was the stronger sense, but there was another sense, a half stifled sense, that found an echo in these southern downs interwoven with suburban life—in other words, a faint resurrection of the original English mind in him. He enjoyed and he

grew akin to this Saxon prosperity; he learned to recognise it as manifested in the various prospects of the weald and the wold, and he loved this medley of contradictory aspects —the spires of the village churches, the porches of the villas, the rich farmhouses and their elm trees, the orchards jammed between masses of chalk, the shepherds seen against the sky of the Downs. It is true that he felt that this country was alien to him, but he was not individually conscious that his love of suburban Sussex was a morbid affection, opposed to the normal and indissoluble bonds of inherited aspirations and prejudices, and the forms and colours that had filled his eyes in childhood. Consciousness in Frank Escott was always slow, and always so governed and coloured by the sentiment of the moment that his comprehension of things were always deformed or incomplete. In his mind the phenomenon of life was ever in nebulae, and though very often one thought would define itself, no group of thoughts, or part of a group, ever became clear, so there was no abiding principle, nothing that he might know and steer by. He was, of course, aware that the Brookes were not equal to him in rank, but he did not know, or, rather, he would not know, that they were vulgar; nor did he think that Mount Rorke might marry again, if he were to marry Maggie or Sally. All that was really alive and distinct in him was love of them; and this love thrived in a sensation of class which he would not acknowledge, even to himself, had any existence. The glass−houses, and swards, and laurels had a meaning and fascination for him that he could not account for or describe, and he found these feelings, which were mainly class feelings of an unusual kind, not only in the aspect of the country but in the accent and speech of his friends, in the expression of their eyes and very hands. The English servants pleased him, and he strove to detect qualities in the carriage and horses, and he compared them to their advantage with Mount Rorke's. He loved to wrap the rug about the young ladies' knees, and they seemed to him quite perfect and delightful as they lay back in their carriage, driving beneath a sky full of blue, and through the changing views of the Downs, all distinct with light and shade. Sally and Maggie made much of him, covered him up, and addressed to him pleasant speeches. His eyes and ears were open and eager for new impressions, and his heart panted with readiness to admire and praise all he saw. He was ready to think that he had never seen anything so lovely as the laurels and the numerous glass−houses; and he wondered why he had ever thought so little of Berkins, and he listened with interest to that gentleman's explanation of the superiority of his possessions over everybody else's possessions. He even allowed himself to be persuaded that there was no pheasant shooting in the kingdom— for its size—equal to that in the little wood. Sally, who did not attempt to conceal her dislike of her brother−in−law, whispered: “That's the way to bring them down,” and Frank was obliged to laugh. Then she and Maggie disappeared as if the earth had swallowed them for several hours. The Grenadier Guards played on the lawn, and Frank was introduced to ladies of all ages and sizes; and as these bored him, he began to see that the place was vulgar and the people shoddy, and he wondered what Mount Rorke would say if he were to come suddenly across him. Grace was the subject of much concern, and obviously *enceinte,* she passed through the different groups. She had introduced Frank as Lord Mount Rorke's son, then as his nephew, then as his heir, and, fearing she might succumb to the temptation of introducing him as Mount Rorke himself, Frank escaped from her, and joined a party that Berkins was personally conducting through the grounds.

The stables had been built by So−and−so on the most approved principles. There were no stables like them in Sussex—the fittings of the harness−room alone had cost him three hundred. The horses he had bought at the Duke's sale, the Duke would not have thought of parting with them had he known how they would turn out. He had driven them along the Brighton road at the rate of fifteen miles an hour; he would back them to do fifteen miles in the hour. There was not a pair of horses in England equal to them. That was Mrs. Berkins's riding horse —was it possible to imagine a more perfect cob? He could get a hundred for him any day, he did not know of anything like him. “Did any of you gentleman ever see anything like him?” They went to the kennels. A brace of Irish setters were declared to be the finest dogs that Ireland had ever produced, they had taken two prizes, one in Dublin and another in Brighton—and the little fox terrier was the gamest dog in Sussex. She would go into any hole after a fox, and never leave him till she brought him out. You couldn't find her equal. Then the glass− houses were perfect. They contained all the latest improvements, and all these were fully explained. “Berkins is excelling himself to−day,” thought Frank.

Presently they came upon a basket of peaches.

“These peaches were, of course, grown under glass, but I think I am right in saying, Jackson, that they were produced without artificial heat.”

“Yes, sir, quite right, sir. It couldn't be done nowhere else, sir, but all the sun in Sussex seems to come down

here—a regular little sun trap, I think that's what you called it the other day, sir, when you were speaking to me about them there peaches."

"Yes, I did. If you move nearer the sea you get fogs and cold winds, further inland you lose the sun, but just here the climate is equal to the south of Europe! I ask you to look at these peaches, it seems impossible—does it not?—to have peaches like these at the end of May, and without any heat, merely glass."

"It seems to me quite impossible," declared a little fat man with flaxen hair. "I am devoted to peach−growing, and I confess I am quite at a loss. Gardener, did you say that those peaches were grown entirely without artificial heat?"

The gardener pretended not to hear, and tried to slip away, but the little man, who had been taken on his hobby, was not to be baulked, and he pursued the wretched horticulturist.

"You mean to say that these peaches ripened without any artificial heat, any?"

"You have no idea what a sun we get here, sir. I have never seen anything like it. In my last situation, when I was living with Lord —−, we couldn't get our fruit forward, use whatever heat he might, and Houghton is not more than fifty miles from here—the difference of climate is positively wonderful."

Jackson had reckoned that Mr. Berkins would move on, and that the inquisitive little man would find himself obliged to follow, but chance was against him, for Berkins, with his guests around him, stood listening to the discussion.

"You mean to say that these peaches were grown without heat. I wouldn't mind giving you five−and−twenty pounds for the recipe for doing it."

"You must take a small place down here, sir, and then you will be able to do it."

This raised a laugh, but the little man was not to be beaten, and he said: "I should like to see some of those peaches of yours on the trees. You haven't plucked them all; let me see them."

"Yes, Jackson, show us the trees. Some will not believe without seeing; let us see the peaches on the trees."

Jackson appeared to be a little disconcerted; he murmured excuses, and strove to escape. Driven to bay he brought them into a glass−house where there were hot water−pipes, and when his tormentor pointed triumphantly to the pipes he attempted a faint explanation—he had meant to say that heat had only been used within the last three weeks.

"So you see, Berkins," exclaimed little flaxen−haired fatty, "your south of Europe is no better than my south of Europe, or anybody else's south of Europe."

"Jackson, you have told me many deliberate falsehoods about these peaches. I keep no one in my employment whose word cannot be depended upon. You take your warning."

"Falsehoods! What do you want a man to do, if you will have everything better than anybody else's?"

Berkins turned suddenly on his heel, he drew himself up to his full height, and stood speechless with indignation. Never, not even on the most important Board meetings, did his friends wait to hear him speak with more anxiety; but at that moment a crash of flower pots was heard, and Sally and a young man were discovered hiding in the potting shed; and to make matters worse, in the very next house they visited, they suddenly came upon Maggie sitting with another young man in strangely compromising circumstances. Explanations were attempted, and some stupid remarks were made. Berkins was seriously annoyed, and he took the first opportunity of taking Mr. Brookes's arm and leading him away to a quiet path. Frank saw the men pass through the laurels, and ten minutes after he saw them return. Evidently Berkins had read Mr. Brookes an exhaustive lecture on the conduct of his daughters.

"Now, Mr. Brookes, now Mr. Brookes, I must beg of you—calm yourself. What would my guests think if they found you in tears? What would they think I had been saying to reduce you to such a condition? It is veryunfortunate that Sally and Maggie should act as they do, particularly at my place; but really you must not give way."

"Since the death of their poor mother I am all alone. My position is a very trying one." Then, with a sudden burst of laughter, "However, I suppose it will be all the same a hundred years hence!"

X

The girls walked to the station with Escott. A fleecy evening, with the clouds growing pale towards the sea, the sun like fire in the elms, and the woods showing upon a purple tinge.

“How delightful!” exclaimed Frank. “How charming this is—this old English green, the horse pond at one end, the various houses, the inn, the grocery business, the linen drying in that yard, the smith, and the wheelwright. I don't like that modern Queen Anne school−house, and I wish I could remove the dead level of the embankment and see the sea. The green is better from this side with the view of the Downs— those lines waving against the sky, where the gorse grows and the sheep feed, and inclining to the road all the fields pale green and deep green. But what game are those men playing—what game do you call that?”

“Bat and trap.”

“I have passed the green twenty times before, and I never really saw it till now. It is charming—so thoroughly English. I should like to live here for a month—for two months. How nice it would be to breakfast in the morning looking out on the green, to see the cocks and hens and all the children and all this English life! How different from Pump Court! I am sick of Pump Court—dirt and smoke, a horrid servant, stale eggs. I suppose you can always get fresh eggs and new bread here? I would give anything to spend a month on the green.”

“Well, you can!” cried Sally. “I wish you would, and you could come and play tennis with us every afternoon. Mrs. Heald has some rooms to let; why it was only last week I heard that she hadn't let her rooms this season, and was most anxious to do so.”

“There's no use my coming here until I begin to write my novel. I am painting now, and I must see if I can get my picture finished for one of the autumn exhibitions.”

“I knew you would find some excuse.”

“No, I assure you, but I can't do anything without a studio, and I'm not likely to find a studio on Southwick Green.”

“I don't suppose Mrs. Heald has a room large enough for a studio,” said Maggie; “but I don't see why you shouldn't find a place where you can paint.”

“Where? Not in that eighteenth−century house where the two old ladies are standing! Supposing I were to go and ask them if they would let me have their drawing−room to paint in! That is the only house on the green, all the rest are cottages.”

“I suppose you are not very particular where you paint,” said Maggie reflectively. “You don't mind appearances, I suppose? I wonder if you could manage to fit up a farm building.”

“There is the famous barn where Charles the First hid himself, I don't suppose the authorities would allow me to turn that into a studio.”

“No, probably not; but I think you might find a house that would do.”

“What nonsense, Maggie,” said Sally, who began to grow jealous of her sister.

“Why is it nonsense? I see no reason why Frank shouldn't come to some arrangement with the smith, and turn his house into a studio.”

“Which is the smith's house? I'll tell you in a moment if it could be turned into a studio.”

“That house standing quite by itself in the corner of the green.”

“That tall narrow house with the bit of broken wall and the elder bushes?”

“Yes.”

“I daresay I could rig up a very nice studio out of that place, indeed it looks quite picturesque amid its elder bushes. There is the stile, and there is the cornfield. But I couldn't live there.”

“No, you would live at Mrs. Heald's, and you could walk over every morning to the studio.”

“Yes, I could do that. I prefer to live with my work. There is nothing like walking from the breakfast table across the room to the easel.”

“Of course you can find fault with everything; nothing is perfect.”

“There goes the train!” cried Sally. “No use in running now, you've missed it.”

“How very provoking; the next isn't till half−past seven—just an hour to wait.”

“Well,” said Maggie, “if you have missed the train we may as well go at once and ask Mrs. Heald if she has let her rooms.”

They walked towards a block of cottages—at one end the “Cricketer's Arms,” at the other the grocery business; and the cottage that joined the grocery business was remarkable for a bit of green paling and wooden balcony, now covered with Virginia creeper. Frank thought at once of new−laid eggs, and the sunlight glancing through a great mass of greenery, and he resolved if a sacrifice were necessary to live at Southwick, he would put his picture aside and begin his novel. The people in the house pleased him, and he ran on in his way thinking how English and trustworthy they seemed, liking the green parrot that rubbed its head affectionately against the grey ringlets of a very ladylike old person; and Mrs. Heald, brisk as a bee, notwithstanding her lame leg, who led the way up the ladder−like cottage staircase.

“How nice and clean everything is; books and engravings along the passages. How unlike Ireland!”

But the sitting−room was full of horsehair sofas and chairs. These displeased Frank, but some handsome china—an entire tea service in Crown Derby—reconciled him to the room. In the bedroom they found a huge four−poster of old time, with a lengthy bolster and imposing pillows, and they were shown into another and a similar room. One looked out on the green, the other on the fields that lay between the green and the Manor House.

“If that elm were cut down you could see my window,” said Sally.

“Which room do you like the best?” said Maggie.

“It is hard to say. The other room looks on the green, but here there is a nice large wardrobe, and I don't see how I can get on without a wardrobe.”

“If you like the other room best, sir, I can turn out the chest of drawers.”

“Oh, that would be very nice if you can manage it, the room will do very well. I can have a bath every morning?”

“Yes, sir; there will be no difficulty about that.”

Maggie had taken off her hat and was settling her hair before the glass. Sally opened the wardrobe, revealing various petticoats and skirts, but she thought of it as full of Frank's light overcoats, the scarves he wore round his throat when he went out in evening clothes, the patent leather shoes in the corner. Suddenly the conversation dropped, and after a pause Frank said: “I think these rooms suit me very well, but I can do nothing; it is impossible for me to say if I can take them until I find out if there is any place in the immediate neighbourhood that I could convert into a studio. Do you know of any such place?”

“No, I do not, sir.”

“Mr. Escott was thinking of seeing the smith about his house. I wonder if Town would let it to Mr. Escott for a consideration,” said Maggie.

“Of course, I should have to get leave to make what alterations I pleased.”

“I don't suppose the house belongs to Town, sir; I don't think he is more than a weekly tenant.”

“If that's the case, we must see the landlord. Do you know who is the landlord?”

“I can't say I do, sir.”

“Well, Mrs. Heald, I will let you know in a day or two if I can take your rooms—you can give me a day or two?”

“Yes, sir, but I should like to know as soon as possible; several people have been asking after my rooms.”

“I'll let you know in a day or two.”

“If Town is only a weekly tenant, you'll be able to get his house by paying a little more for it,” said Maggie, as they walked down the green towards the smith's forge.

“That would be hardly fair; I should like to act squarely by the smith. What is his name?”

“Town.”

Town was cutting out the hoof of a shaggy grey cart horse when his visitors entered the cindery blackness.

“Town, this gentleman would like to speak to you,” said Maggie, raising her voice above the wheezy bellows. He threw the hoof out of his apron, and, drawing his blackened arm across his forehead, he came forward.

“Town, I am anxious to find a place on the green that I could convert into a studio; I think your house would suit my purpose very well. Do you think we could come to some arrangement? Of course I would give you a

reasonable compensation."

"Well, I really hardly know, sir; I dunno that I hardly understand. You want my house to turn into a—"

"A studio—a place where I can paint pictures."

"I don't see how I can do without my 'ouse."

"But I will compensate you—make it worth your while."

"You see it is so near my work. Was I to go and live at Ada Terrace, I should, you see, be out of the way. If people want a job done they always knows where to find me."

"Yes, but if I compensate you?"

Seeing that Frank was exciting the smith with too wild hopes of wealth, Sally thought fit to interpose. "Mr. Escott would require permission to make any alterations in the building he thought proper— you couldn't give him permission; he would in any case have to see your landlord. Who is your landlord?"

"I don't see how I can give up my 'ouse to be turned into a painting place; it wouldn't suit me at all."

"If I make you sufficient compensation—"

Again the smith was reduced to silence. He scratched his head, and Frank watched the sparks fly, and heard the rhythmical sledge. "I wish he wouldn't talk so much about compensation," thought Sally. "I don't know what the man won't be asking if Frank doesn't shut up."

"Do you think we shall be able to come to an understanding? I want to know."

"Well, you see, sir, my wife is delicate, and I'm that afraid she wouldn't like to give up her 'ome. But I'll speak to 'er if you like to−night, sir."

"Mr. Escott will have to see your landlord; he will have to arrange with him about the alterations."

"There will be no difficulty about the alterations."

"Very probably; but you are only a weekly tenant. It is a question your landlord must decide. If he agrees to allow Mr. Escott to make the alterations, Mr. Escott will no doubt compensate you for disturbance."

"It is all very well to talk about compensation. How do I know what your compensation will be? How do I know you will make it worth my while? I don't want no compensation. I want my 'ouse. Cheek I calls it, to come down here wanting to muck me out of my house."

"Now, sir, we want no impertinence. I shall do exactly as I please in the matter. Your landlord is the person I should have spoken to."

"Spoken to! Who are you, I should like to know, coming round here interfering in my business?"

All Frank's discussions ended in angry words, and he never came to terms with any one without threatening blows. Town returned to the forge; Frank and the young ladies made their way across the green. At the corner of Southdown Road they found the General, the schoolmaster, and a retired farmer ardently gossiping; Mrs. Horlock, prim in her black gown and poke bonnet, waited with admirable patience, and Angel, the blind pug, in horrible corpulence, waddled and sniffed the grass. The story of Town's impertinence was told. The General was shocked—it was surprising. What are we coming to? The retired farmer said that Town was a hot−tempered man, but not a bad sort when you knew how to take him, and all, except Mrs. Horlock, agreed that the landlord was the person who should be consulted.

"I really don't see why you should turn the poor man out of his house if he doesn't want to go. How would you like some one to come and turn you out of your house?" she said, turning to her husband.

The General laughed. "My dear Lucy, whatever you say must be right. So you are coming to live at Southwick. Very glad to hear it. You know where to find us, the gate's always open; lunch at half−past one, dinner at eight—old Indians, you know; come in when you like. Pretty place I have here, everything I want—stables and horses, and (the General looked to see if Lucy was out of hearing) plenty of dogs, you know—a few too many; but my wife, you know—" The rest was lost in a burst of good−natured laughter.

They bade the Horlocks good−night and walked up the Southdown Road, looking with its line of trees along the pavement like a little mock boulevard. Frank was particularly severe in his remarks on the trim privet hedges and the little bronze sphinxes standing before the portico of yellow glass; he declared that a man must be born to put up such things, and he clearly thought this sneer a very happy one, for he repeated it, fearing that Sally had not understood. The grocer who had placed a bas−relief of himself over his door was greatly wondered at, and Sally told an amusing anecdote regarding the invitations he sent out for the first dinner party. The conversation turned on the Measons. Jack's ship had gone to China, and he was not expected back much before Christmas.

“That's very sad, Sally. How will you be able to live through so many months?”

“I don't care for him. I don't care if I never saw him again—it was Fanny who was my friend. Some nice people have come to live in that corner house—a young man, who is learning farming. Mr. Berkins insists on father not allowing us to visit any one in the Southdown Road, and Mr. Berkins can turn father round his finger, he is so much richer. I'm not allowed to see Fanny at the Manor House. As for Jack, I daresay you won't believe me, but I shouldn't care if I never saw him again.”

Maggie shrugged her shoulders. The gesture exasperated Sally, and she turned on her sister.

“You needn't shrug your shoulders at me, miss; I never flirted with him; you did, and then you set father against me.”

“Well, for goodness' sake don't quarrel; what does it matter? The idea of Berkins telling your father whom he should visit; and the idea of your father permitting it merely because he makes two or three thousand a year more! He surely doesn't object to your visiting Mrs. Horlock?”

“No, he couldn't do that.”

Still engaged in discussion, they entered the gates of the Manor House, and Mr. Brookes was told that Frank would stay at Southwick a few days longer, so that he might arrange about a studio. The news was not at first wholly pleasing to the old gentleman, but he remembered the anecdotes he should hear concerning his favourite painters, and was consoled. The evening passed away in the security and calm of habit, sweetened by the intimacy of familiar thoughts and customs. There was the usual expensive dinner; Mr. Brookes lit a cigar, handed the box to Frank, and said, puffing lustily, “That's a good picture, paid a lot of money for it, too much money, mustn't do it again. You were a pupil of Bouguereau; great painter; you have seen him paint; you would know his touch amid a thousand, I suppose?”

About ten o'clock steps in the passage, then the squeak−squeak of the cork; then the goggle−guggle of the water, and the young ladies came in with their grog. They kissed their father and brother, shook hands with Frank, and went to bed. Further anecdotes concerning the painters were told; further condemnations of the Southdown Road were pronounced; the house was locked up; Mr. Brookes retired, and the young men continued the conversation in their rooms. Willy told Frank all about his shop, Frank told Willy all about his studio, and they went to sleep delighted with each other and at peace with the world.

Mr. Brookes had gone when the young men came down next morning. Willy was down first, and when Frank finished breakfast he found him busy in the garden making purchases for his shop.

“How much am I to charge for these peaches, sir?” said the gardener.

“I intend to pay the market price for everything. I don't know what peaches are selling at in Covent Garden. I will look it up and let you know. I am taking two dozen.”

“Yes, sir, there are only very few more ripe.”

“It is a pity I can't have them all,” Willy whispered to Frank. “There is a tremendous profit to be made on peaches. Now, I want some new potatoes. How many can you let me have?”

“Really, sir, we are very short; you see it is so early in the year. We have only a few, none too many for the house.”

“I must have some, if it is only a sample. How much are potatoes selling at now?”

“Well, sir, I hardly know. Last year we bought some off Hooper at—”

“These are the things I have to contend with. How am I to keep my books right if I don't know exactly the price things are selling for? I may be paying more for his potatoes than they are selling in Brighton for. My father gets more out of the shop than any one, and he isn't satisfied.”

The woes of this suburban Lear amused Frank. No sooner was the arch enemy Meason on the high seas, and the Southdown Road had quieted down, than another demon had risen up against him; his garden was ravished of its fairest fruits and vegetables, his carriages were turned into market carts, and all, as he said, for the sake of practising an elaborate system of book−keeping. Maggie, who had finished her house−keeping, came into the garden, and she went with Frank down the town in search of the landlord of the tall house amid the elder bushes. For a small increase in the rent, and a promise to undo all alterations before leaving, putting the house back in the same arrangement of rooms as it at present stood, the landlord agreed to allow Frank to do his will with the place. For twenty pounds the smith was silenced, and Frank explained to the local builder that the house was to be thrown into one room, and the ceilings of the upper rooms were to be removed. He had thought of having the

rafters painted, but at the builder's suggestion he decided to have them lined with fresh timber and stained. This would look very handsome. A large window, some six feet by eight, would have to be put in the north wall. Of course, all the doors, windows, etc., would have to be taken away and replaced by new. He would have a book−case in stained wood. An estimate was drawn up. It came to a good deal more than he had intended to lay out, and Frank dreaded the expense. But he must live somewhere, he was sick of Pump Court, and his friends and this little south−coast village were now ardent in his mind; why not live here? True that the country was in no way beautiful and offered no temptations to a landscape painter, but he seldom painted landscapes, and if he wanted a bit of woodland he would find it over the Downs. Then there was the sea, and that was always interesting. Perhaps Mount Rorke would let him have the money. The old fellow had never refused him an extra hundred when he asked for it. Yes, he would risk it. So the order was given, and all the delays and broken promises of a builder began to be experienced and endured. Frank, who now lodged at Mrs. Heald's, hung around the workmen, counting each brick, and commenting on every piece of woodwork. He at once took to grumbling at their slowness, and he soon declared that all hopes of his being able to finish his picture for the Academy were at an end, and he paraded his misfortunes at the Manor House, at Mrs. Horlock's, and, indeed, at all the houses he went to for tea or tennis parties. The painters especially annoyed him, and he even went so far as to threaten them with an action.

Long before they had finished his pictures had arrived from London, and several pieces of furniture from Brighton. The ideas of this young man were now in full revolt against oriental draperies and things from Japan. The furniture was, therefore, to consist of large cane sofas with pillows covered with a yellow chintz pattern which pleased him much. The selection of a carpet was a matter of great moment. He received with scornful smiles his upholsterer's suggestions of Persian rugs. Turkey, Smyrna, and Axminster were proposed and rejected, he even thought of an Aubusson—no one knew anything about Aubusson at Southwick, and the vivid blues and yellows and symmetrical design would have at least the merit of disturbing if not of wrecking the artistic opinions of his friends. He discovered one of these carpets in a back street in Brighton, and with some cleaning and mending he felt sure it could be made to look quite well. But no, if you have an Aubusson carpet you must have Louis XIV. furniture in the room, and Louis XIV. in Southwick would be too absurd. Clearly the Aubusson scheme must be abandoned—he would have a rich grey carpet, soft and woolly, and there should be a round table covered with a dark blue cloth, set off with a yellow margin, and the chairs drawn about the table should be covered with dark blue and painted yellow. A grand piano was indispensable in Frank's surroundings, both for its appearance in the studio and the relaxation it afforded in the various interludes. Several journeys to London were made before the lamps to be used were determined on (a modern design was essential), and the brass fittings to hang candles from the rafters required still more delicate and cautious consideration; at last it was decided to have none.

All this while Willy was busy with his shop. He had taken a whole house, and at first he had thought of letting a room, but for many reasons this scheme had to be abandoned. He did not know who might take the room. “Who knows—perhaps one of my own friends, a member of my club, for instance?” Then it would give the missus a lot of bother and worry, and she had all she could do in looking after the shop. To make a thing a success you must think of nothing else. It was a pity, but it wasn't to be thought of. Otherwise he seemed fairly well satisfied. There was a back door leading on to a back lane, in turn leading on to a back street, so with his latch−key he could pop in and out unobserved. All his books and papers in the drawing−room, the ledger, the day−book, the cash−book all ready, all to hand, so that after dinner, when he had smoked his pipe, he could go to work. Frank alone was in the secret. And how the young men enjoyed going to Brighton together. Frank worried Willy, who ran up and down stairs collecting his brown paper parcels, calling upon him to make haste. They set forth, Willy firm and methodical, his shoulders set well back: Frank loose and swaggering, over−dressed. How to get to the shop was a matter of anxious consideration. Willy was fearful of detection, and all sorts of stratagems were resorted to. Sometimes they would walk down to the Old Steyne, and suddenly double and get back through a medley of obscure streets, or else they would publicly walk up and down the King's Road, and when they thought no one was looking, hurry up one of the by−streets, and so gain their haven, the lane. Once they were in the lane they slackened speed, all danger was then over, and they laughed consumedly at their escapes, and delighted in telling each other how So−and−so and his daughter had been successfully avoided. Willy always had his latch−key ready; in a moment they were inside, and Frank would rush upstairs and throw himself into the armchair, crying:

“Here we are!” One day they were at the window, when, to their amazement, the Manor House carriage pulled up before the shop, and they had only just time to dodge behind the curtain and escape Sally's eyes. Never before had the carriage arrived later than five o'clock, and now it was nearly six. What could be the meaning of this? Begging of Frank not to move, Willy went out on the landing and listened to his sisters talking to his wife. The girls—who were, of course, ignorant of their relationship to the shop−woman—liked Mrs. Brookes very much, and were fond of a chat with her; and, looking through the blinds, Frank saw the footman in all the splendour of six feet and grey livery carrying a small pot of flowers worth sixpence from the carriage to the shop.

On ordinary days the shop was shut at eight, but when Willy and Frank dined there it was closed an hour earlier. Frank enjoyed his evenings there; he enjoyed it all—the homeliness and the quiet. He enjoyed seeing Willy nurse the missus after dinner, and he found no difficulty in pretending a certain interest in the book−keeping, and an admiration for the lines of figures all carefully formed, and the beautifully ruled lines. Cissy adored him. He took her on his knee, and she leaned her hollow cheek against his handsome face. She would have probably rushed to death to serve him. His height, his brightness, his rings, his spotted neckties—all seemed so perfect, so beautiful, to her; and when he brought his fiddle she would sit and look at him, her little hands clasped with an intensity of love that was strange and pitiful. Swaying from side to side, he ran on from tune to tune—waltzes, reminiscences from operas, fragments of overtures, delightful snatches from Schubert; and when he introduced Willy to one tune—a tune in which all his *might−have−been* was bound —the dry man seemed to grow drier: perhaps it brought a glow of pleasure to his heart: but be this as it may, he only sat and puffed more emphatically at his pipe.

XI

For Frank this pleasant English village was now a happy *fete* of summer joys and occupations. Oh! the hill prospects and the shady gardens around the coasts. And when he went inland he would return by choice across the Downs, and in the patriarchal valleys where nothing is heard but the bell−wether he would stand in the great, lonely darkness, and see the lights of Brighton brighten the sky above the ridges, and climbing up the ridges, he gazed on the vague sea, and the long string of coast towns were like a golden necklace.

His days went like dreams. The morning hours—bachelor hours—were full of intimacy and joy. The joy of waking alone with a strange and secret self that, like a shy bird, is all the day chased out of sight and hearing, but is with you when you awake in sweet health in the morning; that of waking alone with the sunlight in the curtains, that of being alone with your body as well as your mind, and no presence to jar the communion. There is a dear privacy in morning hours of single life.

But although the desire to exchange these for the joys of wedlock was germinating in Frank, although it was inherent in him to understand the husband's happiness when he puts his arm round a dear wife's neck and draws her to him with marital kisses and affectionate words, he was certainly conscious that each hour seemed to bring its special pleasure. His room was airy and pleasant, the window full of the colour of the green and its aspects; the little water−course with its brick bridge, the trees along the embankment, the rigging of the ships in the harbour, the linen drying in the yard. Of these views Frank seemed never to grow tired; he noted them as he brushed his brown curls over his forehead, and when he sat at breakfast eating fresh eggs and marmalade. After breakfast he lay on the sofa, and read society papers and smoked cigarettes. He could not drag himself to the studio. “A man should live at his studio, impossible to settle down to work, if he doesn't,” he thought, and he watched Mrs. Horlock coming up the green accompanied by the chemist's wife and the pugs.

“Dear old lady, how nice she looks in her black dress and poke bonnet! And there goes the General—he is giving all his coppers to the children.”

Frank took up a volume of Browning, turned over the leaves, and laid the book down to watch a drove of horses that had suddenly been turned out on the green to feed, and he laughed to see the children throwing stones, making them gallop frantically. Very often the thunder of the hoofs alarmed Triss, and he stood on his hind legs and barked. “What is it, old dog? What is it? Like to have a go at the horses? Shall we go out and play with the pugs?” At the mention of going out Triss cocked his ears and barked. “I suppose I must make a move. I wonder what the time is—half−past eleven. Good Heavens! The post will be here at twelve. I had better wait for it.” On waking his first thoughts were for his letters, and almost before he had finished reading them he had begun to think of what the mid−day delivery would bring him. To see the boy pass and so have ocular proof that there was nothing for him seemed to lighten his disappointment. He saw him waste his time with the doctor's horse and then with the maid−servant, and if the old ladies were not about he would stand talking many minutes with their servants. Then he visited the short line of cottages, passed sometimes round the yard or open space at the back of the wheelwright's, where the linen hung on poles between the elms, and once Frank saw the provoking boy hide behind the cricketers' tent and remain watching the match. For half an hour the question—letters or no letters—hung in suspense, and when the loiterer came, stopping every minute to see where the ball was hit to, the joy, heightened by anticipation, was great in receiving a packet of newspapers and various correspondence. Frank often went to meet him. True, he might have nothing for him, he might be going to deliver at the grocer's shop, or at the “Cricketer's Arms.”

“Any letters for me, to−day?”

“Yes, sir, two postcards and a newspaper.”

It was disappointing not to get a letter—postcards meant nothing. He only exchanged a few words with Mrs. Horlock, and passed on to the General, who, at the corner of the Southdown Road where the gossipers met, was discussing a local candidature.

“So you are off to paint. You must come and see the model my wife has done of a horse I once had. I mustn't say much about him, though—it is a sore subject. After winning over a thousand with him I lost it all, and five

hundred with it. She never would paint his picture for me; but yesterday was my birthday—I suppose she thought she would give me a treat, she began to model him from memory—wonderful likeness—she knows every bone and sinew in a horse—clever woman, never seen any one like her. Come in to−night, dinner always at eight —old Indians. She'll show it to you."

"Thanks, not to−night, General; to−morrow night, if you like."

"Very well, to−morrow night at eight. What a terrible dog that is of yours! You need fear nobody while you have him with you. You must ask my wife to paint him for you, but I forgot, I beg your pardon—you are a painter; you should paint him yourself."

"I don't paint animals. I shall be very glad if Mrs. Horlock will paint him; there is some beautiful drawing about him—those fore−legs."

Probably attracted by the dog, Mrs. Horlock came walking towards them. Triss went sidling after Rose, and when Mrs. Horlock called him, he growled.

"I beg of you, Mrs. Horlock, do not touch him; he isn't safe, I assure you. He once bit a man's nose off who was trying to train him to do something or other. I will not be answerable."

"All nonsense! No dog ever bit me, they know I love them. 'Come to me, sir.' No dog ever bit me but once, and he was a poor mongrel that had been hunted by a lot of horrid men. I was dressing to go to a ball at the Government House, and I heard him under my bed. He had taken refuge under my bed, poor thing. He was frightened to death; he couldn't see me, and he bit me through the wrist. I went to the ball all the same. A dog died of hydrophobia in my arms. He died like a child, licking my hands and face. 'Come here, sir. Come to me.'"

"I wish you wouldn't do it, Mrs. Horlock. I am afraid to call him, for fear he should think I intended to set him at you."

Triss showed a terrible set of teeth, and his nose seemed to curl back almost into his eyes; but stooping down Mrs. Horlock extended her hands to him. She looked so like herself in the poke bonnet and the black dress, and the kind, intelligent eyes softened the dog's humour, and he came to her.

"You see—what did I tell you? Dogs know so well those that love them. No animal ever did bite me except that poor frightened creature, and he didn't mean it. We kept him for ten years after that, and how he did love me!"

"Wonderful woman, my wife; she can do what she likes with animals. I was telling Mr. Escott that he must come in and see the model you are making of Snap−dragon."

"Only an amateur, I never had a lesson in my life. Mr. Escott would think nothing of it, I am sure. But I wish he'd come in and dine with us."

"He promised to come to−morrow, Lucy; but stay, isn't that the day we are going to have the Bath people in to dine?"

"Never mind—Mr. Escott won't mind, I'm sure. They are very nice, good people, indeed. I'm sure you'll think so. They are all snobs about this place. I never heard of such snobbery in my life. Mrs. So−and−so —over there—once said to me, 'I believe you know all the people who live in those little houses.' She said she wouldn't allow her children even to walk across the green. Did you ever hear of such snobbery?"

"Well, Mrs. Horlock, as I have always said, your position is made; you have your friends who will like you and value you just the same no matter whom you may walk about the green with. Every Viceroy that ever went to India called on you; your position is made."

"There are a lot of snobs about here; but I mustn't keep Angel waiting, he is never well unless he gets a little exercise. We shall see you then at eight."

"The cleverest woman I ever knew. I don't say the cleverest that you ever knew. But we have got too many animals; I often wish I could get rid of the brutes," and the General laughed as he stumped along. "Five horses when two would be sufficient—five horses eating their heads off; then the Circassian goats that the neighbours complain of, and the parrots and the squirrels. There are a few too many, there's no doubt. But once an animal comes into the place she will cherish it for ever. I try to keep Prince out of the drawing−room as much as possible, she says she can't smell him. If that little beast Angel would only die!"

"Why don't you poison him?"

"I would if I dared; but just think, if my wife heard of it she would go out of her mind. I don't think she'd have me in the house." The General laughed.

“We all have our troubles, General. Good−bye, I'm off to work.”

“Lucky man to have something to do. If I had a little something—just a little something to bring me out, I should be perfectly happy. Then at eight. Good−bye.”

“Half−past twelve! Half the day gone, I really must make an effort to get to the studio earlier. It is, as I said, useless to hope to get through work unless you wake up where your work is. A man doesn't get a chance. I wonder if I could build a bedroom out at the back? I have let Mount Rorke in for three hundred extra this year; he would turn rusty if I spent any more. I must give him a rest; besides, I don't want to have the workmen in again. I wish I could get ivy to grow over those walls, they do look precious shabby.”

He looked at the tall dilapidated walls showing above the dark green of the elder bushes, and lingered, for it was a soft blue summer's day with just a breeze stirring, and the corn waved yellow, and the dim expanses of the Downs extended in faint lines and dim tints.

When he entered his studio his colour scheme pleased him, and looking at the rafters he thought that the stained wood was handsome and appropriate. The grey carpet was soft under foot, and the lustre and form of a grand piano suggested Chopin and Schubert. His studio seemed to him a symbol of his own refinement, and being moved, perhaps, by the silence and the quiet of the north light, he took his violin, and turning from time to time to look on himself on the glass or his picture on the easel, he played Stradella's “Chanson d'Eglise.”

Then seeing, or rather thinking he saw, how he could improve his landscape, he took up his palette, and in a desultory and uncertain fashion he painted till five o'clock. “It is no use,” he thought, “I can do nothing with it until I get a model, but the devil of it is, there are no models in Brighton—at least, I don't know where to go and look for one, and it is no use asking Sally or Maggie to sit. They'll sit for five minutes, and then say they have some work to do at home, and must be off. You must have a professional model, a girl you pay a shilling an hour—I might sling the hammock from there to here—I wonder where I could get a girl who would do. I can't have a girl off the street; she must be more or less respectable—I wonder whom I can get. That girl in the bar−room at the station would do.” Putting his palette away with a lazy gesture, he thought for a few minutes of Lizzie Baker. What had become of her? And why had she disappeared?

It was nearly a year and a half ago now. What a jolly day up the river! All the beauty of the flowing water, the crowning woods and whispering rushes filled his mind, and yielding to the moment's emotion he took some verses out of an escritoire and altered several lines. Another abandoning the search for a suitable rhyme he turned to a portrait of Maggie which he had begun a few days before. She stood in a pose that was habitual to her—her hands linked behind her, the head leaned on one side, the little black eyes—but not ugly eyes— fixed in a sweet subtle and enquiring look. The thinness, and, indeed, the angularity of her figure was almost powerfully indicated with broad lines of paint and charcoal. It was Frank's most successful effort. He knew this, and he said to himself, “Not half bad, very like her, quite the character; the drawing is right, if I could only go on with it; if I could only model the face. I see very well where I shall get into trouble—that shadow about the neck, the jawbone, the cheekbone, and then all that rich colour about the eyes.” Then he thought he would walk over to the Manor House, and he must hasten, for it was half−past five, and tea was always ready in the verandah.

He stayed for dinner; he talked to Mr. Brookes about painters in the billiard−room; he strayed through the shadows and the perfumes of leaves and flowers through the gentle moonlight with his arms about the girls. And as they walked it seemed to Frank that his life was so mingled with theirs that he could not think of one sister apart from the other. The dusk gathered; the sky became a decoration in blue and gold; the scent of the sea came over the embankment, filling the garden. Day followed day, without anything happening to stay or check the gentle tide of their mutual affections; neither was jealous of her sister, for their desires were set upon others. Frank was but an ideal, a repose, a pious aspiration which joined their hands and hearts leaving them free of any stress of passion, Maggie claiming him a little more than Sally, and Sally yielding her claim to her without knowing that she was yielding it.

It is only natures that are never gross—calm and tepid livers—that are really incapable of ideality, of real and adequate aspiration; nature works by flux and reflux; and if we waive the rough temper and the coarse edge of passion due to youth, it will not be impossible to conceive another picture of these girls. Sally, good−hearted and true, full of sturdy, homely sense, willing to take care of a man's money, and make him a straightforward wife; Maggie, gentle and sinuating— always a little false, but always attractive, the enchantment of a man's home. Frank, notwithstanding his genuine admiration of all that was young and sweet and pure, was of poor and

separating fibre, and it is clear that it will take all the strength of society to support him and save him from sinking of his own weight.

One day, as he was coming through the station from the post−office, he met Maggie with a young man. He was introduced, and they returned to the Manor House to play tennis. Instead of playing they talked, and the set fell through, and after tea they disappeared, and Sally proposed not to disturb them, for they had gone, she said, to sit in the shade at the end of the garden. The marked mystery of the new flirtation piqued Frank's curiosity, and, striving to veil his question, he asked Sally who the young man was, and if her father knew he was coming to the Manor House.

“He! Don't you know? That's the fellow we often speak of—the only fellow Maggie ever really cared for. He has just come back from America. He is going to begin business in London.”

A sickening pain rose from his heart to his eyes, and he longed to place his hand on his heart.

“So that is the man she is engaged to,” he said, after a pause. “I remember, now, you have spoken to me of him.”

“She is not exactly engaged to him. Father would never hear of it; he hasn't a cent, and I believe he lost the little he had in America—now mind you must take care not to let out to father that he has been here; there would be the deuce of a row, and I promised Maggie not to tell any one; she has been nice to me lately, and I want to play fair with her if she will play fair with me.”

“Oh, I won't tell any one; I won't even let Maggie know that I know it was he.”

“It doesn't matter about Maggie, she will tell you herself, no doubt; she doesn't mind your knowing. What do you think of him? Isn't he nice−looking?”

“I confess I should never have thought of calling him handsome—would you? And do you think he is quite a gentleman?”

“He seems to me to be all right.”

“All right, yes, but isn't there a something? You can see he is in trade—all the trading people look alike, at least so I think.”

“But we are in trade, and I think he is quite as good as we are. But you seem quite put out. Would you like to take his place? I didn't know you were in love with Maggie.”

“I don't know that I am in love with her. I like her very much; but, love or no love, I don't think it is right for her to walk round the garden alone with that fellow the whole afternoon. I don't think it is very polite to me, and she knows her father does not like—”

“But you mustn't say anything to father; mind you have promised me.”

“Oh, I shan't say anything about it.”

Frank longed to get up from the tea−table and rush after Maggie. His heart ached to see her. He trembled lest she loved the man she was with, and rejoiced and took courage from the knowledge that she had not formally pledged herself to him. Frank was the romantic husband, not the lover; he found neither charm nor excitement in change; his heart demanded one single, avowed, and binding faith. He could take a woman who had sinned to his heart, and admit her to all his trust, for stolen kisses and illicit love were unfelt and imperfectly understood by him, and were considered as shadows and thin fancies, and not as facts full of mental consequences. He answered Sally in monosyllables, and on the first opportunity he pleaded letters to write, and withdrew. The gladness he felt that Maggie was truly not engaged to this fellow quickened and dominated his regret that the girls were inclined to behave so indiscreetly. The moment Mr. Brookes turned his back it began—that perpetual going and coming of men—it really wasn't right. Sally was a coarser nature, but Maggie! He might speak to Mr. Brookes; no, that wouldn't do. He might speak to Willy; but Willy didn't care—he was absorbed in his wife and his speculations.

His little dinner at Mrs. Heald's passed in irritation and discomfort, and after dinner he stood at the window, his brain full of Maggie—her graces, her fascinating cunning, and all her picturesqueness. He knew nothing yet of his passion, nor did he think he could not bear to lose her until he went from the stuffy cottage towards his studio thinking of his portrait of her. He wanted to muse on the little eyes as he had rendered them. He saw the faults in the drawing hardly at all, and his pain softened and almost ceased when he took up the violin, but when he put it down the flow of subjective emotion ceased, and he stared on the concrete and realistic image of his thought—Maggie passing through the shade with the young stranger.

Who was he? By whose authority was he there? Was he one of those men whose only pleasure is to tempt

girls, to corrupt them? Had he thought of this before his duty would have been to interpose; and he saw himself striding down the garden and telling Maggie that he insisted on her coming back to the verandah to her sister. It did not matter if he had no right, he was prepared to answer for his conduct to her father and brother. Did that man look like one of those men who are always sitting with girls in far corners out of sight? Ah, if he were sure that he was one of those dastardly ruffians he would seek him out, force him to speak his intentions. If a girl's father and brother will not look after her, a friend must say "I will." Yes, he would have to thrash him, kill him, if it were necessary. She might hate him for it at first, but in the end she would recognise him as her saviour.

It was too late now, the man was in Brighton. To−morrow? Elated with what he deemed "duty," with what he deemed "for the sake of the girl," he strode about, thinking of "the ruffian"; no thought came to him of how much of the sin, if sin there was, had originated in Maggie; he saw her merely as a poor little thing, led like a lamb. Following the idea of saving came the idea of possession. When she clung to the husband she would tremble at the danger she had escaped. Their home, their table, their fireside; protection from evil, now all wild winds might rage—they would be safe. The vision was constitutional and characteristic of his soul. He was out of thought of all but himself, his dream evolved in pure idea, removed from and independent of all limitations—out of concern of the world's favour—Mount Rorke, Mr. Brookes, or even the girl's grace. As this temper passed, as reality again interposed, and as he saw the garden with Maggie leaving him for another, he viewed her conduct suddenly in relation to himself. What did she mean by treating him so, and for whom? One day he would be Lord Mount Rorke! The Brookes knew nobody. He had only met a lot of cads at their house; they did not know any one but cads. The Brookes were cads! The father was a vulgar old City man, who talked about money and bought ridiculous pictures. The girls, too, were vulgar and coarse. God only knew how many lovers they had not had. Willy was the best of the bunch, but he was a fool. His miserliness and his vegetable shop—hateful! The whole place was hateful; he wished he had never come there; since he had been there he had never been treated even as a gentleman. The Brookes had treated him shamefully.

The skeleton of Frank's soul is easy to trace in this mental crisis— his quixotism, his wish to sally forth and save women, his yearning for a pretty little wife, who would sit on his knee and kiss him, saying, "Poor old boy, you are tired now;" therefore an emotional and distorted apprehension of things, a tendency to think himself a wronged and persecuted person, and under much bravado and swagger the cringe that is so inveterate in the Celt.

Next morning he thought of her lightly, without bitterness and almost without desire; but after breakfast his heart began to ache again. He strove to read, he went to his studio, he went to Brighton; but he saw Maggie in all things. She was with him—a sort of vague pain that kept him strangely conscious of life.

Once convinced he was a lover he became the man with a mission; his heart swelled with mysterious promptings, and felt the spur of duty. No longer was delay admissible. A day, an hour might involve the loss of all. Should he go round to the Manor House and tell Maggie of the message he had received to love her and save her? She would now be watering her flowers in the green−houses. But that other fellow might be there—he had heard something about an appointment. No, he had better write. If he wrote at once, absolutely at once, he would be in time for the six o'clock delivery. Snatching a sheet of paper he wrote:—

"DEAREST MAGGIE,—I have loved you a long while, I remember many things that make me think that I have always loved you; but to−day I have learnt that you are the one great and absorbing influence—that without you my life would be stupid and meaningless, whereas with you it shall be a joy, an achievement.

"I have frittered away much time; my efforts in painting and poetry have been lacking in strength and persistency. I have vacillated and wandered, and I did not know why; but now I know why—because you were not by me to encourage me, to help me by your presence and beauty. I will not speak of the position I offer you—I know it is unworthy of you. I would like to give you a throne; but, alas, I can but promise you a coronet."

His hand stopped and he raised his eyes from the paper. He recollected the day he saw her a child, the day they went blackberrying over the hills. He saw her again, she was older and prettier, and she wore a tailor−cut cloth dress. How pretty she looked that day, and also when she wore that summer dress, those blue ribbons. All the colour, innocence, and mirth of his childhood came upon him sweetly, like an odour that passes and recalls. He sighed, and he murmured, "She is mine by right, all this could not have been if she were not for me." Ah! how he longed to sit with her, even at her feet, and tell her how his life would be but worship of her. He regretted that he was not poor, for to unite himself more closely to her he would have liked to win her clothes and food by his labour; and hearing himself speaking of love and seeing her as a maiden with the May time about her, his dreams

drifted until the ticking of the clock forced him to remember that he could tell her nothing now of all his romance, so with pain and despair at heart he wrote,

"Never before did I so ardently feel the necessity of seeing you, of sharing my soul with you, and yet now is the moment when I say, I must end. But let this end be the beginning of our life of love, devotion, and trust. I will come to−night to see you; I will not go into the billiard−room, but will walk straight to the drawing−room. Do be there. Dearest Maggie, I am yours and yours only."

He seized his hat and rushed to the post. He was in time, and now that the step had been taken, he walked back looking more than usually handsome and tall, pleased to see the children run out of school and roll on the grass, pleased to linger with the General.

"Where are you going, sir?" said the old man.

"I'm going to my studio to play the fiddle. Will you come? I'll give you a glass of sherry, and—"

"Never touch anything, except at meals. I used to when I was as young as you, but not now. But I will go and hear a little music."

Glad to have a companion, Frank took out the violin, and he played all the melodies he knew; and his mind ran chiefly on Schubert and Gounod. The "Soir," the "Printemps," and "La Chanson du Printemps" carried his soul away, nor could he forbear to sing when he came to the phrase, "La Neige des Pommiers." When musical emotion ran dry he tried painting, but with poor result. During dinner he grew fevered and eager to see Maggie, and mad to tell her that he loved her, and could love none but her. At half−past eight the torture of suspense was more than he could endure, and he decided that he would go to the Manor House. He passed round the block of cottages, and got into the path that between the palings led through the meadows. It was a soft summer evening—moonlight and sunset played in gentle antagonism, and in a garden hat he saw Maggie coming towards him. He noticed the pink shawl about her shoulders, and the thought struck him, "had she come to ask him to elope." She stopped, and she hesitated as if she were going to turn back again.

"Oh, I am so sorry," she said, speaking with difficulty, "but I wanted you to get this before nine."

"Never mind, darling," he answered, smiling; "you can tell me all about it—it will be sweeter to hear you talk. Which way shall we go?"

"I really don't think I can now; father doesn't know I am out. This letter will—"

"No, no; I cannot bear to part with you. How pretty you look in that hat! Come."

"No, Frank, I cannot now, and you had better leave me. I cannot walk with you to−night. Read this letter."

"Then am I—is it really so?" said Frank, growing suddenly pale. "You will not have me?"

"You must read this letter, it will tell you all. I am truly sorry, but I did not know you cared for me—at least not like that. I don't think I could, I really don't. But I don't know what I am saying. How unfortunate it was meeting you. I but thought to run round and leave the letter, it would have explained all better than I could. We have known you so long. You will forgive me?"

She stood with the letter in her hand. He snatched it a little theatrically and tore it open. She watched, striving to read the effect of her words in his face. They dealt in regrets. There was an exasperating allusion to engaged affections. There was a long and neatly−worded conclusion suggesting friendship. She had taken a great deal of trouble with the composition, and was very fearful as to the result. She felt she could not marry him—at least, not just at present, she didn't know why. Altogether Frank's proposal had puzzled and distressed her. She felt she must see her flirtation out with Charlie, but at the same time she did not want to utterly lose Frank, or worse still, perhaps, to hand him over to Sally. She was determined that Sally should not be Lady Mount Rorke, and she thrilled a little when she saw he would not give her up easily, and her heart sank when she thought of the difficulty of continuing her intrigue without prejudicing her future. If Frank would only leave Southwick for a little while.

"Is this all? The meaning is clear enough; it means that you love the man I saw yesterday at the Manor House. But he shall not have you; I will save you from him. Listen to me—I swear he shall not have you; I will strive to outwit him by every means in my power. If I don't get you, none shall. I will shoot the man rather than he should get you."

"O Frank, you wouldn't commit murder!"

"I would, for you; but it will not be necessary. I can challenge him to fight a duel, and if he is cowardly enough to refuse, I will horsewhip him before your face, and I don't suppose you will marry him after that."

Maggie struggled with feelings of laughter, fear, and delight; delight overpowered laughter, for Frank was young and handsome, and full of what he said. It was quite romantic to be talked to like that. She would like to see the men threaten each other. But then—the scandal— father might never get over it. And if he married again? Speaking slowly, and in an undertone so as not to betray herself, she said: “O Frank, I'm sure you would not do anything that would injure me.”

“My darling, I love you better than the whole world. My whole life, if you will, shall be spent in striving to make you happy.”

“You are very good.” She took his hand and squeezed it; he returned the pressure with rapturous look and motion. She drew from him a little, for there were some people coming towards them, and she said: “Take care.” When the fisher folk had passed, she looked at him stealthily. She had always liked him in that necktie, and those cloth shoes were perfect. Had she never known Charlie, or if she had not gone so far with him!—There was something in Frank that was very nice—she could like the two. What a pity the two were not one! “If he were always as nice as he is now, and not lecture me!” Then she remembered she must return home. “I must really go home; I can't go any farther—”

“No, no, I cannot leave you. I must see and hear you now. If you knew what I have endured waiting for you, you would not be so cruel. Come and let us sit on the beach.”

“I couldn't. I must go back; father will miss me. Besides, what have we to say? If I were only free and could tell you that I loved you, it would be different.”

“Free! then you regret; if a woman wills it she can always free herself.”

“No, it is harder than you think for a girl to get out of an engagement she has entered into, even if no absolute promise has been given.”

“What do you mean? If you have entered into no formal engagement you are surely free.”

“I don't know. Do you think so? I am afraid men think that a promise may be broken after marriage as well as before.”

“You are wrong. Women who are jealous, who are old, tell girls that men are always unfaithful, but I'm sure that if I loved a girl I could never think of another. Do you really think I could think of any girl but you?”

“I don't know. I wonder if all you say is true.”

“Do you think me different from other men?”

“Yes, but I cannot go on the beach; some other evening I will walk there with you.”

“No, now, now—I want to tell you how and when I began to love. Do you remember when I used to spend part of my holidays at the Manor House when I was only so high, and you were all in short frocks? Come, there is much I want to say to you; I cannot part with you. Come, and let us sit on the shingle. Oh, the beautiful evening!”

She could love him a little when she looked at him, but when he talked she lost interest in him. She had allowed him to take her hand, he had bent towards her, and she had let him kiss her; and then they talked of love—she of its bitterness and disappointments; he of its aspirations, and gradually their souls approached like shadows in the twilight, paused for a few vague moments, seemed as if lost in dreams.

“I shall never forget this night! O my love, tell me one day you will be mine!”

“I cannot promise, you must not ask me.”

“We are meant for each other. It was not blind fate that cast us together. Does no voice tell you this? I hear it in my heart.”

The abandonment, the mystery of the gathering dusk, touched Maggie's fancy. They were alone in the twilight, and it was full of the romance of a rising tide.

“Never did I know such happiness; I am supremely happy, alone with you beneath this sky, listening to the vague, wild voice of the sea. It would be bitter sweet to die in such a triumphant hour. Supposing wewere to lie here and allow the sea to take us away.”

“No, I don't want to die. I want to live and enjoy my life.”

The answer fell a little chillingly on Frank's rapture. Then after a pause, Maggie said: “I think I have read of that somewhere—in anovel— lovers caught by the tide.”

“Yes, I daresay you have. I was thinking of two lovers who were so overcome with happiness that they decided that they would not trust themselves again to the waves and storms of life, but would let the calm, slow tide of death take them away with all their happiness unassoiled.”

Maggie did not answer. The double fear had come upon her—first, that the tide might rise higher than usual and cut off their retreat. Secondly, that Frank—he was a poet—might insist on remaining there and being drowned. Getting up, she said: “I do not know what father will say when I get home, really it is quite dark. Come, Frank.”

“Death is better than a life of abomination—loss of innocence, and of delight in simple things. I ask you,” he said, stopping her suddenly.

“Yes, no doubt it is so; but I want to get home. Do go on, Frank.”

“I will save you from a life of abomination—in other words I will save you from him; he shall not get you. I have sworn it; you did notknow that when you were lying down on the beach—you had ceased speaking, and in the silence my life seemed stirred to its very essence; and I knew that I must struggle against him, and conquer. I want to know this: Have you ever thought of what your life would be with him? Have you ever thought what he is?”

“But you don't know him, Frank. You have never spoken to him. I am sure you misjudge him.”

“Do you think I cannot see what he is? He is one of those men whose one ambition is to make themselves friendly in a house where there are women to wheedle. If the wife is young he will strive to wheedle her, and though he may not succeed he must degrade her. Or, if she have daughters, he will never cease to appeal to, to work upon, to excite latent feelings which, had it not been for him, would never have been developed into base and abnormal desire. I know what the foul−minded beast is. Such men as he ought to be killed; we don't want them in our society. I want to save you, I want to give you a noble, a pure life, full of the charms of a husband's influence, a home where there would be love of natural things. You are capable of all this, Maggie, your nature is a pure one, but your life is unwholesome and devoid of purity.”

“Frank, how can you speak so? You have no right to say such things about us. I am sure you have always been well treated—”

“You do not understand me, I will explain what I mean. Your life is rich and luxurious, but you are not happy, no one is happy in idleness; above all no woman is happy without love. A woman's mission in life is to love, she must have her home, her husband, and her children. These are the things that make a woman happy; and these are the things I want to give you—that I will give you; for, listen to me, I swear you shall not have that adventurer. He would degrade you with pleasure at first, and afterwards with neglect. You are too good for this, Maggie—it must not be, it shall not be. As I said before, death would be better.” They stood in front of the canal locks and Maggie looked with a beating heart on the deep water that a ray from a crescent moon faintly indicated. “A woman is helpless until she finds her lord, he who shall save, the saviour who shall bring her home safe to the fold. He exists! and all are in danger till they find him. Some miss him—they wander into misery and ruin; those that find him are led to happiness and content. I am yours. I would tell you how I became convinced that I am the one appointed by God to lead you to Him.”

“I thought you didn't believe in God.”

“Not as we have been taught to understand Him but I believe in a presiding power—call it luck, fate, or destiny that—that exists and wills; that is to say, watches over—rules out that this man is for that woman, and ordains that he shall protect her from danger, shall save her from those that seek her destruction. Much has happened to prove that I was intended for you. We have known each other since we were children. Do you not remember when I kissed you in the verandah as I was going to school? I was the first man who kissed you; you were the first woman who kissed me—have you never felt that we were for each other? Nor can I forget that when I thought we had drifted for ever apart, that I was brought back. Do you think it was accident— blind chance? I don't. Now I see this man striving to win you, and whether it be for your money, whether it be for yourself, or for both, it is my duty to say: No, this must not be.”

“I think you are mistaken about Charlie. I admit that a man is often a better judge than a girl; and as for you, Frank, I am sure I am very fond of you. It is very good of you to take such interest in me—but we must get home. I don't know what father will think.”

“No, before you go a step further you must promise me not to see that man again. I cannot tell you how, but I know no good can come of it. He is one of those creatures who cannot love, and only care for women for the excitement they afford. I know what sort of brute he is. It is more depraving to walk alone with him, than to be the mistress of a man who loved you.”

“He is leaving Brighton in a few days.”

“So much the better for all of us. But you must promise me. I would sooner see you lying drowned in that lock than his wife.”

Maggie trembled. It was ridiculous to think of such a thing. Surely he did not mean to drown her if she refused to promise. Charlie was going to London in a few days; he would be away for three or four months. Heaven only knows what would happen in that time. She didn't see what right Frank had to bully her—to extort promises from her by night on the edge of a dangerous lock. But a promise wasn't much, and a promise given in such circumstances was not a promise at all.

“If you are really in earnest—if you think it is for my good, I'll promise you not to see him again.”

“O Maggie, if you only knew what a load of trouble you have taken off my mind! Thank you—give me your hand, and let me thank you. I know I am right. And now, tell me, can you love me? Will you marry me?”

“I will promise nothing more to−night; we shall see how you behave yourself,” the girl replied winningly. “And now go on, sir, we have been here quite long enough.”

He crossed the gate mechanically, she followed eagerly, and when she reached the other side her heart beat with pride at her pretty triumph. Now I'll twit him, she thought, as they ascended the shore and entered the town.

“I wonder why you think Charlie so wicked; I think if you knew him you would change your opinion.”

“I am very thankful indeed that I do not know him.”

The conversation dropped, but a moment after he gave her the chance she wanted.

“Mind you have promised me not to see him again. I trust you.”

“But suppose he calls and if I should be in the drawing−room, I cannot walk out of the room without speaking to him.”

“I think you had better write and say you do not wish to see him.”

“I couldn't do that; we have known him a long time, and father has always said that we must be rude to no one. Besides, what reason could I give?”

“You need not give a reason. But let that pass. I can't see why you should meet; you can surely tell your servant to say 'Not at home,' when he calls.”

“I might be in the garden—Sally would not allow it. If John said 'Not at home,' she would run down and let him in.”

“I see you are raising difficulties—I see you do not intend to keep your promise.”

“You have been quite rude enough for one evening. You have kept me out on the beach by force till nearly ten o'clock at night, and you said that my life at the Manor House was not a pure one—I don't know what you mean. No man ever spoke to me like that before.”

“You misunderstood me. If you knew how I loved you, you would not twit me with my own words. Heaven knows I would sooner go back and drown myself in the lock than do anything or say anything that would offend you. Remember also that I asked you to be my wife.”

“You are not the first. I daresay it may appear strange to you, but others have asked me the same question before.”

“It does not seem strange to me, it only seems strange to me that every one doesn't love you, but I daresay they do. O Maggie, remember that you gave me hope, you said that you might—”

“Did I? Well, it's too late to talk any more. Goodnight. I suppose you're not coming in?”

She left him in a cruel dispersal of hope. He avoided, and then he tenderly solicited a regret that he had not thrown her into the lock. To end on that hour by the sea would have been better than the trivial and wretched conclusion of a broken promise, and everything, even murder, were better than that a brute should have her woman's innocence to sully and destroy. His love of the woman disappeared in his desire to save, the idea which she represented at that moment; and lost in sentiment he stood watching the white sickle of the moon over against the dim village. The leaves of some pollarded willows whitened when the breeze shot them up to the light, and a moment after became quite distinct in the glare and the steam of an approaching engine. He might go and tell Willy all about it; he would ask him to interfere− could he catch that train? If he ran for it, yes. He ran full tilt across the green under the archway up the high stone steps. He just did it.

It was the last train; he would sleep in Brighton. His plan, so far as he had a definite plan, was to ask Willy to come with him and tell “that brute” that his visits to the Manor House must end, and request him to pay his sister

no further attentions. His other plans were— Willy must speak to Maggie and tell her all he knew of the man; Willy must speak to his father; Mr. Brookes must not be kept in ignorance. But of course the right thing to do would be for Willy and him to call at the brute's hotel, tell him what they thought, and give him a licking. The train jogged on, and Frank made plan after plan. It was now past eleven, and he would not be at East Street before twelve o'clock. As he hurried along the streets he doubted more than ever how Willy would receive him. He might just as well have waited till morning. However, it was too late now to think of going back, there was no train, and he rapped at first timidly and then noisily at the shop door. He had to wait some time, and then he heard a voice asking from the top windows who was there.

"'Tis I, Frank; awfully sorry, but must see you—particular business."

There was no answer; he heard the voice grumbling, and more than ever doubtful of the cordiality of his reception, he listened. The door opened.

"Who is it?" he said.

"'Tis I, Cissy; but I'm in my nightdress."

"I won't look at you, Cissy, if that's what you mean. But won't yougive me a kiss?"

"Stoop down, then."

"I am sorry for waking you up, Cissy."

"Never mind, I'd get up at any hour to see you."

"There, run upstairs, and take care you don't catch cold, or I shall never hear the end of it."

"Father is in bed with mother. He says you are to go up, for if he were to get out of bed it might give him cold. You know his room?"

"Yes, here it is, now run along."

"Come in."

Frank was a little shocked, and he waited stupidly on the threshold. He could see a fragment of Mrs. Brookes's profile, and beneath the clothes the outline of Willy's bony body.

"Come in, come in," he said, "don't stand there filling the room with cold air. Now, what is it? Why the deuce do you come here waking us up at this ungodly hour? What has happened?"

"I have proposed to your sister Maggie."

"I am sure I am delighted to hear it, old chap; but I can't help thinking that I could have congratulated you equally as well, if not better, in the morning." Then, noticing the distressed look in Frank's face, he said: "I hope she has not refused you."

"No; she asked me to wait, she said it would depend—"

"Then you may depend it is all right; now go away and let me go to sleep, we'll talk about it in the morning. You can't get back to−night. You are sleeping in Brighton, I suppose? You'll come and breakfast here?"

"Yes, with pleasure, but it wasn't exactly to tell that I had proposed to Maggie that I came here to−night; there is something more than that. You know that fellow she calls Charlie? I don't know his other name."

"Stracey?"

"I dare say. I mean the man you said you hated more than any man alive; I hate him, too."

"You don't mean to say she is still thinking of that fellow. Has he come back?"

"He was at the Manor House all day yesterday."

"If she marries that fellow I'll never speak to her again, it will be dead cuts."

"It is only natural that I should love Maggie. You remember the first day I came down to the Manor House? How young I was then—how young we all were; there are no days like the old days! There is a beautiful poem by Wordsworth; I only remember one line now—

"'When every day was long
As twenty days are now'—

Do you remember the poem?" Willy did not answer, and noticing that his eyes were blinking, Frank hastily returned to more recent events." I wrote to her this afternoon telling her how much I loved her, and I said that I would call about nine in the evening at the Manor House, and that I hoped to find her in the drawing−room where we could talk without being disturbed. However, I was too excited, and could not hold out till nine; I thought I had better hear my fate at once, and as I was walking across the field—you know, at the back of Mrs. Heald's—I met her half way. She had a letter in her hand, which she said she was going to leave at Mrs. Heald's for me—She

admitted that the letter was in point of fact a refusal, and when I questioned her she admitted that she was obliged to refuse me because she had half promised Charlie. We went for a walk on the beach; we sat on the beach and watched the sunset, and I told her all. I spoke to her about the past, how we had grown up together—how we had been, as it were, from the first fated for each other; for you must admit, Willy, that it is very curious—I don't know if you ever think of it, but I do—how we have met again even when the chances of life seemed to have put us for ever apart. “Here a slight sound warned Frank that the present moment was one as equally unfitted for psychological analysis as for poetry, and he hurried to his story, hoping that the incident of the lock would secure him attention. “Willy, I think I convinced her that I liked her better than that other fellow. We were standing by the lock —Willy, I really do think you might listen.”

“My dear fellow, I am listening. You were both looking at the sunset.”

“It really is too bad. Of course, if you don't want to hear, and would prefer to go to sleep, you have only to say so.”

“My dear fellow, I assure you I wasn't asleep. I only closed my eyes because I can't bear the glare of that candle. I know where you were— you were looking at the sunset.”

“No, we weren't.”

“Weren't they, Jessie? Are you asleep?”

“No, I am not asleep. Do hold your tongue, Willy, I want to hear the story. You were standing by the lock, Mr. Escott.”

“Ah, yes, so they were.”

“I felt it was my duty, so I told her that I felt it was my mission to save—to save her from that man, and I made her promise me not to see him again.”

“Then it is all right. Nobody can be more glad than I am. I hate the fellow.”

“She will not keep her promise. Of course she may only have done it to tease me; but as we were going home she said she could not walk out of the room if she happened to be there when he called, nor could she leave word with the servants to say that they were not at home. She made a lot of excuses. What are you laughing at, Mrs. Brookes?”

“I am really very sorry, Mr. Escott, but I couldn't help wondering if she would change her mind again if you were to go back to the lock.”

Frank took up the candle and turned to go.

“Don't go,” Willy murmured faintly.

“I am very sorry, Mr. Escott—if circumstances permitted, I would do all I could to help you.”

This was delicate ground, and Willy woke up.

“What do you want me to do? Have you anything to suggest?”

“Yes, it struck me that we might both go round to the fellow's hotel— Stracey, you call him, I think—and you might tell him that his visits must cease at the Manor House, and that he must not speak to your sister if he should happen to meet her. That should bring the matter to an end. He is in Brighton—he is staying at the 'Grand.' We might go round there to−morrow morning.”

“He might kick us out.”

“I only hope he may try. I would give him such a hammering. But you need not be afraid of that. It wouldn't do to have Maggie's name mentioned in connection with a vulgar brawl—people are not too charitable. My idea is that this business should be conducted in the quietest and most gentlemanly manner possible.”

“I think I had better speak to father first.”

“No necessity; he will be only too glad to get rid of the penniless brute. Don't you think so, Mrs. Brookes?”

“I do.”

They then spoke of other things—of the shop, the profit they had made on tomatoes, and the losses that had resulted from over−stocking themselves with flour. At last a loud snore brought the conversation to a full stop, and Frank hurriedly bade them good−night.

“Cissy will let you out,” said Willy, with a sigh of relief.

The little girl had pulled on her stockings and tied a petticoat round her waist. “So you are going to be married.”

“O Cissy, you have been listening!”

“Is she very nice? She must be very nice for you to marry her. I should like to marry you.”

“Would you, Cissy, and why?”

“Oh, because you are so very handsome. But you will come and see us all the same, and let me sit on your knee?”

“Of course I will, Cissy, and now good−night.”

Next morning Willy declared himself ready to go and see Mr. Charles Stracey, and to tell him that he was not to call any more at the Manor House, or speak to Miss Brookes if he should happen to meet her. Frank wondered if this decision was owing to Mrs. Brookes's influence.

“I slept last night at the 'Grand' It seemed odd sleeping in the same house—perhaps within a few doors of him. If you only knew how I love her, if I could only tell you, you would pity me. You ought to know what I feel—the anxiety, the heart−ache. I know you have gone through it all.”

“Yes, I think I know what it is,” Willy replied thoughtfully.

“Mr. Stracey is staying here?”

“Will you enquire at the office, sir?”

While the books were being searched the young men consulted together. Frank said: “Send up your card, and say you will be glad to speak to him on a matter of importance. Of course he will see you, but before you speak about Maggie you must apologise for my presence; you must say that I am a very particular friend, and that you thought it better that the interview should take place in the presence of a witness.”

“I wish it were all over. I wouldn't do what I am doing for any one else, I can tell you, Frank.”

“Mr. Stracey is in the hotel, sir.”

“Will you give him my card, and say I should be glad to speak to him on a matter of importance?”

“Very good, sir.”

(In an undertone to Frank), “Was that right?”

“Quite right.”

“Oh, one thing I had forgotten to ask you—am I to shake hands with him?”

“You mean if he offers you his hand?”

“Yes.”

“It is impossible to settle everything beforehand. One must act according as the occasion requires.” “That's all very well for you, but I am a slow man, and am lost if I don't arrange beforehand.”

“Pretend not to see his hand, and apologise for my presence; he will then see that we mean business.”

“The waiting is the worst part.”

“Will you walk this way, sir?” said the page boy. “Mr. Stracey is not out of bed yet, but he said if you wouldn't mind, sir.”

They shrank from their enterprise instinctively, but the door was thrown open, and they saw a bath, and a sponge, and a towel, and Mr. Stracey lying on his back reading *The Sporting Times*. He extended a long brawny arm. The strength of the arm fixed itself on Willy's mind, and he doubted if he had not better take the proffered hand.

“I brought my friend Mr. Escott with me, for I thought a witness—I mean, that this interview should be conducted in the presence of a third party.”

At this speech Charlie opened his eyes and dropped his paper. Willy leaned over the rail of the bed; Frank looked into the bath, but remembering himself suddenly, he examined the chest of drawers.

“I have come to speak to you about my sister.”

Charlie changed countenance, and both men noticed the change.

“I mean to say I have come to tell you that you must discontinue your visits to the Manor House, and I must beg of you not to address my sisters should you meet them.”

“May I ask if you are your father's representative, if you speak with his authority?”

“I do not. I—”

“Then I should like to know on what authority you forbid me a house that doesn't belong to you, and I should like to know, if your father doesn't disapprove of my knowing your sisters, why you should? I shall speak to Miss Brookes as long as she cares to speak to me. The very idea of a man like you coming here to bully me! You have got my answer.”

“If, after this warning,” said Frank, who, seeing that things were going against them, thought he had better interfere, “you speak to Miss Brookes, you will do so at your peril.”

“Peril! What do you mean?”

“I mean that you must be prepared to take the consequences.”

“Who are you? I should like to know what you have to do in this matter?”

“I speak as Miss Brookes's future husband.”

“Future husband be damned! She'll never marry you,” said Charlie, springing out of bed.

Frank threw himself on his guard, and they would have struck each other if Willy had not cried out: “Frank, remember you promised me there must be no scandal.”

“I had almost forgotten. For Miss Brookes's sake, I refrain. Do you also, for her sake, cease to provoke me.”

Charlie hesitated for a moment, then rushing to the door, he said: “I, too, for Miss Brookes's sake, refrain, and I give you three seconds to clear out.”

In attempting to carry out the injunction Willy nearly fell in the bath. Frank had to bite his lip to avoid a smile, and he stalked out of the room assuming his most arrogant air.

“I think, on the whole, we got the best of it,” he said as they went down stairs.

“Do you? He turned us out of his room!”

“That's the worst of tackling a man in his own room—if he tells you to go, and you don't go, he can ring for the servants.”

“I was as nearly as possible going into the bath.”

“Yes, a touch more and down you'd have gone.” Frank laughed, and Willy laughed, “and that fellow in his nightshirt fishing you out!”

“Oh, don't, don't—”

Frank asked Willy to lunch with him at Mutton's, and he ordered a bottle of champagne in honour of the day.

“I say, just fancy pulling you out of the bath, and wiping you with a towel. I can see you dripping!”

“Don't set me off again. Let me enjoy my cutlets.”

“By Jove! there's something I hadn't thought of.”

“What's that?”

“We must be off. We must tell Maggie what has happened before he has time to communicate with her. What is the next train to Southwick?”

“There's one at half−past one.”

“It was after twelve when we saw him, he won't have time to catch that. We must be off. Waiter, the bill, and be quick. Look sharp, Willy, finish the bottle, pity to waste it.”

“What a nuisance women are, to be sure. Just as I was enjoying my cutlet! I can't walk fast in this weather, I should make myself ill.”

“We must take a cab.”

“What a fellow you are, you never think of the expense. I don't know where I should be if I were as reckless as you are.”

“Supposing he were at the station. It would be rather a sell if we went down by the same train! What should we do? He would surely never attempt to force his way in!”

“I don't think he would attempt that. If he did, we should have to send for the police.”

The young men strove to decide how the news should be broken to Maggie. But they had arranged nothing before they arrived at Southwick, and Frank stopped Willy time after time by the footpath, until at last in despair the latter said: “We must make haste; there's another train in twenty minutes.”

“By Jove! I had not thought of that; we must get on. Well, then, it is all arranged. You must tell her that you thought it your duty. Put it all down to duty, and it was your duty to do what you did—putting entirely out of the question the service you did me.”

“I can tell you what, Frank, I am very sorry I ever meddled in the matter. Had I known the vexation and annoyance it would have caused— and mark my words, and see if they don't come true, we are only commencing the annoyances that the affair will cause us. Ah, had I only foreseen! What a fool I was; I ought to have known better; I have had nothing but bad luck all my life. It is perfectly wonderful the bad luck I have had; no matter what I did, nothing seemed to go right. I dare say if you had gone to see that fellow without me it would have

turned out differently. But I don't see how I am to tell my sister point blank that I have forbidden him the house. What will she say? She may fly at me. Women have queer tempers, particularly when you interfere with their young men. My sisters have the very worst of tempers; you don't know them as I do. Fortunately it is not Sally. I assure you I wouldn't face Sally with such news for all the money you could give me."

"I am very sorry, old chap, but we must now go through it. You must forbid her to communicate with him."

"She won't heed what I say. It will only excite her. She will fly at me, and call me names, and burst into tears. I should not be surprised if she went off her head—she has been very strange once before. I don't mean to say she was ever wrong in her head, but she is a nervous, excitable girl—most excitable; my sisters are the most excitable girls I have ever known."

It was surprisingly soon over. Willy had not spoken a dozen words, when he was interrupted.

"You mean to say you have been to call on him?"

"Yes; and we told him he was never to speak to you again."

Frank expected her eyes to flash fire, but he only noticed a slight change in her face, a movement of the muscles of the lower jaw.

"Then I will speak to neither of you again!" and she walked out of the room, and in dismay they listened to her going upstairs.

"She didn't fly at me," said Willy; and, looking a little terrified, he stroked his moustache softly. "I told you she would give no heed to what we said; nor do I see how we can prevent her seeing that fellow if she chooses. He cannot come into the house, it is true, but she can go out when she pleases."

"We must follow her."

Conscious of defeat, Willy desired compromise. He could not be induced to take a share of watching and following which Frank declared essential; and, dreading an encounter with Stracey, whose brawny arm it was impossible to forget, he shut himself up in the shop, and devoted himself to drawing up a most elaborate balance−sheet, showing how he would stand if he were obliged to close the business to−morrow, whereas Frank loitered about the roads, till Mrs. Horlock came along with her dogs, and engaged him in conversation; and no matter at what corner he stationed himself, he found he was not free from observation. A few days after he could not bring himself to return to his post, and contented himself with looking out of his window, and taking an occasional stroll by the embankment, when he saw a train signalled.

A great weight seemed lifted from his shoulder the day he heard that his rival's holiday had come to an end, and that he had been forced to return to his counting−house in London. True it is that Mr. Brookes had in a certain measure approved of Willy's action in forbidding young Stracey the Manor House, and therefore of his, Frank Escott's, suit, but neither of these gains compensated him for the crowning loss of not being able to see his beloved, for although the Manor House was still theoretically open to him, practically it was closed. The sisters, although at variance on all subjects, had united in condemning him and Willy, and during one dinner, the misery of which he declared he could never forget, they had sat whispering together, refusing to address him either by look or word. Willy took all this calmly. It is an ill wind that blows no good, and the silence enabled him to thoroughly masticate his food. Mr. Brookes wept a little and laughed a little, and reminded them of the oblivion that awaited all their little quarrels.

All this, like much else in life, was ridiculous enough; but because we are ridiculous, it does not follow that we do not suffer, and Frank suffered. He was five−and−twenty, and light love had him fairly by the throat; he winced, and he cried out, but very soon his dignity gave way, and he craved forgiveness. But Maggie passed without heeding him. For more than a week she resisted all his appeals, and it was not until she saw that she was taking the neighbourhood into her confidence, and to feel that if she did not relent a little he might leave Southwick, and not return, she answered him with a monosyllable. With what bliss did he hear that first "no," and how passionately he pleaded for a few words; it did not seem to matter what they were, so long as he heard her speak one whole sentence to him. Feeling her power, she was shy of yielding, and with every concession she drew him further into the meshes of love. He dined now nearly every day at the Manor House, and he spent an hour, sometimes two, with her in the morning or afternoon; he followed her from greenhouse to greenhouse, but all his efforts were in vain, and he failed not only to obtain her promise to marry him, but even a renewal of the feeble and partial hopes which she had given him that night on the beach. He prayed, he wept, he implored pity, he openly spoke of suicide, and he hinted at murder. But Maggie passed him, pushing him out of the way with the

watering−pot, threatening to water him too, until one day he drew a revolver. She screamed, and the revolver was put away, but on the next occasion a stiletto that he had brought from Italy was produced, and with a great deal of earnestness life was declared to be a miserable thing. It was absurd, no doubt, but at the same time it was not a little pathetic; he was so good−looking, and so sincere. Maggie put down the watering−pot, and she would probably have allowed him to take her hand and kiss her, if he had not spoken roughly about Charlie, and called her conduct into question. So she told him she would not speak to him again, and she continued watering the flowers in silence. Amid vague remembrances of murders she had read of, Frank's words and behaviour remained present in her mind, and that evening when Willy, who rarely took the trouble to speak, much less to advise his sisters, told her that she might never get such a chance again, she said: “I am not going to marry a madman to please your vanity.”

“Marry a madman! What do you mean?”

“Well, I call a man that who comes regularly to see a girl with a revolver in one pocket and a stiletto in the other, and threatens to leave himself wallowing in a pool of blood at her feet—”

“You mean to say he does that? You are clearly determined to drive the poor fellow out of his mind with your infernal coquetry. Well, women are the most troublesome, and I believe in many cases, the wickedest creatures on the face of God's earth.”

“You shut up. Men who don't get on with women always abuse them; you are soured since Miss ——, the actress, jilted you.”

“If you ever dare mention that subject, I will never speak to you again. You know I don't break my word.”

“Why do you interfere in my affairs? You don't think of me when you go down to browbeat Charlie Stracey; you don't think of what would have been said of me had Frank hit him, and it had all come out in the papers.” Maggie said no more; she saw she had gone too far. Willy sat puffing at his pipe; but when her father spoke of a certain investment that had not turned out as well as he had anticipated, he joined in the conversation, and she hoped her cruelty was forgotten.

XII

Frank uttered a cry of surprise when he opened the studio door to his friend. It was his favourite complaint that Willy never came to see him.

“At last, at last! This is the second time you have been in the place since it was finished, faithless friend!”

“My dear fellow, you know it is not my fault. I have been very busy lately trying to get on with my accounts. There's not a room in the Manor House where I can work in; my sisters' things are everywhere, and they must not be interfered with—their ball−dresses, their birds, their work. My sisters think of nothing but pleasure.”

“Triss, go back, go to your chair, sir; I'll get the whip.”

Showing his fangs, the bull−dog retired; then with a hideous growl sprang upon his chair, and sat eyeing Willy's calves.

“I cannot think what pleasure it can give you to keep such a brute. Even if I had my accounts finished, I don't think I should care to come here much. It isn't safe.”

“You are quite mistaken. There's not a better−tempered dog alive than Triss; he wouldn't bite any one unless he attacked me. Give me a slap, and you'll see—I won't let him come near you.”

“Thank you, I'd rather not. But he sometimes growls even at you, and shows his teeth, too.”

“That's only a way of his, and when he does it I kick him. Come here, Triss—come here, sir!” The dog approached slowly; he sat down and gave his paw to his master, but he did not cease to growl. “There! We have had enough of you, go back to your chair. What will you take—a glass of Chartreuse—a cigarette?”

“Thanks, both if you will let me. I see you like pretty things,” he said, admiring the tall legs of the table—early English—and the quaint glasses into which Frank poured the liqueur. “You've got the place to look very nice.”

“Very different from what is was when the smith and his boisterous brood were here,” and as if he intended an apt illustration of his words, he stretched his leg out on the white fur rug and surveyed his calf and red silk stocking. “Just look at that dog, isn't he a beauty? I always think he looks well in that attitude, leaning his head over the rail. I began a picture of him the other day in a pose somewhat like that. I'll show it you.” Frank propped his sketch against the leg of the sofa, and returned to his place on the sofa. “What do you think of it? Your father said it was very like.”

“It is like him, but I can see no merit in it. I'm afraid of the brute. I can't help hating him, for he always looks as if he were going for my legs. What else have you been painting? Any pretty women about? I should admire them more.”

“I haven't been painting lately,” he said, sighing a little melodramatically, as was his wont, “I think I have been playing the piano more than anything else. I have composed something too, I don't think it bad, I'll play it to you: a dialogue between a gentleman and a lady. He speaks first, then she answers, then I blend the two motives, and that is what they both say.”

Willy sat enwrapped in his own thoughts, not having heard a note. Though he knew that Willy was incapable of judging of music, it disappointed him that his dialogue had passed unperceived. Then smiling, he struck a few notes, and Willy awoke. “You haven't been listening,” he said, reproachfully. “You don't care for any music, except that little tune.”

“Yes, I do; I heard what you played, and I think it very pretty.”

“Willy, I am the most miserable man in the world. Every hour, every minute of my life is a pain to me. I never knew before what you must have suffered, but I know now; it is a sickening feeling, it takes you by the throat, it rises in the throat, and you are almost suffocated. Last night I lay awake hour after hour thinking. I could see Maggie as plainly as I can see you—she looked down upon me out of space with strange, steadfast eyes, and my whole soul went out to her, and I cried to her that I loved her beyond all things; and we seemed to be so near each other; it seemed such an intimate and perfect communion of spirit and sense that I seemed, as it were, lifted out of actual life; I seemed to myself holier, purer, better than I had ever been before; I seemed to loose all that is gross and material in me, and to gain in all that is best and worthiest in man. Did you feel like that when you were in

love?”

“I don't know that I felt exactly like that. But never mind how I felt; you are too fond of alluding to that subject, it is a very painful one to me; you will make me regret that I ever told you anything about it.”

“I am sorry I mentioned it. It is strange, but when one suffers one likes to speak of and to compare with one's own the suffering that another has endured. Your sister treats me most cruelly. She has forgiven me that miserable business, but she refuses to hold out any hope that she will ever be my wife. I don't understand—I am utterly at sea. I don't believe for a moment that she cares for that horrid brute; he is gone away. She tells me she never cared for him. If so, I should like to learn your explanation of her conduct.”

Willy stroked his moustache, apparently declining the responsibility of apologist; but his manner showed he had something on his mind, and Frank sought more eagerly than ever to enlist his sympathy and support.

“I have done everything I could to win her. I don't know why she should be so difficult to please. I am not bad looking, I am at least as good looking as that damned brute” (here he paused to glance at himself in the glass and smooth the curls above his forehead). “I am certainly quite as clever” (here he thought of his painting, and his eye sought one of his pictures), “and my position—I will not speak of that, it would be snobbish. Women have cared for me. I have told Maggie hundreds of times that I never could care for any but her. Fate seems to have specially marked us for each other. You must admit that there is something very remarkable in the way we have been brought together over and over again. I have told her that my life is worthless without her. The day before yesterday, when I was speaking to her, I burst into tears. That a man should cry, no doubt, seems to you very ridiculous but if you knew how I suffer you would pity me. I often think I shall commit suicide.” Frank took the stiletto from his pocket. “I don't mind telling you, when you knocked at the door I was lying on the sofa thinking it over. One stab just here and I should be at peace for ever. I told her so yesterday.”

“I'm not fond of giving advice, as you know—I have quite enough to do to think about my own affairs—but as you have often spoken to me on this matter, and as you have asked me for my opinion and my help, I had better tell you that I differ entirely from you concerning the wisdom of the course you are pursuing.”

“How's that?” said Frank, at first surprised and then delighted at Willy's breaking from his reserve.

“What I mean is, that I think you would be more successful if you would lay aside daggers and revolvers, and try to win her affection by patience and gentleness. Maggie was talking to me about it no later than last night, and I could see clearly that you frighten her with bluster. I am sure there are times when she dreads you; it must be a positive terror to her to sit with you alone—so it would be to any girl.”

“What do you mean?”

“Maggie is a very delicate and nervous girl, and it wouldn't surprise me if your threats to commit suicide seriously affected her health; you come with a revolver and a stiletto, and you ask her to marry you, and if she doesn't at once say yes, you abuse her, declaring all the time that you'll stab yourself with the revolver and shoot yourself with the stiletto—I beg your pardon, I mean—”

“Of course, if you've come here only to turn me into ridicule—”

“I assure you I didn't mean it—a slip of the tongue,” and as their eyes met at that moment, neither could refrain from laughter.

“Admit that there is something in what I say. If you will behave a little more quietly—if you will talk to her nicely; leave off assuring her of your love, she knows all that already; have some patience and forbearance; you will see if before long she doesn't change towards you.”

His interest in the matter was a desire that his sister should not miss this chance of marrying the future Lord Mount Rorke. But Maggie felt too sure of Frank to resist the temptation to tantalise him; besides her moods were naturally various, and the first relapse into her former coldness was answered by a sudden reversion to threats of murder and suicide, and one summer evening about six o'clock, when Mrs. Horlock took her dogs out and stood at the corner waiting for Angel, a rumour was abroad that Mr. Escott had stabbed himself to the heart, and had fallen weltering in his blood at Miss Brookes's feet.

Dr Dickinson walked across the green, watched with palpitating anxiety from the corner of the Southdown Road. The General spoke to the farmer, and the farmer's pupil nudged the general dealer. Mrs. Horlock spoke to the grocers, and the owners of the baths declared they had just heard from their servant that the young man was not dead, but mortally wounded.

There was, therefore, no doubt that Dr Dickinson was going to Mrs. Heald's, and would not turn to the right

and walk to the station for the quarter−to−seven train; and expectation on this point ceasing, the group expressed its sympathy for the young man. Poor young man—and so good−looking too—what will she do if he should die?—and he must die —there was no doubt of it. Maria had met Mary—that was the housemaid at the Manor House—it was Mary who had mopped up the blood. She said there was a great pool right in the middle of the new carpet under the window—they were sitting there on the ottoman when he said suddenly, “I have come to ask you to marry me; if you won't I must die.” Notwithstanding this she continued to play with him—the cruel little minx! He could stand it no longer, and he pulled out a dagger he had brought from the East, and stabbed himself twice close to the heart. What will she do?—she is his murderer—to all intents and purposes she is his murderer—she will have to go into a convent—she won't go into a convent—she'll brazen it out. No one thinks much of those girls—the way Sally carried on with young Meason—it was disgraceful —they say she used to steal her father's money and give it to him—Dr Dickinson could tell fine tales.

Then gossip ceased, and they were in doubt if they might intercept the doctor and obtain news of his patient when he left Mrs. Heald's. Some strolled about the green, pretending to be taking the air. Mrs. Horlock, however, had no scruples, and picking up Angel and calling to Rose and Flora, she walked straight to Mrs. Heald's, and was seen to go in. Some five minutes after she came out with the doctor. Frank was not dead, nor mortally wounded, nor even dangerously wounded, but he had had a very narrow escape.

“I said to him, 'You have had a very narrow escape.' The fact is—(I, of course, examined the weapon)—a small part of the point had been broken away; it was this that saved him. The first blow scarcely pierced his clothes; the second was more effective, it entered the flesh just above the heart, and I have no doubt if the steel had penetrated a quarter of an inch deeper that he would have killed himself. But so far as I can see at present, he will get over it without much difficulty.”

“When did it occur?”

“About an hour ago, at the Manor House. It appears that he has gone there every day for the last three weeks to ask Miss Brookes to marry him; she, however, would not give him any definite answer—”

“Horrid girl!”

“I never liked her; most deceitful; no doubt she flirted with him outrageously.”

“I can't say. I hear that he often threatened to kill himself, and to− day, to conclude, he pulled out his stiletto.”

“I thought it was a dagger he had brought from the East?”

“No, the weapon they showed me was an Italian stiletto.”

The grocer's daughter shuddered, her mother murmured, “And for that girl.”

“We didn't know him. The Brookes never allow their friends to know any one in Southwick, but I have heard that he is an exceedingly nice—”

“He will be Lord Mount Rorke, if his uncle doesn't marry again.”

“He must have been desperately in love; no one ever heard of such a thing before. It sounds like the Middle Ages—a stiletto!”

“But what could he see in her? That's what I can't make out; can you?”

“Ah! there I can't assist you. I hope to be able to cure him of the stiletto wound, but Cupid's arrows are beyond me. They did not fly so thickly or strike so hard in my time.” And, laughing, the doctor withdrew.

“I suppose that after this she will marry him; she never intended to let him slip through her fingers. I can see her face when she heard that another quarter of an inch and her chance of being Lady Mount Rorke was gone for ever.”

“I daresay he won't marry her now. It would serve her right. I should be so glad.”

And so pouring their gall out upon the unfortunate Maggie, the tradespeople returned to their homes. The stiletto was so utterly unprecedented, and so complete a reversal of all conception of the chances of life at Southwick, that every one felt puzzled and dissatisfied, even when gossip had brought to light every circumstantial detail of the romantic story. Had the deed been done with a knife, with anything but a stiletto; had he hanged himself, or cut his throat with a razor, or shot himself with his revolver, the wonder of the Southwickians would not have been so excited. But a stiletto! And for a week an Italy of brigands and bravoes, and stealthy surprises haunted shadows of picturesque archways, an Italy of chromo−lithographed skies and draperies in the Southdown Road. Maggie was spoken of with alternate fear and hate; her wickedness seemed more than natural, and had the Southdown Road known anything of Italian opera, there is little doubt that Miss

Brookes would have been compared to Lucretia Borgia. The young women looked out of their windows at night, and wondered how they'd feel if a troubadour were suddenly to sing to them from behind the privet hedges. The young men were even more impressed than their womenfolk; they cursed their place of birth and habitation, knowing that it incapacitated them from knowing her; they wasted their mothers' candles sitting up till two in the morning writing odes to cruel women with raven hair; and all gazed sadly on the old ship in the harbour, and the Spanish main seemed nearer, and those gallant days more realisable than they had ever been before.

The direct cause of this revival of romance lived, however, unconscious of it. She was genuinely frightened. She said her prayers with great fervour, begging God that He might save Frank, and that she might not be a murderess. She made him soups, she sent him wine, she brought him books, and she sat with him for hours. She thought he had never looked so nice as now—so pale, so aristocratic, so elegantly weak, his head laid upon a cushion, which she had brought him, and when he took her hand and said, “Will you, darling?” and she murmured, “Yes,” then it seemed that the happiness of his life was upon his face.

Three days after Frank was sitting at his table writing to Mount Rorke, and on the following Sunday he walked to the Manor House to tell Mr. Brookes that he was engaged to his daughter, and to ask his consent. He did not think of his folly, he was too happy; he seemed like one in a quiet dulcet dream; he walked slowly, leaning from time to time against the wooden paling, for he wished to prolong this meditative moment; he saw everything vaguely, and loved all with a quiet fulness of heart; he took in the sense of this village and its life as he had never done before. He compared it with Ireland; Mount Rorke, with its towers, and lakes, and woods arose, and he was grateful that Maggie was going there, yet he was sure that he could not live without sometimes seeing this village where he had found so much happiness.

His wound had sucked away his strength, the sunlight dazzled him, and feeling a little overcome, and not equal, without pause, to the long interview that awaited him, he stayed awhile in a shady laurel corner, and leaning against a piece of iron railing, watched Mr. Brookes and Mr. Berkins as they paced the tennis lawn to and fro. The old gentleman frequently stopped in his walk to point at the glass houses.

“My dear Berkins, I wish you would try to get Willy some appointment; he would, I am sure, take anything over two hundred and fifty a year. He would do marvellously well in an office—he loves it. I assure you his eyes twinkle when one speaks of how books are kept, or alludes in any way to the routine of office work. You should see his accounts and his letter books, they would make the best clerk you ever had feel ashamed of himself; but left to himself I am afraid he will do no good; he has all the method, but nothing else. He lost money in Bond Street; I am afraid to tell you how much he dropped on the Stock Exchange, but that was not entirely his fault—the firm went bankrupt; nobody could have foreseen it, it was quite unheard of.”

“I have always noticed that successful men do not buy partnerships in firms that go bankrupt.”

“Very true, Berkins; I wish I had asked your advice on the subject.”

“I wish you had, Mr. Brookes. You are no doubt a very clever man, but on one or two points you are liable to make mistakes; you are, if I may so speak, a little weak. You should come and live with me for a few months, I would put you right.”

“This is really too much,” thought Mr. Brookes; and had it not been for the certain knowledge that Berkins had lately increased his income by a couple of thousands a year, he would have answered him tartly enough; but as this fact admitted of no doubt he bridled his anger and said: “If you could put my boy right it would be more to the point. He has all the method of the best clerk in London; he loves the work, he would do honour to any office, but on his own hook I am afraid he will never do anything but lose his money.”

“Your money, you mean.”

“Well, my money if you like. You are very provoking, Berkins. I don't know if you do it with the express purpose of annoying me. I was saying, when you interrupted me, that Nature had evidently intended my son for a clerk rather than for a speculator. I fear he is doing very badly with his shop in Brighton. The rents are very high in East Street, and I don't think he sells anything. He takes enough away from here, though. I don't remember if I ever told you that I was foolish enough to agree to his taking away, buying from me at the market price he calls it, the surplus produce of my garden and greenhouses. I dare say I shall get the money one of these days, but at present I see no sign of it. He is always making up the accounts, and, so far as we have gone, the result of this arrangement is that, when I complain that there is neither fruit nor vegetables on my table, I am told that everything went to Brighton. I am forced, I assure you, to send my carriage and my horses, that I paid two

hundred guineas for, to fetch potatoes, and he, too, uses my carriage to take his vegetables to the shop. He gets his sisters to bring them when they go out driving, nor can I even buy my fruit and vegetables off him at cost price; he says that would interfere with his book−keeping, and so I am obliged to buy everything from Hutton, and you know what his prices are. I assure you, it is most annoying."

"Mr. Brookes, your fortune will not bear this constant drain; you must remember that we are living in very bad times—times that are not what they were. I have heard that your distillery—"

"Yes, times are very bad. I have never known them worse, and no doubt you find them so too. They ought to affect you even more than they do me. My income is, as you know, all invested money, whereas yours is all in your business."

"Of course, I am affected by the times; had they remained what they were, even what they were towards the end of the seventies, I should be making now something over ten thousand pounds a year. But, thank God! I have not to complain. Next year I hope to invest another five thousand pounds. The worst of it is, that there is no price for money in legitimate securities."

"Everything is very bad; you never will invest your money as I did mine ten years ago. My business is not, of course, what it used to be, but I don't complain; if it weren't for troubles nearer home I should get on very well."

"I hope that Sally has commenced no new flirtation in the Southdown Road. I thought she had promised you—since she gave up Meason—that she would for the future know no one that lived there."

"I was thinking for the moment of Willy, not of Sally; she has not been so troublesome lately. But no sooner are we out of one trouble than we are in another. It is, of course, very regrettable that young Escott should have stabbed himself, and in my garden too. I, who hate scandals, seem always plunged in one. I hear they are talking of it in the clubs in Brighton. I hope Lord Mount Rorke will not hear of it; if he did, do you think it would prejudice him against the match?"

"Then you're prepared to give your consent?"

"Why not? Surely! I really don't see—Lord Mount Rorke is a very rich man."

"Possibly, but Irish peers are not always as rich as they would like us to believe they are. The connection is, of course, desirable, but I hope your anxiety to secure it will not lead you into making foolish, I will say reprehensible, monetary concessions. What I mean is this. I am a straightforward man, Mr. Brookes, brought up in a hard school, and I always come straight to the point. You are a rich man, Mr. Brookes—you have the reputation of being a richer man than you are— and it is possible, I don't say it is probable, that Lord Mount Rorke will expect you to make a large settlement. He will possibly—mind you, I do not say probably—taking the coronet into consideration— those people think as much of their titles as we do of our money—ask you to settle a thousand a year, may be fifteen hundred a year, upon your daughter."

"Settle a thousand—maybe fifteen hundred—a year on my daughter!" cried the horror−stricken Brookes.

"He may even ask for two thousand a year. Remember, you are a distiller—he is a peer of the realm. And now I say," continued Berkins, growing more emphatic as he reached the close of his declamation, "that in my wife's interest I will oppose any and all attempts to purchase a coronet for Maggie at her sister's expense."

Mr. Brookes stood for a moment stupefied—as if some great calamity had befallen him. The housekeeping bills, the loss of his fruit and vegetables, even the Southdown Road seemed as nothing in the face of this new misfortune. Troublesome as his daughters were, he preferred an occasional recrudescence of flirtation in his garden to settling the money that he had made himself and letting them go; no pen can describe the anguish that the surrendering of the ten thousand pounds which he had settled on Grace had caused him; but to be told now that the alliance with a lord which he so greedily coveted, and which had been so agreeably tickling him for the last few days, would cost him perhaps two thousand a year, was more than he could bear. He had avoided as much as possible even thinking of the money question. One hundred—two hundred—the shadow of three hundred had fallen for a moment on his mind, but he had successfully chastened these unpleasantnesses by thoughts of the liberality, the generosity of the aristocracy, and he had encouraged a hope that Mount Rorke would let him off with a statement of how much Maggie would have at his death. And now to hear these terrible prognostications, and from his own son− in−law, too. It was too bad—it was too cruel. "You don't know what you are talking about, Berkins. If it were business I would listen to you, but really when it comes to discussing the aristocracy it is more than I can stand. What do you know about the aristocracy—not that," cried Mr. Brookes, snapping his fingers. "You were brought up in an office—what should you know? You were a clerk once at thirty

shillings a week—what should you know? Lord Mount Rorke would never think of making such ridiculous proposals to me. You judge him by yourself, Berkins, that's it, that's it! I dare say he has heard of me in the City—many of your great lords do business in the City. I dare say he has heard of me, and if he has he'll not try any nonsense with me. Twist him round my finger, twist him round my finger."

Berkins liked a lord, but Berkins liked lords without thinking himself one jot their inferior, and he was sure that his horse and his dog and his house and everything belonging to him were better than theirs; and secure in the fact that his grandfather had been a field officer, he did not think it amiss to brag that he had begun life with thirty shillings a week, so he only smiled at his father−in−law's wrath, feeling now easy in his mind that Grace's future fortune would not be prejudiced for Maggie's glorification.

The discussion had fallen, and Mr. Brookes went to meet the young man whom he caught sight of coming across the sward.

"Most imprudent of you to come out to−day," he said, scanning the white face.

"Oh, I am very well now, thanks. The sun is a little overpowering, that is all. I want to speak to you, Mr. Brookes."

"Speak to me? Yes. Will you go into the billiard−room, my boy? I can see the heat has upset you. Take my arm."

Frank took the offered arm. He was feeling very faint, but the cool and dim colour of the billiard−room revived him, and when he had had some claret and water, he said that he felt quite strong, and listened patiently to Mr. Brookes.

"Well, I never! No, I never heard of such a thing. A stiletto, too. You brought it from Italy? It makes me feel quite young again. Ah! 'tis hard to say what we won't do for a girl when Miss Right comes along. I was just the same—pretty keen on it, I can tell you, when I was your age; and I don't know, even now,—but a man with grown−up daughters must be careful. Still when I see a little waist, high heels, plump—you know, that's the way I used to like them when I used to go to the oyster shops; there was one at the top of the Haymarket. Ah! I was young then, young as you are; I was keen on it—Aunt Mary will tell you that—there was nothing I wouldn't do; I never went as far as stabbing—walking about at night, tears, torments as much as you like, but I never went so far as stabbing. Wonderful what love will make a man do! Supposing you had killed yourself; in my garden, too—awful! What would people say? I hear they are talking of it in the clubs—hope it won't go any further. Should Mount Rorke hear of it! Eh? Might set him against us; might not give his consent—eh? We should be up a tree, then."

"I don't think there is much danger of that. I came to−day, Mr. Brookes, to ask for your consent; am I to understand that you give it?"

"Well, my dear Frank, I don't see why I should refuse it; I have known you since you were quite a small boy. I don't want to flatter you. I don't know that I care much about young men as a rule, but you, I have always found you—well, just what you should be. Of course the connection is very flattering. You will one day be Lord Mount Rorke, and to see my darling Maggie sharing your honours will be—that is to say if I live to see it—a great, a very gre—great hon—our."

Feeling much embarrassed Frank begged of him not to mention it. "I shall be writing to−morrow or next day to my uncle; shall I say that you have given your consent to my marriage with your daughter? I may say that I have already written to him on the subject."

"By all means, my dear boy. I think I can say you have my consent— that is to say, you have my consent if the money's all right. All is, of course, subject to that. Now you are for love in a cottage, bread and cheese romance; a man who will use a stiletto can't be expected to know much about money, but I am a father, my stiletto days are over, and I couldn't give my daughter without a settlement. You will, no doubt, be—of course you will be—Lord Mount Rorke one of these days; but in the meantime there must be a proper settlement. My daughter must be properly provided for; it is my duty to look after her interests, so you may as well tell your uncle that I shall be pleased to meet him and talk the matter over with him. I will meet him in London, when it suits his convenience; I need hardly say that if he should choose to come down here that I shall be pleased to see him. And now tell me—of course he will be prepared to act handsomely; I have no doubt he will, the aristocracy always do act handsomely, no one is so liberal as your aristocrat. I hope he will settle a good round sum on my daughter—money invested in first−class securities, not what Berkins would call first−class, but what I should call

first− class securities; and should your uncle prove the liberal man that I have no doubt he is, I don't say that I won't behave handsomely. Of course you know that my dear children will have all my money at my death. I shall never marry again, that is a settled thing; but in the meantime I will do something. When Grace was married I behaved very generously—too generously—a lot of money—mustn't do it again, times are not what they were. But at my death I shall make no difference, all three will share and share alike."

Frank hoped when Brookes and Mount Rorke met, that the former would modify his demands, and what was still more important, his mode of expressing them. But why should Mr. Brookes appear to him in such a sudden glow of vulgarity? He had never thought of him as a refined and cultivated gentleman, but was unprepared for this latest manifestation.

"Lord Mount Rorke allows me a certain annual income, he will no doubt double this income upon my marriage; I daresay he would—since he has recognised me as his heir—make this income legally mine by deed, I could then settle a certain sum on Maggie, in case of my death; but then further settlements would be required when I succeed to the title and the property. I had thought—and indeed I think still—that if my uncle makes me a sufficient allowance, that we might avoid touching on this matter at all. Lord Mount Rorke is an irritable man, and I am sure that if you were to speak to him as you—"

"Pooh! pooh! Nonsense! nonsense! You don't suppose I am going to give my daughter to a man unless he can settle a sufficient sum of money upon her? Berkins wouldn't hear of it. He was only telling me just now—"

"But I don't think you understand me, Mr. Brookes. I do not propose that you should give me any money with your daughter. Let what you give her be settled upon her, and let it be tied up as strictly as the law can tie it."

"Pooh! pooh! the man that marries my daughter must settle a sum of money at least equal to what I settle upon her; and it must be money invested in first−class security, otherwise I couldn't think of giving her one penny."

"I am sorry, Mr. Brookes, that you are so determined on this point. These matters generally arrange themselves if people incline to meet each other half way, and I am sure that my uncle will resent it if you insist on pounds, shillings, and pence as you propose doing. He is not accustomed to strict business—marriages in our family were never made on such principles; my happiness is bound up in Maggie. I hope you will consider what you are risking."

"I would do more for you than any one else, Frank, but business is business, and the man who has my daughter must settle a sum of money equivalent to what I settle."

"I am afraid I have talked too much, I am not very strong, yet with your permission we will adjourn this discussion to another day—in the meantime I will write to my uncle."

Mr. Brookes did not offer the assistance of his arm, and had he, Frank would certainly not have accepted it. Holding the door, the old man waited for his visitor to pass out. "Southdown Road or the heir to a peerage: it is all the same, my money is what is wanted—the money I had made myself," thought Mr. Brookes. "Dreadful old man, he would sell his daughter for a settlement of a few hundred pounds a year. I never knew he was so bad, my eyes are opened," thought Frank. Both were equally angry, and without secrecy or subterfuge they sought consolation in different parts of the garden. Mr. Brookes resumed his walk on the tennis ground with Berkins, and stopping frequently to point to his glass−houses, he described his misfortunes with profuse waves of his stick. Frank had found Maggie, and they now walked together in the shade and silence of the sycamores—he, vehement and despairing of the future; she, subtle and strangely confident that things would happen as she wished them.

Having once yielded and felt the pang of possession she was wholly his, in all ramifications of spirit and flesh, both in her brain and blood, and the utmost ends of her sense mingled with him. But to him, she was the symbol of the desire of which he was enamoured, the desire which held together his nature and gave it individuality—love of *the* young girl.

"Oh! my darling, if he should speak so to Mount Rorke, we should be parted for ever—no, that could never be—nothing in heaven or earth would induce me to give you up, be true to me and I will be true to you; but our happiness—no, not our happiness, that is in ourselves— but all our prospects in life will be wrecked if he will not give way. Should he and Mount Rorke meet—"

"But they won't meet; have patience—I know how to manage father. He doesn't like to part with his money, and I can understand it, he made it all himself; but he will get used to the idea in time, leave him to me; put your trust in me."

She extended her hand, he took it, pressed it to his lips; he took her in his arms and kissed her, and the leaves

of the sycamores were filled with the sunset.

"DEAR SIR,—I received a letter this morning from my nephew, apprising me of his engagement to your daughter. He has apparently obtained your consent, and he asks for mine, and he also asks from me not only an increase of income to meet the requirements of altered circumstances, but he tells me that you will expect me to settle some seven, eight, or ten thousand pounds upon your daughter.

"I do not propose to discuss the reasonableness of his or your demands, but it seems that a statement of his prospects is owing to you.

"Having never married when I was a young man, many have assumed—I among the number—that I never would marry; and I admit that I have allowed my nephew to grow up in the belief that he is my heir and the successor to the title of Mount Rorke; but beyond a general assumption existing in my mind, his mind, and the minds of those who know us, there is no reason to suppose that I shall not marry, or that I shall leave him a single sixpence, and I willingly make use of this opportunity to say that I have no faintest intention of entering intoany engagement either verbal or written with him upon this matter.— Yours very truly, MOUNT RORKE."

"MY DEAR FRANK,—The enclosed is a copy of the letter which I send by this post to Mr. Brookes. And I make no disguise of the fact that it was written with the full intention of rendering your marriage an impossibility. It will no doubt appear to you a harsh and cruel letter; it will no doubt grieve you, madden you—in your rage you may call me a brute. The epithet will be unjust; but knowing very well indeed what love is at twenty−five, I will forgive it. And now to the point. I know something about old Brookes, and I remember the lean boy you used to bring here, and judging from some slight traces that Eton had not succeeded in effacing, I think I can guess what the rest of the family is like; indeed, the old gentleman's preposterous demand that I should settle ten thousand pounds on his daughter throws a sufficient light on his character, and in some measure reveals what sort of manner of man he is. But let all this be waived. I admit that with some show of reason, you may say it is unjust, nay more, it is ridiculous, to pronounce judgment on people I have never seen, and it is cruelty worthy of a Roman Emperor to wreck the lifelong happiness of two young people for the sake of a prejudice that the trouble of a journey to Brighton will most certainly extinguish. I will not irritate you by assuring you that the world is full of desirable women−women that will appeal to you two years hence precisely as Miss Brookes appeals to you now. Were I to whisper that it is unwise to give up all women for one woman, you could not fail, in your present mood, to see in my philosophy only the nasty wisdom of a cynical old reprobate. Therefore I will not weary you with advice—what I have said must be considered not as advice, but rather as an expression of personal experience in the love passion, serving as illustration of the attitude of my mind towards you. I will limit myself to merely asking you—no, not to think again of Miss Brookes—that would be impossible, but to leave Southwick for London or Paris, the latter for preference. I will give you a letter of introduction to a charming lady (ah! were I thirty years younger). Put yourself in her hands, and I have no doubt in the world but that she will send you back cured in six months, as my bank−book will abundantly prove.

"If you cannot do this—if so drastic a remedy should be too repugnant to your present feelings, I would remember, were I in your place, that my uncle had never refused me anything; that I could draw upon him for what money I liked—that is to say, for all pleasures and satisfaction save one. I would remember that at his death I was to inherit ten thousand a year and a title; and I would weigh (first examining each weight carefully, to see if it were true weight) all these present and future advantages against the gratification of possessing a woman I loved when I was twenty−five for a period of time extending perhaps over half a century; I would think—at least I think and hope I should hesitate—before I refused to obey one of whose affection I was sure, and I feel certain it would go hard with me before I refused to gratify the whim—call it a whim if you like—of one who had often given but never asked before.

"Somehow I think you owe me this sacrifice; I have done much for you and am prepared to do more, and to speak quite candidly, I want something in return; I do not mean that I am desirous of striking a bargain with you, but we all expect to receive—of course not directly, but in some remote way—something for what we give, and I confess that I look forward to your companionship to assist me through the last course of life. I do not want you now—for the next few years I want you to see the world, to educate yourself; I want you to improve your taste in art and letters, and later on, if possible, to turn yourself to some public account. Besides other work, I am now working at my memoirs; they are to be published after my death, as I have arranged, under your supervision. I regard these memoirs as being of the first importance, and it is advisable that you should be in full possession of

all my intentions respecting them. Hitherto I have always looked after everything myself, but the time will come when I shall not be able to do this, and shall require you to relieve me of the burden of business. Then I wish you to live here, so that you may learn to love Mount Rorke. I am very busy now with improvements, and I would wish you to be with me so that you might adequately enter into my views and ideas. To conclude, I do not marry for your sake; do you not marry for mine, at least do not marry for the present. I do not say that if I knew and liked the girl of your choice—if she were in your own set—that I could not be won over, but on the whole I would sooner you didn't marry. But I could not really endure a lot of new acquaintances—people who had never dined in a lord's house, and would all want to be asked—no, I could not endure it. I am an old man, and now I want to enjoy myself in my own way, and my desire is to get through the last years of my life with you.

"You can do what you please, ask here whomever you please, give me a few hours of your time when I am particularly busy with my memoirs, and, above all, let us be alone sometimes after dinner, so that we can turn our chairs round to the fire and talk at our ease.—Your affectionate uncle, MOUNT RORKE."

"So he won't pay for a secretary, and wants me to do the work; that's about the meaning of that letter." Frank re−read the letter sentence for sentence, and as he read new sneers and new expressions of scorn rose in his brain in tremulous ebullition. There was scarcely a plan for the chastisement of his uncle that he did not for some fleeting moment entertain, and one most ironical letter he committed to paper; but Maggie would not hear of its being sent, and he was surprised and glad to see that she was not depressed and disheartened at the turn affairs had taken.

"I can do what I like with father; Sally can't, but I can. You leave it me."

"What's the good of that? You can't get round Mount Rorke."

"Never mind; we don't want to get married yet awhile. We'll be engaged, it is nearly the same thing. We shall be able to go anywhere together—up to town, if we only come back the same day. Write a nice letter to your uncle, saying you'll do nothing without his consent; that it is true your affections are very much engaged, but that your first thought is of him—"

"Oh! but my darling, I want to make you mine."

"So you shall—we shall be engaged; father won't consent to our being married, but he can't prevent us being engaged. You'll see, I'll get round father sooner or later; he'll give in."

"But you won't get round Mount Rorke; if he would only come here and see you."

"He won't do that; but one of these days he'll be in London. I suppose he goes to the Park sometimes; we'll go too, you'll introduce me—a little impromptu, and I'll see if I can't get him to like me."

"How clever you are!"

"I understand father."

Still it required all Maggie's adroitness to even partially reconcile Mr. Brookes to Lord Mount Rorke's letter. She accepted without argument that marriage in the present circumstances was out of the question. She even went so far as to cordially assent that a man would be a fool to give his daughter to a man who could not settle a substantial sum of money upon her, and she only ventured to suggest that it would be foolish not to give Lord Mount Rorke the opportunity of changing his mind. She spoke of his immense fortune, and exaggerated it until she made even Berkins seem a paltry creature in the old man's eyes.

Frank was anxious to propitiate Sally. He returned from London with presents for her, and he always spoke to her, looking at her admiringly.

He showed much anxiety, and, fearing that she found it dull at his studio, when the sisters came to tea he begged her to give him Meason's address. Sally tossed her head; she had had enough of Meason, and her manner left no doubt as to her sincerity. But happening to meet Meason a few days after in the train, Frank slipped easily into asking him to come and see him; and in the easy atmosphere of the studio the acquaintanceship soon ripened into intimacy, and after a preliminary ruffling of plumage, Sally restored her old sweetheart to all the rights of wrong. Life went well amid incessant secrets, letter−writing, and tea parties. Grace came to the studio to lunch sometimes, and she had been betrayed into a promise not to say a word about Meason. It was never ascertained whether, in the indiscretion of the marital night, she had betrayed this trust, or whether some jealous enemy had spoken or written to Mr. Brookes on the subject; but certain it is that one joyful day when Meason, Sally, and Maggie were eating oysters, and Frank was twisting the corkscrew into a bottle of Chablis, there came an ominous ringing at the door.

“I wonder who that can be. Shut up, Triss.”

“Perhaps it is father.”

“He is in London.”

“I'm not so sure about that.”

“No matter—we don't want to see them.”

“Rather not! They wouldn't have known we were here had it not been for that dog.”

“I must go and see who it is. Come here, sir; come here, you brute.”

“Supposing it is father?”

“Get behind that piece of tapestry. I'll say that Meason and I were having some oysters.”

“Come here, sir. I'd better tie up that dog—I wonder who it is?”

“Open the door.”

“Oh! Mr. Brookes, quite an unexpected pleasure.”

“I have come, sir, for my daughters.”

“Your daughters? Your daughters are not here. Mr. Brookes.”

“I have reason to know they are here, and I will not leave without them.”

“You will do well to let us in, Mr. Escott; we are determined—”

“Who are you? What business is it of yours?”

“Should you refuse us admission we are resolved to wait here till evening, till midnight if necessary!” exclaimed Berkins. “I say again you will do well to admit us, and so avoid a scandal on the green.”

“You can come in if you like.”

“Will you kindly chain up that dog of yours?”

“Well, this is coming it too strong; this is a little too 'steep.' If Mr. Brookes refuses to believe my word that his daughters are not here he may come in and look for them, and to facilitate his search I will tie up the dog—(the dog is tied up). But you, what brings you here? What the devil, I should like to know, brings you here, poking your nose into other people's business?”

“Mr. Brookes, will you answer him?”

“I must decline your offer to admit me unaccompanied by my son−in−law. We shall not stay long.”

“All this seems to me very extraordinary, but since you wish it, Mr. Brookes, pray enter.”

“Is that dog tied up quite securely?”

“Quite. I think you know Mr. Meason?”

“Mr. Meason knows very well that I do not wish to know him.”

“If you only come here to insult my guest, the sooner you go out the better. Had I known that you intended to behave in this fashion I should have left you standing outside till morning. I'll not have—”

“Never mind, Escott; I'm off. Mr. Brookes and I are no longer on speaking terms, that's all! I'll see you later on.”

“Don't go, pray.”

“I think I must.”

“I am surprised, Frank,” said Mr. Brookes, when Meason was gone, “that you should seek your friends among the enemies of my family.”

“We will not discuss that question now. I never heard of such conduct —you force your way into my studio, and apparently for no purpose but to insult my guest. You see your daughters are not here.”

“I am by no means satisfied with that,” said Berkins, opening a door. “I must see behind that piece of tapestry.”

“No, you shall not. I have had just about enough of this. How dare you? God's truth—” and as Berkins seemed determined to continue his search, Frank caught him by the collar.

But Berkins was tall and strong, and showed no intention of allowing himself to be thrown out. His long legs were soon extended here and there; his body was sometimes bent back by Frank's weight, once he had succeeded in nearly throwing Frank over on the sofa. Mr. Brookes had fled to the door, which, in his excitement, he failed to open, and the struggle was continued until at last, maddened by a most tight and tempting aspect of Berkin's thigh, Triss broke his collar, and in a couple of bounds, reached and fixed his teeth deep in the flesh.

“Triss, you brute, leave go.” But Triss clung to the long−desired thigh. “I'll twist his tail, it will make him

leave go.”

With a savage yelp of pain the dog turned on his master and was hauled instantly off Berkins's thigh.

“I need hardly say that so far as the dog is concerned, I regret, and I am truly sorry for what has occurred.”

“Sir, do you not see what a state I am in; do not stand there making excuses, but lend me your handkerchief. I shall bleed to death if you don't.”

“Shall I tie it up for you?”

“If those girls there would only fetch a doctor.”

Mr. Brookes could not refrain from foolish laughter, and in a moment of wretched despair he declared that it would be all the same in a hundred years time—a remark which would not have failed to irritate Berkins if he had not fainted.

XIII

Next day Willy called at the studio, and Frank told him what had occurred.

“But I don't see why you shouldn't come to the Manor House,” said Willy. “If you will only say something about the Measons, I think it can be made all right.”

“No, I'm not going to turn against Meason; I have always found him a good fellow. I know nothing about his flirtation with Sally.”

“No more do I; I think it has been exaggerated, but, as you know, I never interfere. I wish you would come in to dinner one night.”

“Supposing I were to meet Berkins?”

Willy stroked his moustache.

“No, it is quite impossible that I could return to the Manor House. Your father behaved in a way—well, I will not say what I think of it.”

“Berkins hasn't been to the City since. Grace was over here yesterday, she says he limps about the garden. He'll never forgive you; he says that you didn't call the dog off at once.”

“That's a lie; and I said, 'So far as the incident with the dog is concerned, I am very sorry.'“

“I think that made him more angry than anything else; he thought you were laughing at him.”

“I was not. It was most unfortunate. I shall not give Maggie up. I am writing to−morrow or next day to Mount Rorke.”

All were agreed that things must come right sooner or later. Maggie fought for her lover, and emphatically asserted her engagement. She yielded on one point only—not to visit the studio; but she maintained her right in theory and in practice to go where she liked with him in train or in cart, to walk with him on the cliff, to lunch with him at Mutton's. They found pleasure in thus affirming their love, and it pleased them to see they were observed, and to hear that they were spoken about. Nevertheless the string that sung their happiness had slipped a little, and the note was now not quite so clear or true. Frank could not go to the Manor House; Maggie could not go to the studio. Whether Mount Rorke would consent to their marriage perplexed them as it had not done before.

The summer fades, the hills grow grey, and a salt wind blew up from the sea, blackening the trees, and the beauty of autumn was done. Frank thought of Ireland, and what personal intercession might achieve. She begged of him to go, and he promised to write to her every day.

“Every day, darling, or I shall be miserable.”

“Every day.”

“Arrived safe after a very rough passage. Every one was ill, I most of all.”

She received a post−card:— “It was raining cats and dogs when I got out of the train. Mount Rorke sent a car to meet me; the result is that I am in bed with a bad cold. The house is full of company—people I have known, or known of, since I was a boy; we shall begin pheasant−shooting in a few days. When I am out of bed I shall write a long letter. Do you write to me; I shall be awfully disappointed if I do not get a letter to−morrow morning.”

Extract from a letter:—

“Mount Rorke is considered to be a handsome place, but as I have known it from childhood, as my earliest memories are of it, I cannot see it with the eyes of a professed scenery hunter. I have loved it always, but I do not think I ever loved it more than now, for now I think that one day I shall give it to you. Should that day come—and it will come—what happiness it will be to walk with you under the old trees, made lovelier by your presence, to pass down the glades to the river, watching your shadow on the grass and your image in the stream. We will roam together through the old castle, and I will show you the little bed I used to sleep in, the school−room where I learned my lessons. When I entered the old room I saw in imagination—and oh, how clearly!—the face of my governess; and how easily I see her in the corridor she used to walk down to get to her room.

“Poor, dear, old thing, I wonder what has become of her!

“I saw again the pictures that stirred my childish fancy, and whose meaning I once vainly strove to decipher.

“I came to live here when I was four, immediately after my father's death. I can just remember coming here. I

remember Mount Rorke taking me up in his arms and kissing me. I will not say there is no place like home—I do not believe that; but certainly no place seems so real. Every spot of ground has its own particular recollections. Every bend of the avenue evokes some incident of childish life (in Ireland we call any road leading to a house an avenue, even if it is absolutely bare of trees; we also speak of rooks as crows, and these two provincialisms jarred on my ear after my long stay in Sussex). Mount Rorke is covered with trees—great woods of beech and fir—and at the end of every vista you see a piece of blue mountain. A river passes behind the castle, winding through the park; there are bridges, and swans float about the sedges, and there are deer in the glades. The garden,—I do not know if you would like the garden; it is old− fashioned—full of old−fashioned flowers—convolvuluses, Michaelmas daisies, marigolds; hedges clipped into all sorts of strange and close shapes. There is a beautiful avenue behind the garden (an avenue in the English sense of the word) where you may pace to and fro and feel an exquisite sense of solitude; for when the castle had passed out of the hands of Irish princes—that is to say, brigands—it was turned into a monastery, and I often think, as I look on the mossy trees—the progeny of those under whose leafage the monks told their beads—that all happened that I might throw my arm about you some beautiful day, and whisper, 'My wife, this is yours.'"

"How beautifully he writes," said Sally reflectively.

"You never had a lover who wrote to you like that. Do you remember how Jimmy used to write?"

"I don't know how he wrote to you, but his letters to me, I will say that, were quite as nice as anything Frank could write. You needn't toss your head, you are not Lady Mount Rorke yet."

Sally refused to hear, but presently, seeing a cloud on her sister's face, and thinking the letter contained some piece of unpleasantness, she relented, and pressed her to continue.

"The house is full of people—people whom I have known all my life— and they make a great deal of me. I have to tell them about Italy, and they ask me absurd questions about Michael Angelo or Titian, Leonardo or Watteau.... The house party is a large one, and we have people to dinner every day; and in the evening the drawing−room, with its grim oak and escutcheons and rich modern furniture, is a pretty sight indeed. There is a lady here whom I knew in London, Lady Seveley; and I have had suspicions that Mount Rorke would like me to marry her. But she has the reputation of being rather fast, so perhaps the old gentleman is allowing his thoughts to wander where they should not. I hope not for his sake, for I hear she is devoted to a young Irishman, a Mr. Fletcher, a journalist in London. I met them at Reading once in most suspicious circumstances. He is the son of a large grazier, one of my uncle's tenants, and she is, I suppose, so infatuated that she could not resist the temptation of calling on his family. She was careful not to speak of her intentions to anybody, but waited until she got a favourable opportunity and slipped off to pay her visit. The Fletchers live about half a mile from the castle. I was riding that way, and met her coming out of their house. I got off my horse and walked back together. I hope Mount Rorke will not hear of her ladyship's escapade; he would be very angry, for the Fletchers are people who would be asked to have something to eat in the housekeeper's room if they called at the Castle. In London one knows everybody, but in the country we are more conservative."

"I hope she won't cut you out," said Sally. "It would be a sell for you if she did. Go on."

"No, I shan't, you are too insulting."

"Who began it? You told me that I didn't get such nice letters as you. Pray go on."

"I do not know if you would think her handsome. I don't. She is, however, an excellent musician; we play duets together every evening, to Mount Rorke's intense delight. You know my dialogue between a lady and a gentleman? She has written it down for me and corrected a few mistakes; I think I shall publish it. Darling, I love you better than any one in the world; you are all the world to me; try to love me a little—you will never find any one to love you as I do."

"Well, you can't find anything peculiarly disagreeable to say about that, I think."

Extract from another letter:—

"All the visitors have gone; Mount Rorke and I are quite alone. He is kindness itself, and does not bother me about his memoirs; but from what I hear that book will make one of the biggest sensations ever made in the literary world. I want him to publish it now, but he only smiles and shakes his head. He says: 'What is the use of setting the world talking about you when you are alive; as long as I am alive I can see those I want to see, and be with them far more personally than I could by placing in their hands three volumes in 8vo; the 8vos are only useful when you have passed into darkness, and are not yet reconciled to dying quite out of the minds of men. I do

not desire to be remembered by those who will live three hundred years hence, but I confess that I should like to modulate the pace of forgetfulness according to my fancy, and be remembered, let us say, for the next sixty or seventy years. I find no fault with death but its abruptness, and that I hope to be able to correct. The vulgar and most usual plan is children, but children are no anodyne to oblivion, whereas a good book in a certain measure is.'

"These are almost the words Mount Rorke used, and I quote them as exactly as possible, so that you may see what kind of man he is. We pulled our chairs round to the fire and had a real good talk. I know no better company than Mount Rorke. He has seen everything, read everything, and known everybody worth knowing; he is a mine of information, and, what is far better, he is a complete man of the world; and long contact with the world has left him a little cynical, otherwise he is perfect. I told him the story about Berkins, and he laughed; I never saw him laugh so before; and when I told him that I had told Berkins, as he was tying up his leg, that so far as the incident with the dog was concerned, I regretted deeply what had occurred, he could not contain himself. He rang the bell, and we had old Triss up. He asked a great deal about you; I leave you to imagine what I said. How did he expect me to describe my darling? I told him of your subtle, fascinating ways, of your picturesque attitudes, and your exquisite little black eyes. 'I think I see her,' he said; 'little eyes that light up are infinitely more interesting than those big, limpid, silly eyes that everybody admires.' I am now doing a water−colour sketch from the photograph—the one in which you stand with your hands behind your back and your head on one side—for him. I am getting on with it pretty well. Ah! if only I had you here for an hour (I should like to have you here for ever, of course; but now I am speaking artistically, not humanly), I think I could get it really like you; there are one or two things that the photo does not give me. I shall send the sketch to Dublin to be framed; it will be a nice present for Mount Rorke.

"My darling, you must not be anxious; all will come right in time— have a little patience. He is already much more reconciled to the match than he was when I arrived, and if your father will refrain from speaking too much about that hateful question, I am sure that all difficulties can be surmounted."

She wrote to him three or four times a week, and on beautiful hand−made paper, delicately scented.

Extract from a letter:—

"We went up to town yesterday by the ten o'clock train West Brighton; and so that we might have more money to spend, we went third class. Father doesn't like us going third class, but I don't think it matters if you get in with nice people. We were very jolly. The Shaws went with us. They are very nice girls. They had to leave us at Victoria, and I and my cousin, Agnes Keating, went shopping together. We met the Harrisons at Russell &Allen's. We saw there some lovely dresses—I wish you had been with us, for I have confidence in your taste, and when I choose a thing myself I am never sure that I like it. The assistant was so polite; she told me to ask for Miss —−; she said she would like to fit me. Sally was coming up with us, but she changed her mind and remained at home, I was very glad, for she is wretchedly cross, and not looking at all well. You would not admire her in the least; she is growing very yellow. But I don't mean to be ill−natured, so we'll let Sally bide, as we say in Sussex. After Russell &Allen's we went to Blanchard's, and had a nice lunch. Grace was in town; she chaperoned us, and paid for everything; it was very kind of her. Then we went to the theatre, and saw a play which we did not care about much. There was a very stupid 'tart' in it. I do like 'gadding,' don't I? But, oh, my darling Frank, gadding is not really gadding without you. How I miss you, how we all miss you, but I especially. The Keatings came over to tea to−day, and they asked about you. Blanche wants you to write something in her album, and she admired immensely the drawing you gave me. She is very artistic in her tastes; I think you would like her.

"But I have a bit of news that I think will amuse you. You remember Mrs. Horlock's old dog—not the blind Angel; he's old too. But I mean the real old dog,—the one twenty years old, that once belonged to a butcher. He never smelt very sweet, as you know, but latterly he was unbearable, and the General resolved on a silent and secret destruction. He purchased in Brighton a bottle of chloroform. It was the dead of the night and pitch dark. However, he reached the end of the passage in safety; but suddenly he uttered a fearful shriek and dropped the chloroform. He thought he had seen a ghost; but it was only Mrs. Horlock, who was going her rounds, letting down the mouse− traps and supplying the little creatures with food. The General blurted out various excuses. He said that he had come to relieve the cock parrot's tooth−ache—that he feared the Circassian goat was suffering from spinal complaint and the squirrels from neuralgia. But his protestations proved unavailing, and now he eats his meals in silence. And to make matters worse, the old dog did die a few days after—the General says from old age, but Mrs. Horlock avows that his death resulted from fright. 'He was a sweet, cunning old thing, and no doubt

knew all about that plan to destroy him.' I think this would make an excellent subject for a comic sketch; I wish you would do one —the General dropping the bottle; Mrs. Horlock, surrounded by closed mouse−traps and crumbs, sternly upbraiding him.

"I see lots of Emily Pierce. Every Sunday I have tea with her, and sometimes lunch; but she doesn't come here. I am afraid I couldn't get on at all without her; we do everything together, and we hit it off so well.

"Sally has been staying in Kent. I do not know what's up, but she seems to see everything *couleur de rose*; everything in Kent is better in her estimation than anywhere else. The men dance so much better for one thing. I am glad she is so happy, and I wish she would get married and stay there. Father says he has a cough that tears him to pieces, but I haven't heard it yet."

The elementary notion of a woman in love is to surround, to envelop the man she loves, with her individuality, and to draw him from all other influences. And the woman in love strives to accomplish this by ceaseless reiteration of herself or himself seen through herself. So Maggie with her nervous, highly−strung, febrile temperament could not refrain from constantly striking the lyre of love. Her hands were for ever on the chords. Letters and notes of all kinds; impetuous messages asking him when he would return; letters apologising for her selfishness—he had better remain with Mount Rorke until his consent had been obtained; resolutions and irresolutions, ardours, lassitudes, forgetfulness followed fast in strange and incomprehensible contradiction. And Frank was asked daily to perform some small task. There was always something; and Frank undertook all he was asked to do, for he loved to be as much as possible in that circle of life in which his sweetheart lived, and to feel her presence about him.

Extract from a letter:—

"Mount Rorke and I had a long and serious talk about you last night. He is against the marriage, but then he is against marriage in general. He said with his quiet, cynical laugh, 'I daresay she is a pretty girl—I can read the truth through your romantic descriptions. I am convinced that she is very charming. But are you quite sure that you will never meet another equally charming girl? Remember the world is a very big place, and the stock of women is large; are you sure that you will be able to enjoy the charm which now rules and enchants you for thirty, forty years without wearying of it? These are the questions you have to consider, which marriage entails.' I need hardly tell you what answer I made, and how I tried to convince him that your charms are those that a man capable of appreciating them could not weary of. Indeed I think I made him rather a neat answer—I said there are books in one volume, in two volumes, in three volumes, and there are books that you can take down and read at any time. He laughed; it rather tickled his fancy. And he said, 'Quite true, there are some books and some women that one never tires of—that is to say, that some people never tire of. I haven't been so fortunate or unfortunate, but that by the way. I admit such cases may occur. I will go further— I will admit that a man's life may be made or marred by his taking to himself a wife; and if Miss Brookes were a really nice girl—if she were the one girl in a million, and if I were sure that your passion for each other has its root in deeper and more lasting sympathies than those of the skin (these were his exact words)—believe me, my dear Frank, I should not think of opposing the marriage. I shall be in London during the season, and no doubt an occasion will arise, of which I promise you to avail myself, of making this model young lady's acquaintance. I will tell you what I think of her; she won't deceive me, let her try how she will. There is only one thing I bar—one thing must not be, one thing I will not tolerate—a bad marriage.' I lost my temper for a moment, but Mount Rorke did not lose his, and I soon came round. It is annoying to be spoken to in that way; but I remembered that he had not seen you, and I consoled myself by thinking of how great his conversion will be when he does. My only fear is that he'll want to marry you himself. So, you see, my own darling, my uncle is on the 'give,' and we shall win soon and easily. The only real obstacle is your father's pig−headedness on all matters in which money enters. I think with terror of his meeting with Mount Rorke. If he speaks to Mount Rorke as he spoke to me, my uncle will take up his hat and wish him good−morning. Do you exert all your influence. Do leave no stone unturned. All depends upon you."

Extract from another letter:—

"I am weary of this place, and I long to see you. My longing is such that I can resist it no longer. Besides, nothing would be gained by remaining here. Mount Rorke will not say more than he has said. In a few days—think of that—I shall be with you. With what eagerness I look forward. How gladly I shall see the train leave the dreary bogs and the blue mountains of the West and pass into the pasture lands of Meath; how gladly I shall hail the brown, slobber−faced city of Dublin; with what delight I shall step on board the packet—I shall not

think of sea sickness—and watch the line of the low coast disappear, then the Welsh mountains and castles, looking so like an illustrated history of England. I must spend two days in London, alas! I must order some new clothes. Victoria Station, with all its doors and cab stands, and book−stalls, the Sussex scenery, the woodlands, the Downs, the plunging through tunnels, and then you. Darling, I cannot believe that such happiness is in store for me."

All happened as he had anticipated. At Victoria the usual difficulties had arisen about the dog. Triss was growling, the guard was cringing, and, with reference to no stoppage before we come to Redhill, the necessity of a muzzle was being argued.

"I am certain it is she," and he followed with his eyes the tall, swinging figure in the black cloth dress. Then he saw the clear plump profile, so white, of Lizzie Baker.

"Here, give me the chain, I'll tie the dog up."

"But the muzzle, sir."

A muzzle was procured, and Frank ran to the third class carriage where he had seen Lizzie enter.

"Lizzie! Lizzie!"

"Oh, Mr. Escott, who would have thought of seeing you! It is such a time—"

"Yes, isn't it; how long? But are you going to Brighton?"

"Yes."

"So am I; but—let me get you a first−class ticket. Guard, have I time to change my ticket?"

"No, sir, the train is going to start; get in." "Do you get out, Lizzie; I'll pay the difference at Brighton."

"No time for changing now, sir; are you getting into this carriage?"

He could not forego the pleasure of being with Lizzie. An old woman with a provision basket on her lap drew her skirts aside and made way for him; there were three dirtily dressed girls—probably shop girls; they sat whispering together, a little troubled by the publicity; there were two youths, shabbily dressed, their worn boots and trousers covered with London mud. He was surprised, and he did not for a moment understand or realise his company. Frank had never been in a third−class carriage before.

"I'm afraid you won't be comfortable here."

"Oh, yes, I shall; I'd just as soon travel in one class as another— much sooner when it means being with you."

"None of your nonsense; I see you haven't changed. Well, who'd have thought it? Just fancy meeting you, and after all this time."

"How long is it? It must be nearly two years. I haven't seen you sincethat day we went up the river."

"Yes, you have."

"No; where did I see you since?"

"At the bar; I didn't leave the 'Gaiety' for several days after."

"No more you did; I remember now. But why did you leave without letting me know where you were going?"

"I didn't know I was leaving till the morning, and I left in the afternoon. A lot of us were changed suddenly. The firm couldn't get enough young ladies to do the work at the Exhibition."

"But you didn't leave an address."

"Yes, I did."

"No, you didn't; I asked the manager, and he told me you had left no address. They didn't know where you had gone."

"Did he say so? You mean Mr. Fairlie, I suppose—now I come to think of it, it is the rule of the firm not to give information about the young ladies. I am sorry."

"Are you?"

"I am, really. We had a very pleasant day up the river—Reading; you took me to Reading."

"Yes; but you would never come again."

"Wouldn't I? I suppose I couldn't find time—I did enjoy myself. What a lovely day it was."

"Yes; and do you remember how like a beautiful smile the river lay? And do you remember the bulrushes? I rowed you in among the rushes; you wet the sleeve of your dress plunging your arm in. I remember it, that white plump arm."

"Get along with you."

"I wanted to make a sketch of you leaning over the boatside with your lapful of water−lilies; I wish I had."

“I wish you had, too; you wrote a little poem instead. It was very pretty, but I should have liked the picture better. You gave me the poem next day when you came in to lunch. You had lunch at the bar, and I was so cross with you because you said I hadn't wiped the glass. It was all done to annoy me because I had been talking to that tall, rather stout young man, with the dark moustache, whom you were so jealous of. Don't you remember?”

“Yes, I remember; and I believe it was that fellow who prevented you from coming out with me again.”

“No, it wasn't; but don't speak so loud, all these people are listening to you.”

Frank met the round stare of the girls; and, turning from the dormant curiosity of the old woman, he said—

“Do you remember the locks, how frightened you were; you had never been through a lock before; and the beautiful old red brick house showing upon the lofty woods; and coming back in the calm of the evening, passing the different boats, the one where the girls lay back in the arms of the young men, the flapping sail, and the dreamy influences of the woods where we climbed and looked into space over the railing?”

“At the green−table—don't you remember?”

“Yes, I remember every hour of that day; we had lunch at the 'Roebuck.'“

“You haven't spoken of the lady we saw there. Lady Something—I forget what you said her name was; you said she had been making up to you.”

“I dined with her one night, and we went to the theatre.”

“You may do that without it being said that you are making up to a gentleman.”

“Of course; I should never think of saying you made up to me.”

“I should hope not, indeed.”

“I should never think of accusing you of having made up to me; you have always treated me very badly.”

Lizzie did not answer. He looked at her, puzzled and perplexed, and he hoped that neither the girls nor the old lady had understood.

“I am sorry; I really didn't mean to offend you. All I meant to say was that the lady we saw at the 'Roebuck' had been rather civil to me; had—well I don't know how to put it—shown an inclination to flirt with me—will that suit you?—and that I had not availed myself of my chances because I was in love with you.”

Encouraged by a sunny smile, Frank continued: “You wouldn't listen to me; you were very cruel.”

“I am sure I didn't mean to be cruel; I went out on the river with you, and we had a very pleasant day. You didn't say then I was cruel.”

“No, you were very nice that day; it was the happiest day of my life. I was in love with you; I shall never care for any one as I cared for you.”

“I don't believe you.”

“I swear it is true. When you left the 'Gaiety' I searched London for you. If you had only cared for me we might have been very happy. As sure as a fellow loves a woman, so sure is she to like some other chap. Tell me, why did you go away and leave no address?”

“I did leave an address.”

“Well, we won't discuss that. Why didn't you write to me? You knew my address. It's no use saying you didn't.”

“Well, I suppose I was in love with some one else.”

“Were you? You always denied it. Ah! so you were in love with some one else? I knew it—I knew it was that thick−set fellow with the black moustache. I wonder how you could like him—the amount of whisky and water he used to drink.”

“Yes, usen't he? I have served him with as many as six whiskies in an afternoon—Irish, he always drank Irish.”

“How could you like a man who drank?”

“But it wasn't he—I assure you; I give you my word of honour. It really wasn't. I'd tell you if it was.”

“Well, who was it, then? It couldn't be the old man with the beard and white teeth?”

“No.”

“Was it that great tall fellow, clean shaven?”

“No, it wasn't; you'll never guess; There's no use trying. However, it is all over now.”

“Why? Did he treat you badly? Whose fault was it?”

“His. And the chances I threw away. He behaved like a beast. I had to give up keeping company with him.”

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. He changed very much towards me lately; he went messing about after other girls, and we had words, and I left."

"You will make it up. Perhaps you are mistaken."

"Mistaken—no; I found their letters in his pocket."

"There are always rows between sweethearts; and then they kiss and make it up, and love each other the more."

"No, I shall not see him again. We were going to be married; no, it is all over. It was a little hard at first, but I am all right now."

"I am sorry. Do you think there is no chance of making it up?"

"I should have thought that you would be glad; men are so selfish they never think of any one but themselves."

"How do you mean? Why should I be glad that your marriage was broken off?"

"You said just now that you liked me very much, I thought—"

"So I do like you very much. Once I was in love with you—that day when we walked up the steep woods together."

"And you don't care for me any longer?"

"I don't say that; but I am engaged to be married."

"Oh!"

"Had you not snubbed me so I might have been married to you."

"Who are you going to be married to—to the lady we saw that day?"

"Oh, no, not to her."

"I don't believe you. You mean to say you haven't been to see her since."

"I assure you—−"

"You mean to say you haven't seen her?"

"I don't say that. I've just come from Ireland. I've been staying with my uncle. She spent a week with us; that's all I have seen of her. I am going now to see the young lady whom I am engaged to."

"And when will you be married?"

"I don't know; there are a great many difficulties in the way. Perhaps I shall never marry her."

"Nonsense. I know better. You think it will take me in. I'll never be taken in again, not if I know it."

"I don't want to take you in."

"I don't know so much about that. Is she very pretty? I suppose you are very much in love with her?"

"Yes, I love her very much. Dark, not like you a bit—just the opposite."

"And you met her since you saw me?"

"No."

"Ah, I thought as much, and yet you told me the day we went up the river together that you never had and couldn't care for any one elsebut me. Men are all alike—they never tell the truth."

"Wait a minute; wait a minute. I knew her long before I knew you; I have known her since I was a boy, but that doesn't mean that I have been in love with her since I was a boy. I never thought of her until you threw me over, until long after; it was last summer I fell in love with her."

Lizzie's eyes were full upon him, and it seemed to them that each could see and taste the essence of the other's thought.

"What have you been doing ever since? You have told me nothing about yourself."

"Well, after trying vainly to find you—having searched, as I thought, all Speirs and Pond's establishments in London, I tried to resign myself to my fate. I assure you, I was dreadfully cut up—could do nothing. My life was a burden to me. You have been in love, and you know what an ache it is; it used to catch me about the heart. There was no hope; you were gone—gone as if the earth had swallowed you. I got sick of going to the 'Gaiety' and asking those girls if they knew anything about you; so to cure myself I went to France, and I worked hard at my painting. In such circumstances there is only one thing— work."

"You are right."

"Yes; nothing does you any good but work. I worked in the *atelier* — that's the French for studio—all the

morning, and in the afternoon I painted from the nude in a public studio. I had such a nice studio— such a jolly little place. I was up every morning at eight o'clock, my model arrived at nine, and I worked without stopping (barring the ten or twelve minutes' rest at the end of every hour) till twelve. Then I went to the cafe to have breakfast—how I used to enjoy those breakfasts—fried eggs all swimming in butter, a cutlet, after, nice bread and butter, then cock your legs up, drink your coffee, and smoke your cigarette till one."

"Did you like the French cafe better than the 'Gaiety'?"

"It is impossible to compare them. I made a great deal of progress. I began one picture of a woman in a hammock, a recollection of you. You remember when we passed under those cedar branches, close to the 'Roebuck,' we saw a hammock hung by the water's edge, and I said I would like to see you in it, and stand by and rock you. I had intended to send it to the Academy, but I never could finish it, the French model was not what I wanted—I wanted you; and I was obliged to leave France, and I could get no one in Southwick. Once a fellow changes his model he is done for; he never can find his idea again." "Where's Southwick?"

"A village outside Brighton, three or four miles, not more. I have a studio there; you must come and see it."

"You must paint me. But what would your lady love say if she found me in your studio? She'd have me out of it pretty quick. Tell me about her; I want to hear how you fell in love."

"It happened in the most curious, quite providential way. I have told you that I knew them since I was a boy. Maggie has often sat on my knee."

"Maggie is her name, then?"

"Yes, don't you like the name? I do. Her brother was a school−fellow of mine. We were at Eton together, and one time when Mount Rorke was away travelling they asked me to spend my holidays at Southwick. That's how I got to know them. One day Maggie and Sally were at my studio; Sally has a sweetheart—"

The sentence was cut short by a sudden roar. The train had entered a tunnel, and the speakers made pause, seeing each other vaguely in the dim light, and when they emerged into the cold April twilight Frank told the story of Triss and Berkins, Mr. Brookes struggling with the door, and the girls rushing screaming from their hiding−place; and Frank's imitation of Berkin's pomposity amused Lizzie, and she laughed till she cried. He continued till the joke was worn bare; then, fearing he had been talking too much of himself, he said: "Now, I have been very candid with you, tell me about yourself."

"There is nothing to tell; I think I have told you all." Then she said, slipping, as she spoke, into minute confidences: "When I left the 'Gaiety' I went for a few days to the Exhibition, but *he* wanted to leave London, so I applied to the firm to remove me to Liverpool (not Liverpool Street; the girl—I suppose it was Miss Clarke, for I wrote to her—made a mistake, or you misunderstood her). We remained in Liverpool a year, and then we came back to London, and I went to the 'Criterion,' but I couldn't stop there long; he was so awfully jealous of me; he used to catechise me every evening—who had I spoken to? How long I had spoken to this man? Once I slapped a man's face in fun because he squeezed my hand when I handed him the change across the counter. There was such a row about it. I don't know how *he* heard of it. I think he must have got some one to watch me. I often suspected the porter—the bigger one of the two; but you don't know the 'Criterion.' You used to go to the 'Gaiety.'"

"Perhaps he saw you himself. I suppose he used to come to the bar?"

"No, not unless—no, not very often. He banged me about."

"Banged you about, the brute! Good heavens! How could you like a man who would strike a woman? Who was he? Was he a gentleman—I mean, was he supposed to be a gentleman? Of course he wasn't really a gentleman, or he wouldn't have struck you."

"He was in a passion, he was very sorry for it afterwards. Then I left the firm and went to live in lodgings; he allowed me so much a week."

"He was a man of some means?"

"No, but it didn't cost him much, he knew the people. We were going to be married, but he got ill, and we thought we had better wait; and I went to the 'Gaiety' again. I was a fool, of course, to think so much about him, for I had plenty of chances. One man who used to lunch there three times a week wanted me to marry him, and take me right away. I think he was in the printing business—a man who was making good money; but I could not give Harry up."

"Harry is his name, then?"

"Yes; but it all began over again. It was just the same at the 'Gaiety' as it was at the 'Criterion.' He would never

leave me alone, but kept on accusing me of flirting with the gentlemen that came to the bar. Now, you know as well as I do what the bar is. You must be polite to the gentlemen you serve. There are certain gentlemen who always come to me, and don't care to be served by any one else, and if I didn't speak to them they wouldn't come to the bar. The manager is very sharp, and would be sure to mention it."

"Whom do you mean? That fellow with the yellow moustache that walks about with his frock−coat all open—a sort of apotheosis of sherry and bitters?"

"That's what you called him once before. You see I remember. He is very fond of sherry and bitters. But I was saying that Harry would keep on interfering with me, pulling me over the coals. We had such dreadful rows. He accused me of having gone with gentlemen to their rooms—a thing I never did. I could stand it no longer, and we agreed to part."

"How long is that ago?"

"About three weeks. I could stand it no longer, I couldn't remain at the 'Gaiety,' so I resolved to leave."

"Why couldn't you remain at the 'Gaiety,' the manager didn't know anything about it?"

"No, he knew nothing about it, it wouldn't have mattered if he had, but after a break up like that you can't remain among people you know —you want to get right away; there's nothing like a change. Besides I mightn't get such a good chance again; I had the offer of a very good place in Brighton, and I took it—a new restaurant, they open to−morrow. I get thirty pounds a year and my food."

"And lodging?"

"No, they are very short of accommodation, and I have taken a room in one of the streets close by—Preston Street. Do you know it?"

"Perfectly, off the Western Road."

"The lady who has the house knew my poor mother—a very nice woman— will let me have a bedroom for five shillings a week, and I shall be allowed to use her sitting−room when I want it, which, of course, won't be very often, for I shall be at business all day."

The train rolled along the platform; Frank asked the porter when there would be a train for Southwick, and was told he would have half an hour to wait.

"I shall have time to drive you to Preston Street."

"Oh, no, please don't! She will be waiting for you—you will miss your train."

XIV

About four in the afternoon he left off painting, and went to Brighton for a couple of hours. The little journey broke up the day, he bought the evening papers, and it was pleasant to glance from the news to those who passed, and to look upon the sunny and hazy sea. He liked to go to Mutton's, and regretted Lizzie was not there, instead of behind a bar serving whisky and beer. But he went to the bar. It was a German establishment, decorated with the mythological art of Munich, and enlivened with a discordant band. The different rooms were fitted with bars of various importance. Lizzie was engaged at the largest—that nearest the entrance. At half−past five this bar was thronged with all classes. Beer and whisky were drunk hurriedly, with a look of trains on the face. The quietest time was from half−past three to half−past four, during these hours the dining−room was alone in the presence of the awful goddesses and a couple of drowsy waiters. Most of the girls were out, some two or three read faded novels in the sloppy twilight; a group of four or five men who had lingered from half−hour to half− hour turned their backs, and talked among themselves; sometimes a couple would condescendingly address Lizzie, and tease her with rude remarks; or else Frank found her having a little private chat with an old gentleman, a youth, or, may be, the waiter.

Lizzie had her bar manners and her town manners, and she slipped on the former as she would an article of clothing when she lifted the slab and passed behind. They consisted principally of cordial smiles, personal observations, and a look of vacancy which she assumed when the conversation became coarse. From behind the bar she spoke authoritatively, she was secure, it was different—it was behind the bar; and she spoke with a cheek and a raciness that at other times were quite foreign to her. “I will not sleep with you to−night if you don't behave yourself,” so Frank once heard her answer a swaggering young man. She spoke out loud, evidently regarding her words merely in the light of gentle repartee. What she heard and said in the bar remained not a moment on her mind, she appeared to accept it all as part of the business of the place, and when Frank was annoyed she only laughed.

“Men will talk improper—what does it matter? One doesn't pay attention to their nonsense, and it is only in the bar. Never mind all that, tell me what you have been doing. You didn't come into Brighton yesterday, I suppose?”

“No, I had to go to the Manor House.”

“And how is she—the only one? Are you as much in love with her as ever?”

“I suppose I am; I have begun a portrait of her.”

“What, another! You never finish anything. I shan't have that when I come and sit for you. I shall make you finish my portrait.”

“Ah, yes; when you come and sit. But, joking apart, when will you come? I should so like to show you my studio. It really looks very nice now. When will you come?”

“I have no time.”

“Why not come next Sunday; it is your Sunday off.”

“What would Maggie say if she found me there? She'd have my eyes out.”

“If she did find it out she'd know you came to sit; but as a matter of fact she'd know nothing about it. You come and lunch with me about twelve—they're all in church about that time.”

“And you never go to church, you wicked boy. I don't know that I dare trust myself with you.”

A scruple jarred the even strain of his desire to paint Lizzie's portrait, but his scruple vanished in one of her sweet sunny smiles, and he gave her all information about the train she would have to take to reach Southwick by twelve o'clock.

He ordered some delicacies in the way of potted meats, and there was a bottle of champagne in a bucket of ice when she arrived.

“Do you keep your champagne in ice? We never do in the bar. When the gentlemen want it they have a piece to put in their wine.”

“I wish you'd try to forget your gentlemen when you come here.”

Lizzie began to cry, and it was hard to console her; she said that Frank had spoilt her lunch for her.

"It is because you are so much superior to the men I see you speaking to. How can I help feeling annoyed that you should be serving drinks?"

"But I've got to get my living. You don't suppose I serve in a bar because I like it?"

"No, of course not; but don't let us talk any more about it. You're going to sit to me, and I want to do as pretty a portrait of you as I can. All that beautiful brown hair, and that hat! Let me take it from your head!" Frank had bought this hat for her and had handed it to her over the counter, thereby bringing censure upon her from the manager. "Let's forget what I said. The hat suits you. There, now against the light, just a three−quarter face."

At the end of half an hour he said she was a very good sitter and this pleased her, and she tried to keep the pose till the clock struck, but at the end of fifty minutes she said: "I must get up," and she came round to see what he was doing.

"Now you mustn't criticise it," he said. "It's only a beginning. You've forgiven me my remarks about the bar?"

"Don't remind me of it again."

But he could not get it out of his head that he had annoyed her, and was unable to apply himself to his painting; perhaps for this reason his drawing went wrong, and his colour became muddy, and the thought struck him that if Maggie were to find this portrait about the studio she would certainly ask him whose portrait it was,

"I can't paint to−day," he said, getting up from his easel.

"And why can't you paint?" The question seemed to him at first a stupid one, and then she showed a perception that surprised him. "Are you afraid the young lady you're engaged to might come and catch me sitting to you?"

The fear that this might happen had been floating in the back of his mind for the last half hour; he had kept Lizzie too long in the studio, and it was not improbable that the girls might knock at his door at any moment, and if they did it would be impossible for him not to answer. Triss would bark.

"Well," she said, "I won't keep you any longer."

"No, I assure you," he said aloud, and within himself, "I'd give a sovereign if I could get her to the station without being seen."

And he thought he had done so as he returned half an hour afterwards across the green. Maggie was waiting for him. "Come to ask me to dine at the Manor House," he thought; but she told him that she knew all about his visitor, and, despite all Frank's efforts to pacify her she grew more violent, more excited until at last she told him she didn't want to see him any more, that he was to go away, that she gave him his liberty.

"What an excitable girl she is! I'll go there this evening and try to coax her out of her anger. I must try to explain to her that a painter must have models. If we were married we shouldn't have more than a thousand a year to live on at the outside—that is to say, if Mount Rorke and Brookes come to terms, which is not very likely, they might make up a thousand a year between them, that would not be enough for two, and I should have to work; and I couldn't work without a model. The thing is absurd! She'll have to learn that a model is absolutely necessary; we were bound to have a row over that model question, so it might as well come off now as later on, and we shall understand each other better when this has blown over. There is nothing, and never has been anything, between me and Lizzie—my conscience is clear on that score. How pretty she looked to−day—that pale brown hair, so soft and so full of colour. To−day was an unlucky day; I began by being unfortunate with my painting; I never made a worse drawing in my life, and the worst of it was that I did not see that my drawing was wrong until I had begun to paint."

A remembrance of Maggie's gracefulness came dazzling and straining his imagination, and in sharp revulsion of desire he assailed Lizzie with angry and contemptuous memory. She was always in low company—was never happy out of it; it was part of her. How this man liked six dashes of bitters in his sherry, and the other would not drink whisky except in a thin glass.

As he was leaving the studio he received a letter from Maggie, and when he thought of the circumstances in which it was written, he grew genuinely alarmed, for there was no forgetting the seriousness of the letter, and she stated her reasons for the step she was taking without undue emphasis. In its severity and quiet determination the letter did not seem like her, and he suspected forgery, sisterly advice, paternal influence—a family conspiracy. There was but one thing to do. He looked through the various furniture for his hat; and with his head full of citations from the lives of artists illustrative of their conduct, he went to her. But Maggie would not see him.

“Miss Brookes,” the servant said, “is in her room and cannot see you, sir.”

“She will never be mine, she will never be mine,” he muttered as he passed into the town. “But why do I think she'll never be mine?” And looking at the grey sea with only a trace of the sunset left in the grey sky he asked himself if the thought that had crossed his mind were a conviction, a fore−telling or merely a passing fancy created by the difficulty of the moment. He asked himself if he had heard himself saying, “She'll never be mine” and mistaken his own voice for the voice of Fate. Over the shingle bank the sea faded, a thin illusion, dim and promiseful of peace, and as the darkness and the sea filled Frank's soul he, the lightest and most life−loving of men, was filled for once with a sense of failure of life, and as his sorrowing thoughts drifted on he remembered that he had stood with her in hearing of the rising tide, and all his pleading and passion came back to him.

“What are you doing here?”

It was Willy.

“I don't know. Maggie has broken off her engagement; she will never speak to me again, she hopes we may never meet.”

“I don't understand. When did she break off her engagement?”

Frank told his story, and they walked across the green towards the studio.

“Oh, you don't care. I don't believe you are listening to me.”

“I am listening. You never think any one understands what is said to them if they do not instantly jump and call the stars to witness.”

“I suppose I am like that—excitable—the difference between the Celt and the Saxon; and yet I don't know, your sisters are quite as excitable as I am.”

“They take after their mother; I am more like my father.”

“It wouldn't be a bad character for a play—a man who never would believe what you said, unless you threw up your arms and called on the stars.”

“He can't be very bad if he can think about plays,” thought Willy.

“Tell me, Willy, you won't offend me; tell me exactly what you think, did I do anything wrong? I swear to you there is nothing between me and Lizzie—I believe she is over head and ears in love with some fellow who has treated her very badly. She never would tell me who he was. In fact, she told me she had left London so that she might get over it. There would be no use my humbugging you, and I swear there is not, and never was, anything between me and Lizzie Baker. I never expected to see her again. It is very strange how people meet. I have told you all about it. When I go to Brighton I must go somewhere to get a drink, and I really don't see there is any harm in going to the 'Tivoli'; it didn't occur to me to think I should avoid the place merely because she was serving there. I have often been there, I don't deny it. Do you see there is any harm in my going there?”

“I don't like giving an opinion unless I am fully acquainted with the facts; but it seems to me that you might have gone to the 'Tivoli' to have a drink without asking her to your studio.”

“Stay a bit, we'll speak of that presently. I am now telling you how I see Lizzie when I go to Brighton. I often go to Brighton by the four o'clock train, I often go to the 'Tivoli,' and when she is not talking to some one else I talk to her about things in general; but I swear I have never been out with her, that I never saw her except in the bar, and yet Maggie accuses me of keeping a woman in Brighton, and won't hear what I have to say in my defence. This is what she says: 'I have it on unquestionable authority that you have been keeping this woman since you returned from Ireland, perhaps before, and that you go in by the four o'clock train almost daily to see her.' Now I ask you if it is fair to make such accusations—such utterly false and baseless accusations—and then to refuse to hear what a fellow has to say in his defence? By Jove! if I caught the fellow who has been telling lies about me, I'd let him have it. Some of those Southdown Road people have been writing to her, that's about the long and short of it.

“As for having asked her to come to the studio, I assure you my intentions were quite innocent. Perhaps you won't understand what I mean; you don't care for painting, but very often an artist has a longing to paint a certain face, and the desire completely masters him. Well, I had a longing of this kind to paint Lizzie; hers is just the kind of head that suits me—she offered to give me a sitting, Idid not see much harm in accepting, and as I could not paint her in the bar−room, I asked her to the studio. But as for making out there was anything wrong—I assure you she is not that sort of girl. If we were married (I mean Maggie and I) I would have to have models; we'll have to come to an understanding on that point. Now what I want you to do is to explain to Maggie that there is nothing

wrong between me and Lizzie, you can tell her there is nothing—I swear there is nothing; and then you had better explain that an artist must have models to work from."

"Don't ask me. I wish you wouldn't ask me. I make a rule never to interfere in my sisters' affairs. I did once, you remember, and I thought I should never hear the end of it."

"I think you might do this for me."

"Don't ask me. I wish you wouldn't, my dear fellow. I am an exceedingly nervous chap, and I have had nothing but bad luck all my life."

"You think of nothing but yourself. You certainly are the most selfish fellow I ever met. You take no interest in any affairs but your own."

Willy made no answer. He sat stroking his moustache softly with slow crumpled hand. After a long silence, he said: "Tell me, Frank, are you really in love with my sister, or is it only imagination? I know people often think they are in love when their fancy is only a little excited. Very little will pass for being in love, but the real thing is very different from such fancies."

"I assure you I never loved any one like Maggie. Yes, I am sure I love her."

"You may be in love, I don't say you aren't; but I am sure there's no more common mistake than to fancy one's self in love because one's imagination is a bit excited. When you do fall in love, you find out your mistake."

"You think no one was ever in love but yourself. Do you remember when you took me to see her, when we heard her sing 'Love was false as he was fair, and I loved him far too well'?"

Frank knew no more of the story than that: Willy had loved this actress vainly. On occasions Willy had alluded to her, but he had never shown signs of wishing to confide.

"Yes, I remember. How I loved that woman, and what a wreck it has made of my life. I daresay you often think me dull; I can quite understand your thinking me narrow−minded, selfish, and incapable of taking interest in other people's affairs: losing her took the soul out of my life. Now nothing really amuses me—now nothing really interests me. I often think if I were to die, it would be a happy release."

"You never told me anything about it before; wouldn't she marry you?"

"I never knew her. I fell in love with her the first time I saw her, and my love swallowed up everything else. Then I wasn't wrapped up in account−books, although I was always a precise and methodical sort of chap; I was young enough then, now I am an older man than my father. Some fellows have all the luck; everything succeeds with them, every one loves them, men and women, they get all they ask for and more, others get nothing. No matter what I tried to do, something went wrong and I was baulked. I set my heart on that girl, she was the one thing I wanted. I saw her play the same piece fifty times. I knew my passion was hopeless, but I couldn't resist it. Had I known her I might have won her, but there were no means; I never saw her but once off the stage, and that was but a moment. I often sent her presents, sometimes jewellery, sometimes fans or flowers, anything and everything I thought she would like. I sent her a beautiful locket; I paid fifty pounds for it."

"Did she accept your presents?"

"I sent them anonymously."

"Why did you not try to make her acquaintance?"

"I knew nobody in the theatrical world. I was not good at making acquaintances. You might have done it. I am a timid man."

"Did you make no attempt? You might have written."

"At last I did write."

"What did you write?"

"I tried to tell her the exact truth. I told her that I had refrained from writing to her for three years. That I quite understood the folly and the presumption of the effort; but I felt now, as drowning men that clutch at straws, that I must make my condition known to her. I told her I loved her truly and honourably, that my position and fortune would have entitled me to aspire to her hand if fate had been kind enough to allow me to know her. It was a very difficult letter to write, and I just tried to make myself clear. I told her I knew no one in the theatrical world, and that waiting and hoping for some chanceto bring us together would only result in misery long drawn out; that I had some faint hope that this letter might lead her to consider that there might be an exception to the rule that a young lady should not stop to speak to a young man she didn't know. I remember I said 'when men are in deadly earnest, truth seems to shine between the lines they write. I know I am in earnest, and may say that all I hold dear

and precious in life is set in the hope that this letter may not appear to you in the light of one of those foolish and wicked letters which I believe men often write to actresses, and of which I suppose you have been the recipient.' Then I said that I would be at the stage door on the following night, and that I hoped she would allow me to speak a few words to her."

"And did she?"

"I could not speak to her; I lost all courage in that moment. She walked close by me."

"You mean to say you did not speak to her after writing that letter?"

"Call me a fool, an idiot, what you will; I could not do it. I can only compare my feeling to what Livingstone says he felt when he found himself face to face with a lion. He stood staring in the lion's eyes, unable to move."

"She must have thought your letter a practical joke. I wonder what she did think."

"I wrote explaining the unfortunate circumstances as well as I could, and telling her I would come the following night."

"Did you go?"

"Yes."

"Did you speak to her?"

"Yes."

"And she wouldn't speak?"

"She passed on with her maid, but I didn't lose hope until she married. It was always a sort of sad pleasure to go to the theatre to see her. I used to live at the Manor House for two or three months at a time, saving up my money so as to be able to make her some nice present. I wished her to remember me, although she would not speak to me. No one came to the Manor House; there was nothing to do except to read the paper and smoke my pipe. I was sick of my life, and I counted the days that would have to pass till I saw her again—only thirty more days, only nineteen days, only one more week—so I used to count, marking off each day in an almanac, until one day I read the announcement of her marriage; then I knew all hope was at an end. I went mad that night and rushed out of the house, and I should have drowned myself had I not fainted. When I came to, I was weak and delirious, and wandered along the beach, not knowing where I was going. Some fishermen brought me home. My sisters were at school at the time. I believe I was very near dying. I fainted three times one afternoon. I used to lie on the sofa and cry for hours. She married a stockbroker. I believe she didn't care for him at all. Then she died. She was buried in Kensal Green. Whenever I am in London I go and see her grave."

"This is awfully sad."

"Yes; it ruined my life. I never had any luck. Things always went wrong with me."

"I should like to see those letters."

"I haven't got copies. I didn't keep a letter−book in those days. Let's talk of something else. I have some news. I am going in for breeding race−horses."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say. I have calculated it all out, and I find I shall make from fifteen to twenty per cent, on my money."

"By breeding race−horses! And where are you going to breed them?"

"You know those stables on the Portslade Road where the veterinary surgeon used to live? I am going to take that place. The rent is three hundred pounds a year; there are fifty acres of pasture, and stabling for thirty horses. The dwelling−house is not a very aristocratic−looking place, but it will do for the present; when I begin to make money I shall go in for alterations. You can't do everything at once."

"You do astonish me. And where are you going to get the money to do all this? You will require at least twenty thousand pounds capital."

"More than that. You would not be able to work a place like that under twenty−five thousand pounds," Willy replied sententiously. "I have got about eight thousand left of my own, and I came in for a legacy of three thousand at the beginning of this year—an aunt of mine left me the money; and my father has agreed to let me have fourteen thousand on condition of my abandoning all further claim upon him. The bulk of his fortune will now be divided among my sisters. Berkins advised him to accept my offer."

"I should think so indeed; your father is worth ten thousand a year."

"No, nothing like that. His business has been going down for years past. Last year he lost heavily again; if it

weren't for his investments he wouldn't be able to go on with it. The business is done for; I knew that long ago. My father and I could never agree about how the accounts should be kept. That head clerk of his is an awful duffer."

"Yes, but what are you going to do with the shop?"

"The shop was the origin of it all. If it hadn't been for the shop I dare say I never should have thought of the race−horses. My father and I could never work together. I offered to buy his surplus fruit and vegetables, and, without absolutely binding myself to deal with no one else, I had assured him of my chief custom. Naturally I expected something in return—I expected him to let me have peaches in April and strawberries in March. You cannot do this without using a good deal of heating power. I spoke to the gardener several times. Often when I went into the houses I found the pipes nearly cold. I got tired of this, and I paid a man out of my own pocket to keep the furnaces properly stoked, and—would you believe it?—my father actually raised objections—objected to my paying a man to look after his glass−houses as they should be looked after. He said he would not order in any more coke, that I'd have to get along with what there was in the garden; he said he wished the shop at the devil. I saw it was hopeless. You cannot help my father, and he won't help himself, so I threw the whole thing up."

"And when are you going to start the new scheme?"

"Immediately. One of my reasons for accepting fourteen thousand pounds down as a settlement in full was because I was beginning to fear that he might get wind of my marriage. From one or two things I have heard lately, I have reason to suspect that the secret is beginning to ooze out, and I thought it might be as well to take time by the forelock."

"And you told him? What did he say?"

"What people usually say when they criticise other people's lives without knowing anything of their temptations and sufferings. But I want to tell you about my scheme. I have bought Blue Mantle, the winner of the Czarewitch, and only beaten by a length for the Cambridgeshire, a three−year−old, with eight stone on his back; a most unlucky horse—if he had been in the Leger or Derby he would have won one or both. He broke down when he was four years old. By King Tom out of Merry Agnes, by Newminster out of Molly Bawn."

"I didn't know you knew so much about racing."

"I know more than you think. I don't let out all I know."

"And how much did you pay for Blue Mantle?"

"Dirt cheap. I can imagine myself two years hence, when my first batch of yearlings is put up for sale—500, 650, 800, 1000, knocked down for 1000 guineas, brown colt by Blue Mantle out of Wild Rose, bred by William Brookes, Esq."

"I don't think money will come in quite so fast as that."

"Perhaps not; but can't you let a fellow enjoy himself? I never knew any one like you for throwing cold water. I believe you are jealous."

"What nonsense!"

"Well, never mind. I shall be the deuce of a dog, see if I shan't. I always like to kill two birds with one stone if I can, and my business will bring me into connection with the very best in the land. Unfortunately! my people don't care about getting on; now I do. I like to know people who are better than myself—at all events, who are no worse. I shouldn't be surprised if I were dining at Goodwood and Arundel before long. When I go up to town I shall be calling on Lady This and Lady That, and later on I might get in somewhere in the Conservative interest."

"How long you may know a man, and then find you are mistaken in his character," thought Frank. "So vanity is at the bottom of all these efforts to make money."

"When are you coming to the Manor House?"

"Impossible. You know I can't go there so long as your father—"

"Come in one afternoon; he'll ask you to stay to dinner. He has forgotten all about it."

"I cannot come to the Manor House until my engagement to your sister is sanctioned by him."

"The way to get that is to come to the Manor House and talk him into it. For my part, I think, even from his point of view, that it would be better that he should recognise the engagement; nothing can be more damaging than these clandestine meetings."

"What can I do? I will not give her up."

"I never interfere. I have quite enough worries of my own. I must be getting home. It is very late. Good−bye."

The green was as bright as day in the moonlight and Frank watched Willy walking, his shoulders thrown back. He sighed; an undefinable, but haunting melancholy hung about Willy; he often impressed Frank as an old book—a book whose text is trite—which no one will read, and which yet continues to make its mute appeal; a something that has always missed its way, that can hardly be said to be an adequate thing to offer for any man's money, that will soon disappear somehow out of all sight and reckoning.

XV

A few days after he got a letter from Lizzie, saying she was alone and ill, and asking him to come and see her. He took the next train to Brighton. The land−lady's daughter, a girl of about twelve, opened the door to him.

“How is Miss Baker? Is she any better?”

“Please, sir, she is not at all well, she has cold shivers; and mother went away yesterday.”

“And who looks after Miss Baker?”

“Please, sir, I do.”

“You do! Is there no one else in the house?”

“No, sir.”

“Is Miss Baker in bed?”

“No, sir. She said she would get up a little while this afternoon, 'cause she said she thought you was coming.”

“Go and tell her I am here.”

“Please, sir, she said you was to go upstairs—the back room on the second floor, please.”

“Come in.”

“I am so sorry you are ill, Lizzie. What is the matter?”

“I don't know; I think I caught a severe chill. I stayed out very late on the beach.”

“But why are you crying? Do tell me. Can I do anything?”

“No no. What does it matter whether I laugh or cry? Nothing matters now. I don't care what becomes of me.”

“A pretty girl like you; nonsense! Some one rich and grand will fall in love with you, and give you everything you want.”

“I don't want any one to fall in love with me; I am done for—don't care what becomes of me.”

“Do tell me about it. Have you heard anything further about him? Do tell me; don't cry like that.”

“No, no, leave me, leave me! I am so miserable. I don't know why I wrote to you. I hope I shall die.”

“It is very lucky you did write to me, for you are clearly very ill. What is the matter?”

“I don't know; I can't get warm. This room is very cold—don't you think so?”

“Cold? No.”

“I feel cold; my throat is very bad—perhaps I shall be better in the morning.”

“You must see a doctor.”

“Oh, no! I don't want to see a doctor.”

“You must see a doctor.”

“No, no, I beg of you. I only wrote to you because I was feeling so miserable.”

Lizzie stood between him and the door, imploring him not to fetch a doctor, but to go away at once, and to tell no one she had written to him, or that he had been to see her. “Nothing matters now—I am ruined—I don't care what becomes of me.” He marvelled; but soon all considerations were swept away in anxiety for her bodily health; and having extorted a promise from her that she would not leave the room until he came back, he rushed to the nearest chemist and hence to the doctor.

“I want you to come at once, if possible, and see a young lady who, I fear, is dangerously ill. She has not been in Brighton long. She is quite alone. She sent for me. I live at Southwick. I came out at once. I have known her a long time. I may say she is a great friend of mine. I found her very ill—I must say her condition seems to me alarming. I should like her to see a doctor at once. Can you come at once?”

“I am just finishing dinner. I will come in about ten minutes' time. What is the address?”

“20 Preston Street.—I hope he does not think there is anything wrong,” thought Frank. “He look's as if he did,” and with a view of removing suspicion, he said: “She is a young lady whom I have known for some years. We had lost sight of each other until we travelled down in the train together. I say this because I do not wish you to think there is anything wrong.”

“My good sir, I should not allow myself to have any opinions on the matter. I am summoned to attend a patient, and I give the best advice in my power.”

“Yes, but one can't help forming opinions—a beautiful young girl living alone in lodgings, and having apparently for sole protector a young man, are circumstances that might be easily misconstrued, and as I am engaged to be married, I think it right to tell you exactly how I stand in relation to this young woman.”

The doctor bowed.

“Do you not think I did well in making this explanation?”

“It can do no harm; we medical men see so much that we take no notice of anything but our patient. But tell me something of this young lady's suffering. Can you describe the symptoms?”

“She has a racking headache—she is shivering all over—she sits by the fire and cannot get warm. It looks to me as if it were fever.”

“Does she complain of her throat?”

“Yes; she cannot swallow.”

“Probably an attack of quinsy.”

“Is that dangerous?”

“No; but it is infectious.”

“I don't mind about that—she is alone. I will see her through it.”

“I will go round to Preston Street immediately I have finished dinner —in about ten minutes or a quarter of an hour.”

When the doctor had seen Lizzie, he said to Frank, who accompanied him downstairs: “Just as I expected—quinsy. She will take from eight to ten days to get well. We have taken it in time, that's one good thing. The throat is very bad. She must have a linseed poultice, and she must use the gargle. Is there any one in the house who can attend to her?”

“I am afraid not; the landlady went away this morning, leaving no one in the house but that child. She will, I hope, be home to−morrow.”

“In that case you had better have a nurse in; I will give you the address of one.”

When Frank returned he found her lying on the bed weeping. As before, she refused to tell him the cause of her grief. She would make no other answer than that nothing mattered now, that she didn't care what became of her; and when he spoke of going to fetch a nurse, she waved her hands excitedly, declaring she would on no consideration stop in the house with a woman she didn't know. And, hardly able to decide what course he should take, he promised not to leave her; she clung about him, and he was forced to send the child (whose name he now found to be Emma) to the chemist for the linseed, and he wrote a note asking for explicit directions how it should be used. Then he had to persuade Lizzie to go to bed. She resisted him, and it was with great difficulty that he got her boots and stockings off; then she collected her strength, unbuttoned her dress, and took off her stays. Then she said: “Go out of the room for a moment.”

He found his way into the kitchen, and guessing that hot water would be required, he lit a fire. But there was no muslin, and he had to send Emma for some. Lizzie smiled faintly when they entered—Frank with a basin, Emma with a kettle and a parcel of linen. Frank poured some rum into a glass, and beat an egg up with it.

“What is that?” she asked; and her voice was so faint and hoarse that he turned, quite startled.

“Something that will do your throat good and keep your strength up. Possibly you will not be able to eat much to−morrow.” He held the tumbler to her lips, and at length succeeded in getting her to drink it. “Emma, is the kettle boiling?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You had better go downstairs and get some coals, and if you can't find any nightlights you must go out and buy a box. Have you got any money over?”

“Yes, sir, sixpence.”

“Now, Lizzie, let me put this on your throat. Throw your head well back. There, it isn't too hot?”

And all that night he sat by her bedside. Often she could not get her breath, and he had to lift her and prop her up with pillows; and four times he lit the candle, and, with tired eyes, mixed the meal and placed it on her throat. The firelight played upon the ceiling, the kettle sang softly, the sufferer moaned, the light brought the rumble of a cart, and they awoke from shallow sleeps that blurred but did not extinguish consciousness of the actual present. “You must not uncover yourself; you will catch cold. Let me pin this shawl about you.” About eight o'clock Emma knocked at the door. Frank asked her to make him a cup of tea. The morning dragged along amid many

anxieties, for he could see she was worse than she had been over night.

“The disease must take its course,” said the doctor; “we shall be fortunate if by poulticing we can stop it; if we can't, it will come to a head in about eight or nine days' time, and then it will break. Did you see the nurse last night? Couldn't she come?”

“She,” said Frank, pointing to the sufferer, “wouldn't allow me to send for her; she said she would not stay in the house with a strange woman. She was very excited; I fancy she has had some great mental trouble—a sweetheart, I suppose. I did not like to cross her. I thought I could nurse her; I did my best. Was the poultice all right?”

“Quite right. But you will have to sit up with her to−night. You will be very tired; you had better get in a nurse.”

“I think I shall be able to manage. The landlady is expected home this evening or to−morrow morning. What had she better have to eat?”

“She won't be able to eat anything for some days. Try to get her to take an egg beat up in a wine−glass of rum.”

Hourly she grew worse, and on the following day Frank stood by her bed momentarily fearing that she would suffocate; once her face blackened and he had to seize and lift her out of bed, and place her in a chair. When she seemed a little easier he called Emma, and they made the bed and cleaned up the room together. Then he ate a sausage and drank a glass of beer that had been brought from the public−house.

The first night had seemed long and weary, but now the hours passed quickly; he had forgotten all but the suffering woman, and in the interest of inducing her to swallow some beef−tea, in the pride of such successes another and then another day fled lightly. Nor did he feel tired as he had done, and now a nap in an arm−chair seemed all that he required. So the landlady came as an unwelcome interruption of an absorbing occupation. Haggard and unshaven, he returned to Southwick, where he found a note on his table from General Horlock, asking him to dinner that evening.

“I know the meaning of this: Maggie will be there—a reconciliation! Can I?” He turned his ear quickly from his conscience; he was frightened of the voice that would tell him that Maggie was nothing to him, never had been, never could be; that he had been born for Lizzie Baker, as the soldier is for the sword or the bullet that kills him; others had passed him, had been heard sharply, had gleamed dangerously in his eyes. They were but signs and omens meant for others, not for him, and they had passed. But this one had remained, though often lost, as that remains which is to be, and she was now no less for him than before, though now seemingly lost irrevocably to another; and in all the seeming of irrevocable loss was drawing nearer—not with the victory and destiny of old in her eyes, but with no less victory and destiny inherent in her. Though far from him, she had been for long a disintegrated influence, but what had been distant was now near, and all was yielding like a ship in the attraction of the fabulous loadstone mountain. That room!—the wash−hand−stand, the dirty panes of glass, the iron bed−there his fate had been sealed. That body which he had lifted out of bed still lay heavy in his arms. He still breathed the odour of the hair he had gathered from the pillow and striven to pin up; those eyes of limpid blue, pale as water where isles are sleeping, burned deep and livid in his soul; the touch and sight of that flesh, the sound of that voice, those tears, the solicitude and anxiety of those hours of night and day conspired against him, and his life was big with incipient overthrow.

Lizzie was with him at all times. He saw her eyes, then her teeth, and the perfume and touch of her hair was often about him; and yet he was hardly conscious that a revolution of feeling was in progress within him; and when the time came for him to go to Horlock's he went there avoiding all thoughts of Maggie, although he knew he would be called upon that night to take a decisive step. He saw little of her before dinner, and during dinner the General's allusions to the quarrels of lovers being the renewal of love vexed him, and he thought, “Confound it! If I want to make it up I will; but I am not going to be bullied into it.” When the ladies left the room he found it difficult to pretend to the kind−hearted old soldier that he did not believe that Maggie would forgive him. “Forgive me for what? I have done nothing.”

“To get on with women you must always admit you are in the wrong—ha, ha, ha!” laughed the General; “now I have it from my wife—women know everything—ha, ha, ha!” laughed the General. “Have another glass of sherry?”

“No, thanks; couldn't take any more.”

"I took I won't tell you how many glasses before I proposed to my wife, and then I was afraid; enough to make me—a clever woman like Mrs. Horlock, I believe you wouldn't find a woman in England like Mrs. Horlock. Look round; all that's her work. Look at that white Arab— exactly like him. I won five hundred pounds with that horse; but I wouldn't be satisfied, and I ran him again the following day and lost it all and five hundred more with it. I had another horse. My wife is modelling him in wax; she will show it to you in the next room. Marvellous woman!"

Passing Maggie by who was sitting in the window, Frank inveigled Mrs. Horlock into an anatomical discussion. The General stretched out his feet, put on his spectacles, and took up the *St James's*. The conversation dropped, and, full of apprehension and expecting reconciliation, Frank went to Maggie and talked to her of the tennis parties he was going to, of the people he had seen—of indifferent things. The time was tense with the fate of their lives. Once she turned her head and sighed. Time slipped by, and still they talked of their friends—of things they knew perfectly. Maggie said: "I hope you are not angry; I hope we shall remain friends." Frank replied: "I hope so," and again the conversation paused. The General denounced Gladstone, and praised his wife's sculpture. Ten o'clock! Angel was lifted out of his basket. If Maggie had been Helen and Southwick Troy, he would not be kept waiting; the dogs had to be taken out; Willy came to fetch Maggie; hands were tendered, lips said good−bye, and, with a sense of parting, they parted.

Feeling adrift and strangely alone, he walked to his lodging. His future loomed up in his mind as vague and as illusive as the village that now glared through the mist, white and phantasmal. He did not regret—we can hardly regret the impossible. Then, falling back on a piece of prose, he said: "Where was the good? Mount Rorke would never have given his consent. Poor Lizzie; I hope she is better. I hope it has broken. She won't get any relief until it does."

And next day, towards evening, he went to Brighton. He found her shrinking over the fire, wrapped in a woollen shawl.

"How are you to−day? You look a little better. I did not expect to find you out of bed."

"I am better, thank you; it broke yesterday, and I feel relieved. You are very good. I think I should have died if it had not been for you. Think of that landlady leaving me in the way she did."

"What was the reason? Why did she rush off in that way?"

"She went to town to see her sister, and she says she was taken ill. She drinks."

"Does she? I hope she looked after you yesterday?"

"Oh, yes."

"As well as I did?"

"I don't know about that; you are a very good nurse. It was very good of you; no one else would have done it."

"What, not even *he*?"

"You were with me for four days, and you never even went to bed—never took your clothes off."

"Never even washed myself. By George! I was glad to get home and have a good wash. I was a sorry−looking object—haggard and unshaven."

"Where did you say you had been to?"

"Nobody asked me."

"Not Maggie?"

"No; I didn't tell you our engagement is broken off."

"No; you didn't say nothing about it."

"On account of you. She discovered that you had been to my studio, and she said I was keeping a woman in Brighton."

"Keeping a woman in Brighton—she thinks you are keeping me! I will write to her and tell her that it is not true. What right has she to say such things about me?"

"She doesn't say it about you. She says a woman."

"She means me."

"No, she doesn't; she doesn't know anything about you. Some one told her I went into Brighton every day by the four o'clock train, and she put two and two or rather two and three together, and said it was six."

"But I will write to her. I will not be the cause of any one's marriage being broken off."

"You need not trouble. I saw her last night, and I could have made it all right had I chosen—she was quite

willing.”

“You can't care for her!”

“I suppose not. I don't think I ever really loved her. I thought I did. I was mistaken.”

“You are very changeable.”

“No, I don't think I am—at least not so far as you are concerned. I was mistaken. I was in love with some one else—with you.”

“With me?”

“Yes, with you. I was in love with you when we went to Reading, and never got over it. I thought I had, but when love is real we never get over it. I always loved you, and those four days I spent nursing you have brought it all out. I shall never love any one else. I know you don't care for me; you said once you couldn't care for me.”

“I! I am too miserable to care for any one. I wish you had let me die; but that is ungrateful. You must excuse me, I am so miserable. Why speak of loving me? I can love no one. I don't care what becomes of me. I am ruined; nothing matters now.”

“I wish you would confide in me; you can trust me. Has he forsaken you? Can you not make it up?”

“No, never now; I shall never see him again.”

“Has anything happened lately, since you came to Brighton?”

Lizzie nodded.

“Don't cry like that; tell me about it.”

“What's the use? Nothing matters now.”

“Has he been here?”

Lizzie nodded, and Frank folded the shawl about her, and wiped her tears away with his pocket handkerchief. “Since you were ill?”

“No, before I was ill; he was down here watching me. He found out I had gone to your studio, and he said the most dreadful things—that he would break your head, and that I had never been true to him, and that I was not fit to be the wife of an honest man.”

“But I will tell him that you came to my studio to sit for your portrait.”

“No, you mustn't write; it would only make matters worse. No use; he says he will never see me again.”

“Where can I see him? Has he gone back to London? I will follow him and tell him he is mistaken.” “No, please don't, and please don't go to the 'Gaiety'; he is a violent−tempered man; something dreadful might occur. Please, promise me.”

“Not go to the 'Gaiety'? He doesn't know me.”

“Yes, he does.”

“Have I seen him? Do tell me; you know you can trust me. I am your friend. Tell me—”

“You have seen him in the 'Gaiety,' in the grill−room—the waiter, number two, the good−looking tall man.”

“Oh!”

“He wasn't always a waiter; his people are very superior. He has been unfortunate.”

“And it was he you loved this long while?”

“I never cared for another man.”

“I must write and tell him he is committing an act of injustice. I will make this matter right for you, Lizzie.”

“Do you think you can?”

“I am sure of it.”

He rang for the landlady, and asked for writing materials. She apologised for the penny bottle of ink, and spoke of getting a table from the next room, but he said he could write very well on the chimney−piece. “I suppose I had better begin, 'Sir'?”

“Don't people generally begin, 'Dear Sir'?”

“Not when they don't know the people they are writing to.”

“But you do know him a little. He always said you were very haughty. You used to sit at his table.”

“I think I had better begin the letter with 'Sir.'“

“Very well. You know best. He was always very jealous.”

XVI

“SIR,—I hear from Miss Baker that you were in Brighton last week, and, drawing the inference from the fact that she came to my studio to sit for her portrait, you accuse her of very grievous impropriety. I beg to assure you that this is not so. At my urgent request, Miss Baker, whom I had better say I have known for some years, consented to give me a sitting. My intentions were purely artistic; hers were confined to a wish to oblige an old friend, and I deeply regret that they should have been misinterpreted, and I fear much unhappiness caused thereby.”

“Do you think that will do?”

“Yes, it is a beautiful letter.”

“Do you think so—do you really think so? Do you think I have said all?”

“You might say something—that I never even kissed you; and that you respected me too much.”

“I will if you like, but don't you think that is implied?”

“Perhaps so; but you see he does not read many books. He hasn't time for much reading, and you put things in a difficult way. They sound beautiful, but I—”

“Show me.”

“Well, this 'grievous impropriety.' I know what you mean, but I couldn't explain it.”

“Shall I say 'serious impropriety'? but grievous is the right word. You say a grievous sin for a mortal sin. If we had done any wrong it would have been a grievous sin; but I'll change the word if you like.”

“No, don't change it on my account; but I think he would understand an easier word better.”

“A 'heinous impropriety'? No, that won't do. A 'serious impropriety.' That will do. Is there anything else you would like me to alter?”

“No, I don't think there is.”

“You think this letter will convince him that there was nothing wrong?”

“I hope so; but he is a very suspicious man.”

“I will post it when I go out.” Then after a long silence: “Do you know what time it is? It must be getting late.”

“It must be getting on for nine.”

“Then I must say good−bye; but I forgot, I want to ask you—you must be hard up, and want some money—do you? If you do, I assure you I shall be only too glad.”

“Well, I am rather hard up, for you know that this illness has prevented my doing anything; and I am afraid I have lost my place at the 'Tivoli.'“

“What do you intend to do?”

“I should like to go back to London. I shall see him there, and if the letter makes it right we may be married. I will write to you.”

“You will?—Do. Here is five pounds. I have no more about me, but if anything should occur, you know where to write to.”

“You are very good; I don't deserve it. I don't know why you take so much trouble about me. If he doesn't marry me I'll try to get another place; I shall go back to the firm.”

“When do you intend to leave?”

“As soon as I am well enough, in a day or two; but you will not come here again.”

“I had thought that I might.”

“I know; but if he were to hear that you had been here, it would be worse than ever. You don't mind, do you? You aren't angry, are you?”

“No; good−bye, Lizzie. Write to me when you are married.” Frank walked into the street. There was neither rage nor will in him. He was a sorrowing creature in a bitter world. The sea was cruelly blue in the coming night; the sky was also blue, only deeper, a red streak like a red bar of iron stretched across the embaying land, relieving into picturesque detail the outlines of coast−towns and villages. His eyes rested on and drew grief from this dim

distance so illusive; and for jarring contrast, the pier hung with gaudy and gross decoration in the blue night, and a brass band replied to the waves.

Then the clouds lifted, and when he returned to Southwick the moon was shining and some boys pursued the resounding ball through the shadows. He undressed with an effort, and he lay down hoping never to rise again. Next morning he went to his studio full of resolve. His picture must be finished for one of the winter exhibitions. He did not take up his palette, nor did he sit at his piano for more than a few minutes; and when he met Willy he raged against Lizzie, jeered at her vulgarity, heaped ridicule upon her lover, the waiter; he spoke of writing a novel on the subject; he set out her character at length; and was alarmed when told that Maggie was ill. He must win her. She must be his wife. So he told Willy, so he assured himself that she would. He knew that Lizzie was nothing to him. She had left Brighton, thank God! He went to sleep, certain he had torn this page out of his life, and he awoke to find it still there; and day after day he continued to brood upon, and still unable to understand its meaning, he longed to turn it over and read, for there were other pages; but they were sealed, and he might only read this one page.

"I'm afraid that our old friend Brookes is having a hard time of it," said the General, taking the spectacles from his nose, and laying down the *St James's*, "they are all at him tooth and nail," and the General laughed gleefully. "You are the young man who has upset them. The young lady won't dress herself."

"My dear Reggie, you shouldn't talk like that. I do hate to hear scandal; you'll repent it," said Mrs. Horlock, and she adroitly smoothed the wax on the horse's quarters.

"I assure you, Mrs. Horlock, I never repeat what I hear; the guiding principle of my life is not to repeat conversations. Particularly in a village like Southwick, it is most essential that none of us should repeat conversations; I have always said that."

"Do tell me about Maggie; I hear she is very ill. What is the matter with her? What did you say—the young lady won't dress herself?"

"My dear Reggie, I will not stay here and listen to scandal. Not a word of it is true, Mr. Escott."

"What is not true, Mrs. Horlock?"

"What he told you about her walking about the house with her hair down."

"I don't think the General said anything about walking about the house with her hair down; he said some one wouldn't dress herself. I suppose he meant Maggie. I am sure I am sorry—I am most sorry—to hear she is ill, but it is unjust to assume that I had anything to do with her illness. We can speak freely among ourselves, you know. You know the circumstances; no one is more capable of understanding the case than you, for you are an artist. Maggie heard that I had had a model, that's what it amounts to, and she broke off the engagement; nothing could be more unjust, nothing could be more unwarranted."

"It could be brought on again, I know that," said Mrs. Horlock, and she turned the shoulders of her horse to the light.

"We will not go into that question, Mrs. Horlock. I confine myself to what has happened, and I say I was treated unjustly, most shamefully; and when I have been cast aside like an old hat, I hear indirectly that it can be made up again. I have borne quite enough, and will bear no more. Old Brookes came down to my studio with that cad Berkins, and forced his way in, and then forbade me the house because my dog bit Berkins's thigh. I couldn't help it. What did he attack me for? He didn't suppose a bull−dog would be still while his master was being knocked on the head."

"What should a common City man know about dogs? He wouldn't sign the petition when I asked him, to Sir Charles Warren, to cancel the regulations about muzzling."

"And then they set a report going that I had set the dog on, and if I hadn't set it on, that I hadn't called him off. As if I could! You know what a bull−dog is, Mrs. Horlock? Is a highly−bred dog likely to let go when he has fixed his teeth in the fleshy part of a thigh? The Brookes are old friends of mine, and I wouldn't say a word against them for the world; but of course it is as obvious to you as it is to me that they are not quite the thing. I mean—you know—I would not think of comparing them with the Southdown Road; but there is a little something. City people are not the Peerage; there's no use saying they are. Mount Rorke was upset; but I would not give in, and I think I should have won his consent in the long run. After all I have borne for her sake I think I might expect better treatment than to be thrown over, as I have said, like an old hat; and I don't mind telling you that I do not intend to be made a fool of in this matter; I shall turn a very deaf ear to stories of a broken heart and

failing health. I shall not cease to think of Maggie. I loved her once very deeply, and I should have loved her always if—But tell me, General. You know I will not repeat anything."

"I advise you to say no more, Reggie. I will not be mixed up in any scandal. I shall leave the room. Sally is dining here to−night; she is only too anxious to talk of her sister. If Mr. Escott will stay and take pot−luck with us, he will no doubt hear everything there is to hear in the course of the evening."

"What have we got for dinner, Ethel? I know we have got a leg of mutton, and there is some curry."

"Your dinners are always excellent, Mrs. Horlock. I shall be delighted to stay. Here is Sally. Oh, how do you do, Sally? We were talking of you."

"I'm afraid every one is talking of me, now," she whispered, and the big girl passed over to Mrs. Horlock and kissed her. "How is it that no one has seen anything of you lately?" she said, taking the seat next him. "What have you been doing?"

"Nothing in particular. But I want to ask you about Maggie. I hear she is very ill."

Perceiving that his tone did not bespeak a loving mood, Sally's face brightened, and she became at once voluble and confidential.

"Oh, we have been having no end of a time at home. Father has been speaking of selling the place and leaving Southwick."

"Speaking of selling the place and leaving Southwick! And where does he think of going to live, and what is the reason of this?"

"Oh, the reason! I suppose he would say I was the reason; and where heis going to live, that is not settled yet—probably one of the big London hotels. He says everybody is laughing at him, and that when he meets the young men at the station he can see them laughing at him over their newspapers, for, according to father, they have all flirted with us. Maggie has been saying all kinds of things against me, and I am afraid that the Southdown Road people have been writing him anonymous letters again. Some one—I don't know who it is—I wish I did—has been telling him the most shocking things about Jimmy Meason and me; things in which I assure you there is not a word of truth. You know yourself that we have hardly spoken for nearly two years; last year, it is true, we made it up a bit in your studio, but it didn't last long. I don't think I saw him twice afterwards, and never alone— and now to have everything that happened two years ago raked up and thrown in my face! I don't say I haven't—I don't know what you'd call it, I suppose you'd call it spooning. I admit I infinitely preferred walking about the garden with a young man to sitting in the drawing− room and doing woolwork. I was a silly little fool then, but I do think it hard that all this should be raked up now. I don't know what will happen. Maggie pretends to be frightened at me; 'tis only her nonsense to set father against me. She won't dress herself, and she walks about with her hair down her back, wringing her hands."

"But what does she say? This is very bewildering. I don't understand— I am quite lost."

"The fact is that Maggie doesn't know what she is saying, so I suppose I oughtn't to blame her. She is a little off her head, that's the truth of it; but you mustn't say I said so, it will get me into worse trouble than I am already in. She was like that once before, and had to be put in the charge of a lady who was in the habit of dealing with excitable people. I don't mean lunatics, don't run away with that notion. I don't know what would happen if it got about that I was putting that about. Maggie is very excitable, and she has been exciting herself a great deal lately—you were the principal cause. She did all she could to get you to make it up when you met her here at dinner—the dinner was given for that—but you said nothing about it, and she came home in an awful state, accusing every one of combining to ruin her. She said I was jealous of her, that I was wild with fear that she would one day be Lady Mount Rorke. She said father had done everything to break off her marriage, because he did not like parting with his money. She had set her heart on being married, and it was a terrible disappointment. She has been disappointed two or three times. Father doesn't know what to do. Her thoughts seem to run on that one subject. She walks about the garden saying the most extraordinary things."

"But tell me about the illness."

"I don't know if I ought to tell you."

"Oh, do!"

"I don't know how to say it. She used to say she longed to become a mother."

"Longed to become a mother? Well, that is the last thing—"

"You know what I mean."

"But tell me about the illness."

"I should call it more than being a little excited, but of course she isn't mad. She has, however, the most curious notions. She is always a little too imaginative at the best of times; at least, I find her so, but now her delusions are really too absurd, and, as I have said, the worst of it is that her thoughts run on that one thing; it really is most unfortunate. Poor father."

"But what are her delusions?"

"Well, I scarcely know how to tell you."

"Try; anything can be told. It depends how it is told."

"She thinks that the coachman has spread it all over Southwick—how shall I say it? I don't know that I ought to tell you. Well, that she has gone wrong with you and Berkins. I thought I should die of laughing—the idea of Berkins was too funny for words."

"But your father doesn't believe it?"

"Of course not."

"He doesn't suspect me, I hope?"

"No; I am sure he doesn't. He knows Maggie doesn't know what she is saying. But he was dreadfully put out about Berkins; he is frightened out of his wits lest he should hear of it. But for goodness' sake don't mention that I said anything to you about it; I am in trouble enough as it is. Father says he can stand it no longer. I am very much afraid that he will leave Southwick. It depends on what Aunt Mary says. He has sent for her; she will be here to−morrow."

These family councils were held in the billiard−room, and when Aunt Mary and Aunt Hester had had their tea they came along the passage, Aunt Mary of course in front, Aunt Hester timid and freckled and with her usual air of tracts. Uncle James stood with his back to the fire waiting for them. Willy caught at his hair, but an expression of resignation overspread his face, he packed his diary and accounts in brown paper and lit a pipe.

"Now, James, let us hear about these new troubles. Something must be done, that is clear."

"Yes, something must be done, Mary, and I can think of nothing for it but to leave this place. It is no longer a place for me to live in. The Southdown Road has proved too strong for me, it has conquered me."

"Don't speak like that, James. We must try to bear our burdens, if not for our own sakes, for the sake of Him who died for us. He bore a very heavy cross for us."

"There's no use in talking to me like that, Hester, you only provoke me. You forget what a cross two daughters are, and the Southdown Road has become intolerable. It is more than any man can bear; I will bear it no longer. I have borne it long enough, and am determined to get rid of it. I am afraid there's nothing for it but to sell the place and go and live in London."

Aunt Hester cast her eyes into her satchel, afraid even to think that her brother had intentionally misinterpreted her words; but Aunt Mary laughed at the idea of the slonk−hill, as a latter−day Golgotha, with poor Uncle James staggering beneath the weight of the Southdown Road, young men and all, upon him. It was very irreverent. He burst into tears, Hester moved to leave the room, but was restrained by her sister.

"My position is a most unfortunate one; since the death of poor Julia I have had no one to turn to, there has been no restraining influence in this house. Here am I working all day long in the City for those girls, and when I come home in the evening I find my house full of people I don't know. I assure you, Mary, I don't know any of the people who come to my house. I am consulted in nothing. It is not fair—I say it is not fair; and at my death those girls will have thirty thousand pounds a−piece."

"I knew you had the money, James, I knew you had," exclaimed Aunt Mary, and even Aunt Hester could not help casting a look of admiration on her weeping brother.

"I say it is not fair; a man of my money should have a comfortable home to return to. Even the Southdown Road people have that; but no consideration is shown to me. My dinner is put back so that Sally may continue her flirtation with Meason in the slonk. Did any one ever hear of such a thing? A man's dinner put back so that—that—that—"

"Yes, we know all about the dinner being put back; that was three years ago."

"Why," Mr. Brookes asked himself, "had he invited his sisters to his help?" He was only adding bitterness to his bitter cup. "You have no sympathy, Mary," he went on; "you cannot understand the difficulties of my position—these two girls are for ever quarrelling and fighting; sometimes they are not even on speaking terms,

but I think I prefer their sullen looks to their violence. Sally threatened to knock her sister down if she interfered with her young men."

"What, again?"

"Oh, I don't know if she has threatened to beat her lately. I don't remember when was the last time. Their various rows are all jumbled up in my head. All I know is that Maggie says she cannot live in the house with Sally. Maggie is very ill, she is in a very excited state, as she was once before, when I would not consent to her marriage with —I have forgotten his name, but it doesn't matter. Now she won't dress herself, and she walks about the house with her hair hanging down. I know there is nothing for it but to send her away under the charge of some lady who has had experience in such matters. She can't remain here. She has the strangest delusions. Among other things, she fancies the coachman has spread it all over Southwick that she has gone wrong with Berkins and that fellow Escott. Just fancy if Berkins—a ten thousand a year man—should hear of it! I don't know what he would say. He would peg into me; he is at times very hard indeed upon me. I don't say he is not a first−rate man of business, I know he has made several excellent investments; but for all that I do not and cannot think him competent to advise me on all my affairs, and that's what he is always doing. He talks of putting down that Southdown Road. I should like to see how he would set about doing it."

"James, Maggie must go away; she is very highly organised, very sensitive, and if she were to remain here, Sally might have a real effect on her mind. It is clear the sisters don't get on together; have you had medical advice? I told you before that you should have medical advice about those girls; I told you to spare no expense, but to go to a first−rate London physician and take his opinion. I said before, and I say it again, that no girls in good health could carry on as dear Sally, and I will include dear Maggie; for although she does not defy you to the same extent, there is no doubt that she is too fast, too fond of young men; her thoughts run too much in that way, and now she is ill, of course she has delusions. You ought to have medical advice."

"Mary, dear, the body is not everything; to cure the flesh you must first cure the soul. I believe our dear nieces rarely, if ever, attend church, rarely, if ever, remember that this life is not eternal and that there is a hereafter."

The conversation came to a pause. Presently Aunt Mary asked Willy, who sat resigned to his fate, calm and solemn as a Buddha, his hands clasped over his rotund stomach, if he thought that Maggie's state was one to cause immediate anxiety, to which he replied: "My sisters think of nothing but pleasure. The trouble girls are in a house is more than any one would believe. Here I am, I can do nothing; every night it is the same thing, over and over again." And the lean man lapsed into contemplation.

"But to come to the point, James, I want to hear about Sally. You said in your letter that a great deal had come to light, and that you now find that her conduct has been worse than you had ever imagined it, even in your moments of deepest dejection. Now, I want to hear about all this. What has she done? Let's have it in plain English. What has she done?"

"To put it plainly, Mary," said Mr. Brookes, wiping his tears away, and turning his back upon his Goodall, "I don't know what she hasn't done—everything. She is at the present moment the talk of Southwick. The doctor here has seen her in the field at the back here with Meason at nine o'clock at night."

"Why did you allow her to leave the house at that hour? No young girl— "

"She always takes her dogs out in the evening; I cannot prevent her doing that. It appears, too, that she has had Meason up in her bedroom."

"O James, you do not mean to say that my dear niece had a man in her bedroom!"

"Hester, dear, you have lived in a rectory and know nothing of the world. She says it isn't a bedroom. She pushes the bed away in the daytime, and covers it up to make it look like a couch. Besides, she keeps birds in her room, and Flossy had her puppies there. I am not excusing her conduct, pray do not think that, I am only telling you what she says."

"This is very serious. Are you quite sure? Perhaps she only meant to show the young man her birds or puppies. Her spirit must be broken, I can clearly see that."

"I allow them, as you know, one hundred pounds a year apiece. Maggie keeps none, but Sally always keeps accurate accounts of what she spends. I asked to see those accounts, for I had heard she had been giving her money to Meason, and she refused to let me see them. There is a sum of twenty pounds for which she can give no explanation. Then it is well known she gave a set of diamond studs to that fellow, and that he pledged them for five pounds in Brighton. He boasted he had done so, and said he intended to get plenty of money out of me before

he had done with me. After that I ask you, how can I live in this place? When I go to the station in the morning I see these young fellows laughing at me over the tops of their newspapers. When I come home of an evening after a hard day's work, I find that my dinner—”

“Her spirit must be broken,” said Aunt Mary, drawing her shawl about her, and crossing her hands. “Her spirit must be broken; she cannot be allowed to remain here to drive dear Maggie into a lunatic asylum. I am with you in that, James, but I cannot think you did well to let Frank Escott slip through your fingers. Had you not talked so much about money your daughter might have been Lady Mount Rorke.”

“Talked too much about my money? Who would talk about it, I should like to know, if I didn't? I made it all myself. What do I care for that lot—a stuck−up lot, pooh, pooh! twist them all round my finger. I am not going to give my daughter to a man who cannot make a settlement upon her.”

Seeing he was not to be moved in anything that concerned his pocket, Aunt Mary returned to the consideration of what was to be done with Sally. “From what you tell me it is clear that Sally must not remain in Southwick a day longer than can be helped. I will take her with me to Woburn; and I think she had better go abroad as soon as we can hear of some one in whose charge we can place her. But it must not be a sea voyage—there is nothing more dangerous than to be on board a ship for a young girl who is at all inclined to be fast. All are thrown so much together. The cabins open out one into the other, and there is always a looking for something—a handkerchief, a bunch of keys, a lot of stooping and playing, twiddling of moustaches,” said Aunt Mary, with a peal of laughter.

“Mary, dear, we should not speak lightly of wickedness.”

“It was so that all the mischief was done when Emily Evans was sent out to the Cape—it was all done on board a ship. You remember the Evanses, James?—you ought to, you used to flirt pretty desperately with Lucy, the younger sister.” And then Aunt Mary rattled off into interminable tales concerning the attachment contracted on board a ship in particular, its unfortunate consequences, how it brought about a divorce later on by sowing the seeds of passion (Aunt Mary always pronounced the word “passion” in her narratives with strong emphasis), in the young girl's heart; and at various stages of her discourse she introduced fragments of the family history of the Evanses; she followed the wanderings of the different sisters from Homburg to Paris, from Paris to Scotland, from Scotland to the Punjab, explaining their different temperaments by heredity, which led her back into the obscure and remote times of grandfathers and grandmothers, and, having finally lost herself, she said: “What was I talking about? You have been listening to me, James, what was I talking about?”

Till the end of a week the discussion was continued. Aunt Mary tried hard to reconcile all parties to their different lots, and, as is usual in such cases, without attaining any result. And yet Aunt Mary went with her sister to see Frank in his studio. Willy accompanied them, and when they left he complained bitterly of how his time was wasted. “Regularly every evening, just as I am sitting down to work, I hear them coming along the passage. First of all they go to get their grog—squeak, squeak, pop. I know it all so well. Then they come in with their tumblers, and they sit down on the sofa, and they begin.—I don't know what is to be done with dear Sally, unless we can send her abroad in the care of some relation. How is dear Maggie to−day? I hope I shall be able to induce her to put on her frock to−morrow, and come for a drive with me in the carriage. What a trouble young girls are in the house, to be sure. Then father begins to groan, and pulls out his handkerchief; he is quite alone, he has no one he can depend upon, then he laughs, 'Well, well, I suppose it will be all the same a hundred years hence.' So it goes on night after night. Here am I starting a big business, and I haven't a room to work in. Just as I am adding up a long column of figures, perhaps when I am within three of the top, Aunt Mary asks me a question, and it has to be gone over again. It is most provoking, there's no denying that it is most provoking.” Frank agreed that nothing could be more provoking than to be interrupted when you were within three of the top of a long column of figures. On the following day he heard that the aunts had left, taking Sally with them. They had promised their brother to find a lady who would take dear Maggie under her care—one who would soon wean her from dressing−gowns and delusions, and restore her to staid remarks and stays; and hopes were entertained that the Manor House would not have to be sold after all.

But many days had not sped when an event occurred that precipitated the five acres into the jaws of the builders. Meason had sailed for Melbourne, and his sister, thinking that some of Sally's letters might be of use to Mr. Brookes, offered to surrender them upon the receipt of a cheque for one hundred pounds—a very modest sum, she urged, considering the character of the letters, most of which concerned artfully laid plans to meet in the

train going or coming from London. Mr. Brookes called on the shade of dear Julia, but he was not a man to be blackmailed—he had made all his money himself, and on that point was immovable. He prepared to leave Southwick. He looked fondly on his glass−houses, and despairingly on his Friths, Goodalls, and Bouguereaus, and he wondered if they would look as well in the new rooms as in the old, and what sum they would realise if he were to include them in the auction; for an auction was necessary. Mr. Brookes did not thus decide to abandon his acres without many a sob, nor is it certain that the final step would have been taken if the gentle builder had not gilded his insidious hand, and if certain rumours were not about that the villas in the Southdown Road were not letting, and that Southwick would never be anything but what it was, a dirty little village—half suburb, half village.

XVII

Frank was grieved and troubled at the sad accounts that came to him of Maggie's health; he was perplexed, too, for he knew himself to be the cause, and he longed to relieve and to cure her. It seemed to him that he would give his life to go to her, and comfort her with love, and yet he was impotent to make the least effort to attain the end he desired. He lay in the sad and cruel memory of Lizzie, his mind filled with ignoble visions of her life with the waiter, or with delicate fancies of her beauty amid the summer of the Thames. He mused on her gracious figure and face, illuminated by reflections from the water, set off by the bulrushes and floating blossoms which she so eagerly coveted, and varied by the movements of the waist and shoulders, the round white arm, the trailing scarf, and all the wistful charm of the slumbering evening. He thought of the country light, the sound and smell of cows, of the sparrows in the vine, the cottage looking so cosy amid the foliage, the bit of garden full of old−fashioned flowers, tall lilies, convolvuluses, and marigolds, and the sitting− room full of things belonging to her—her flowers, her books, her music, and he thought of this until his life was sick with desire, and there grew a burning pain about his heart.

A man's struggles in the web of a vile love are as pitiful as those of a fly in the meshes of the spider; he crawls to the edge, but only to ensnare himself more completely; he takes pleasure in ridiculing her, but whether he praises or blames, she remains mistress of his life; all threads are equally fatal, and each that should have served to bear him out of the trap only goes to bind him faster. A man in love suggests the spider's web, and when he is seeking to escape from a woman that will degrade his life, the cruelty which is added completes and perfects the comparison. A man's love for a common woman is as a fire in his vitals; sometimes it seems quenched, sometimes it is torn out by angry hands, but always some spark remains; it contrives to unite about its victim, and in the end has its way. It is a cancerous disease, but it cannot be cut out like a cancer. It is more deadly; it is inexplicable. All good things, wealth and honour, are forfeited for it; long years of toil, trouble, privation of all kinds, are willingly accepted; on one side all the sweetness of the world, on the other nothing of worth, often vice, meanness, ill−temper, all that go to make life a madness and a terror; twenty, thirty, forty, perhaps fifty years lie a head of him and her, but the years and their burdens are not for his eyes any more than the flowers he elects to disdain. Love is blind, but sometimes there is no love. How then shall we explain this inexplicable mystery; wonderful riddle that none shall explain and that every generation propounds?

Frank lingered in Southwick, for he had promised Willy to stay with him when he went to live at the stables on the Portslade Road. Summer was nearly over, hunting would soon commence, and he could keep a couple of hunters—Willy had calculated it out—for two and twenty shillings a week. He had ceased to paint, and when he went to the studio it was to play the piano or the violin. None knew of Lizzie, and all knew of Maggie. It was thought a little strange that he would not forgive her, but the obscurity of the story of this point and the delight felt in her misfortune helped to intensify and idealise Frank in the popular mind, and when he played Gounod in the still evenings the young ladies would steal from the villas and wander sentimentally through the shadows about the green. He got up late in the morning, he lingered over breakfast, and until it was time to go to Brighton he lay on the sofa watching the cricketers and the children playing, shaping resolutions, and striving with himself and deceiving himself. A dozen times, a hundred times, he had concluded he must see Maggie; he had decided he would write to Lord Mount Rorke, that he would go to Mr. Brookes and settle the matter off−hand. But, somehow, he did nothing. His mind was absorbed in a novel, which he narrated when Willy came to see him. It concerned the accident that led a man not to marry the woman he loved, and was in the main an incoherent version of his own life at Southwick.

“I don't think I told you,” said Willy, “that they are removing the furniture to−day.”

“You don't say so—to−day? And where is your father?”

“He is in London, at the 'Metropole.'“

The young men walked on slowly in silence, and when they came to the lodge gate, standing wide open, and saw the curtainless windows and the flowerless greenhouses, Willy said: “It is very sad to see all the things you have known since you were a child sold by auction.”

“Oh, yes, it is. Look at the swards. Do they not look sad already? Those beautiful elms, under whose shade we have sat, will be cut down, and stucco work and glass porticoes take their places. Oh, it is very sad.”

“My father never had any feeling, he never cared for the place. Had I been in his place I should have invested my money in land and gone in for the county families.”

“How old was I when I came down to see you for the first time— fourteen, I think? How well I remember everything. It was there, look, through that glade, that I saw your sisters coming to meet me, they were then only ten or eleven years old. I can see them in my mind's eye, quite distinctly, walking towards me, Grace leading the way, and now she is a mother; and they were all so dark. I remember thinking I had never seen girls so dark, they were like foreigners. And do you remember how your father scolded Sally for carrying me round the garden on her back, and she used to wake me up in the mornings by rolling croquet balls along the floor into my room. Oh, what good, dear days those were, and to think they are dead and gone, and that the house is going to be pulled down; and the garden—oh! the moonlights in that garden, where I walked with the girls, with scarves round their shoulders, through the dreamy light and shade. We have sung songs, and talked of all manner of things. You don't feel as I feel.”

“Yes I do, my dear fellow, I think I feel a great deal more, only I don't talk so much about it.”

“I know it is infinitely sad. This dear old wall! There is Maggie's window: how often have I looked up to that window for her winsome face, and I shall never look again.”

“You are as bad as my father. Cheer up; I suppose it will be all the same a hundred years hence.”

“No, no, it won't be the same. Why should all I feel and love be forgotten. I suppose it will be all the same. There goes Berkins. I hate that man.”

“So do I.”

“If time takes away pleasant things it takes unpleasant things too, and those who live a hundred years hence will not be troubled with that fool. True, there will be other Berkinses, and there will be other gardens, and other girls, but that doesn't make it the least less sad to see this garden pass into bricks and mortar.”

Two footmen approached Mr. Berkins, and with all solemnity helped him to take off his overcoat. He said a few words to Willy, and was soon loudly ordering the workmen who were taking the Goodalls and the Friths from the walls.

“Take care, there! Hi, you! get on the ladder and take hold of this end of the picture. There, that's better! That's the way to do it!”

“That's what he said when he shot my bird,” Willy whispered; and they tried to laugh as they went upstairs. But their footsteps sounded hollow, and the wardrobes, where they had so often put their clothes, stood wide open, desolately empty. They looked out of the windows, and heard the voices of the work−people.

“How very sad it is,” said Frank; then, after a long silence: “How beautiful a scene like this would be in a book—a young girl leaving her home, straying through the different rooms musing on the different pieces of furniture, all of which recall the past. I think I shall write it. I wish you would tell me what you feel; I mean, I wish you would tell me what impresses itself most on your mind, and, as it were, epitomises the whole. You have known all this since you were a child. You have played in these passages; some spot, some piece of furniture, your toys—I suppose they are gone long ago; but something must stand out and assert itself amid conflicting thoughts. Do tell me.”

Willy stroked his moustache. “Of course it is very sad, but it is difficult to put one's feelings into words. I should have to think about it; I don't think I could say off−hand.”

At that moment there came a great crash.

“What the devil is that?” cried Frank.

“I hope they haven't broken the statue of Flora,” said Willy, and a look of alarm overspread his face. Frank felt that if such were the case he should feel no great sorrow. They ran down the echoing stairs. The workmen had got drunk in the cellars and in removing the statue they had let it fall, and it strewed the floor—an arm here, a fragment of drapery there.

“I knew what would happen. I told Mr. Brookes so. All my statues are in marble.”

“Come away, I can't listen to that cad. I wouldn't have had Flora broken for a hundred pounds. When I was a child I used to stand and look at her. I never could make out how she was made, and I always wanted to look inside. If you'd like to know what I feel most sorry for, it is Flora. She has stood amid the flowers in the bow

window as long as I can remember."

They followed the high road by Windmill Inn, where they struck across the Downs, and when they reached the first crest they could see the paddocks and enclosures situated along the road in the valley, and the private house so trim and middle−class. "Splendid paddocks and first− rate stabling. The house is not much. When I am making fifteen per cent. on my money I shall go in for a little architecture. If I had a glass I could show you Blue Mantle's stable. Do you see two horses in the paddock, right away on the left, in the far corner—Apple Blossom and Astarte? Apple Blossom is by See−saw out of Melody, by Stockwell out of Fairy Queen. Is that good enough for you? Astarte is by Blue Gown out of Merry Maid, by Beadsman out of Aurora. What do you say to that?"

"I see you have been looking up the Stud Book."

"Business, sir, business. And if I were to go in for owning a racer or two, just look and see what a magnificent training ground; miles upon miles of downland. Did you ever see a handsomer view? You must paint me some landscapes for my dining−room."

XVIII

“The pain is always here—just over the heart. You know what I mean? Suddenly, when I am thinking of other things, the sound of her voice and the sight of her face comes upon me, and then a dead, weary ache. I know I cannot have her, perhaps if I did I shouldn't be wholly glad; but glad or sorry, good fortune or ill, I cannot forget her. My life will not be complete. You have felt all this.”

“Never mind how I felt, you know I don't like talking about it. I am sorry for you. We all have our troubles, I've had nothing else; I often think that if I were to die to−morrow it would be a happy release.”

“If I had never seen her, or if I had married Maggie; if your father had not put obstacles in the way; if he had not raised the wretched money question, which you know as well as I do was dragged in quite unnecessarily, I should not be suffering now. For, once married, I should think of no one but my wife. I am sure I should make a good husband. I know I could make a woman happy; she'll never find a husband better than she'd have found in me, I don't believe if they were to be made that you could make a better husband than I should be —I feel it.”

“I have always said that my father brings all his troubles on himself. He never went in for the country people; he never would have people at the Manor House. You can't shut up young girls as if they were in a convent, and if they don't get the right people they'll have the wrong people. My father thinks of nothing but his money, and he can't understand that he might go for an equivalent. How could he have expected it to have turned in your case but as it did? Lord Mount Rorke was not going to come over to Southwick to haggle over pounds, shillings, and pence with him—not likely. My sisters might have married very well if he had gone the right way to work, and he would have been saved a deal of worry and bother. I always say that my father brings all his troubles on himself.”

“So far as I was concerned he certainly acted very stupidly. Ah, if I had married Maggie last summer, how different my life would be now.”

“But you couldn't have really loved her; if you had you would never—”

“Yes, I did love her.”

“I heard from my father to−day. Maggie is better. This is, of course, a very delicate question, but we have been friends so long—would you like me to see if—if this matter could be arranged? I don't like, as you know, to meddle in other people's affairs, I have quite enough to do to look after my own; but if you would like—You, of course, do not think of marrying Lizzie Baker?”

“Of course not.”

“Then you would like me to speak to my father? Are you willing? Would you like to marry Maggie?”

“Yes, of course I should.”

“I don't say so because she is my sister, but I think it is the best thing you could do.”

They had traversed the paddock, and were close to the stables. Picking a few carrots out of a heap, they opened the door of Blue Mantle's box. The horse came towards them, his large eyes glancing, his beautiful crest arched. His coat shone like satin, his legs were as fine as steel, and with exquisite relish he drew the carrots from their hands.

The perspective of the hills was prolonged upon fading tints, and in the pale blueness the mares feeding in the paddocks grew strangely solitary and distinct; the trees about the coast towns were blended in shadow, and out of the first stars fell a quiet peace.

Their dinner awaited them—a little dinner, simple and humble. After dinner, when the lamp was brought in, Willy nursed the missus with affection and sincerity. Cissy sat on Frank's knee, and he told her stories and stroked her hair. This household retired at eleven. At ten every morning Willy was busy with his letters, his cheques, his accounts, and in the afternoon the young men walked about the fields talking of possible successes of the forthcoming breeding season, and so the days went. But the secret forces were busy about Frank's life. There were mines and counter−mines. Every fort of prejudice, every citadel of reason rested now upon foundations that quaked, and would fall at the first shock. Doom was about him. As the silence rustles in the deadly hush of the storm that brings winter upon the forest, he waited unconscious as a leaf in the imminence of the autumn moment; and in such a stillness, awaiting a change of soul, he received a letter from Lizzie. It dropped from his hand, and

such desire to go as comes on swallow and cuckoo came on him; he struggled for a moment, and was sucked down in his passion.

The little village—a summary of English life and custom, a symbol of the Saxon, the church steeple pointing through the elm trees, the villas with their various embellishment in the line of glass porticos and privet hedges, the General, Mrs. Horlick, Messrs Brookes and Berkins—how complete it seemed, how individual and how synthetical— his eyes filled with tears of unpremeditated grief. The leaves were falling, the hills were shrouded in wreaths of floating mist. Some trees had been cut down and scaffolding had been reared about the Manor House, some of the walls had already fallen revealing the wall paper, the pattern of which he could almost distinguish. He was going to the woman he loved, but he was leaving his youth behind, and those whom he had known as children, as girls, as women; he remembered all the gossip, all the quarrels, all the to−do about nothing; and now, looking on the beautiful garden where he had played and passioned in all varying moments of grief and glee, he re−lived the past; and leaning out of the carriage window he gazed fondly, and cried out: “Alas, those were Spring Days.”

THE END